

THE POWER OF GOD TO CHANGE LIVES

CMBC September 20, 2015

Mark 9:14 – 50

- The father was desperate to get help for his son. It was destroying him. Every night he heard the screams. Shout of words and sounds he didn't understand. He was terrified by what the son might do next. During the day, someone needed to keep close watch on him. He had hurt himself so many times, cutting himself, throwing himself to the ground, falling in the fire.
- The father wept so often. He loved his son. This was a special boy. Desperately he needed help.
- You know what, in some ways it sounds like I am describing the world we live in. The terror, the pain, the wild ideological shouts that are hard to make sense of. A just when you think it is quieting down, there is another scream, another terrifying convulsion – sometimes far away – sometime just next door.
- In the midst of this chaos we hear of places where the church is acting in great power. Lives are being change.
- In other places, the church is a closed shop. There is little evidence of lives being changed, souls set free.
- Just before this story in Mark 9, three disciples were up on the mountain with Jesus where he was transfigured. These three said, O this is marvelous. Let's just stay here. Jesus said, "Get up. Don't be afraid," and they came down the mountain to this troubled world and this desperate father and his possessed son.

1. WHERE IS THE POWER TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE

- a. The disciples were embarrassed.
 - i. In Jesus absence they had tried to follow all the steps that they had seen from Jesus.
 - ii. Now they were arguing, right there in public, about whose fault it was, and debating over what they thought were the right steps.
 - iii. You know, I have heard this before, in the halls of a powerless church.
 - iv. I have heard this before from my own lips.
 - v. Embarrassing!
 - vi. In fact, I have just heard it again, in the debate of political leaders wanting to fix our country and the world.
 - vii. Embarrassing!
 - viii. Oh how we and the world need disciples operating in the power of God - churches of power.
- b. Faith yet unbelieving
 - i. Did you hear what Jesus called them? An "unbelieving generation".
 - ii. But these were his disciples, followers of Jesus, believing in Jesus
 - iii. Yet they had no power. Something was missing..
- c. And the faith of the father was shaken.
 - i. He came with confidence to the followers of Jesus
 - ii. Now, in speaking with Jesus, he says, "IF you can.." He wasn't sure anymore that Jesus could defeat evil, change lives,
 - iii. Do you blame him? If Jesus was for real, if He could change lives, wouldn't his disciples be able to do the same.

- iv. Do you think the world today has lost faith in God because of a crumbling, powerless church – not all churches, but enough to doubt the relevancy of God, and the power of the Gospel?
- d. The disciples asked an honest question: Why couldn't we?
 - i. That is where we all need to come to: Why can't we?
 - 1. Sometimes we are too proud to ask that question.
 - 2. Sometimes we are too afraid of what the answer might be to that question.
 - 3. Sometimes we too have lost so much faith in God, the Gospel and the Church, that we see no point in asking that question.
 - 4. Sometimes we are blind to our powerlessness.
 - ii. The only hope for the disciples was to honestly ask that question, "Why couldn't we," and to have the courage to hear and accept the answer.
 - iii. It is the question that the church should be regularly asking, "Why couldn't we?" or "Do we still have the power?" or "Will we dare come off the mountain and risk letting the power of God change lives, even our own lives?" "Can we?" ... "Why couldn't we?"
 - 1. This is part of what we are asking in our meetings of Listening To God.
 - 2. "Are we?" "Can we?" "If not, why couldn't we?"
 - iv. Jesus answered that questions. In fact he answered it over the next several days, maybe even weeks.
 - v. The short answer was, "This kind can only come out with prayer," (some translations say "much prayer and fasting")
 - vi. But we didn't see Jesus stop for a few hours or days to pray and fast..
 - 1. Prayer is more than words we say.
 - 2. Prayer is an everyday life of constantly being in communication with God about every aspect of life. That is where the power is.
 - 3. Ruth and I saw the movie, "War Room". The "war room" is a prayer closet. All of you should see it. Tell your children and grandchildren should see.

2. THE POWER OF A HUMBLE SPIRIT

A day or so later the disciples got more of the answer to their question, "Why couldn't we?"

- a. Confused about "greatness"
 - i. They are arguing again.
 - ii. This time it is about who among them is the greatest.

[33] They came to Capernaum. When he was in the house, he asked them, "What were you arguing about on the road?" [34] But they kept quiet because on the way they had argued about who was the greatest.

 - 1. I don't think the argument was "You are the greatest." "No you are." "No, no, you are much greater than I am."
 - 2. No, it would have been, "I am greater, better than you."
 - 3. Hey, be easy on them. They had just been publically embarrassed. They need to have their ego built up.
 - iii. But there they were building up their ego. Can you hear them?
 - 1. "Jesus said prayer, and I have spent much more time in prayer than you."

2. "Well I have spent much more time in the Word than you."
3. "But I have a better understanding of the Word. My answers in the Bible Study are so insightful."
4. "I think I deserve a better position in the kingdom, because I have introduced more people to Jesus – even Gentiles."
- iv. And those statements were the underlying evidence of their powerlessness.
- b. Power where we least expect it
Here is what Jesus said, **[35] Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve and said, "If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the servant of all."**
 - i. It is hard to accept that this is the power. It is so contrary to the world.
 - ii. When our power is in how great we are
 1. When it is all about how spiritual I am
 2. How well I can do the work of the kingdom
 - iii. Then my power is only as mighty as I am
 1. And that will never be enough to defeat the power of Satan and evil, and set this boy free.
 2. All we will do is embarrass the Kingdom of God
- c. Here was Jesus' lesson: **The first shall be last**
 - i. Go back to the story of the boy.
 1. After their question, "Why couldn't we," and Jesus tell them that this kind needs prayer
 2. And then he adds this:
[31] "The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men. They will kill him, and after three days he will rise."
 - ii. That is what it means, the first shall be last.
 - iii. Then we read: **[36] He took a little child and had him stand among them. Taking him in his arms, he said to them, [37] "Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me."**
 1. We have heard him says that we need to become as children.
 2. But here he says, **"When you welcome a child in my name, you welcome me, and not only me but the one who sent me."**
 3. Who is the greatest there, you, the wonderful caring person, or the child? It is the child. The first is last in God's eyes and the last is first.
 4. Who was the greatest, the disciple that could have healed the boy, or the boy, the boy enslaved by the devil?
 5. When you welcome the boy, you welcome God who sent Jesus.
 6. When you see the desperate boy in that way, you have partnered with the power that will set him free.
 7. And this isn't just about children.
 - a. Who is the greatest? Our church that welcomed the Punjabi or the Punjabi struggling to find hope in Jesus.
 - b. Who is the greatest? The church that has wonderful preaching and music and programs that bless us all, or the soul looking for a place to meet Jesus.

- c. When you welcome one of these in my name, you welcome me, said Jesus. You welcome not only me but the one who sent me, the Father.
- 8. Sometimes it is hard for us to be honest about our understanding of greatness.
 - a. The disciples would have said, "I am the greatest, so my church should be for me." That is why they were powerless.
- 9. But Jesus teaches us that, the boy and his father, the little children, the Punjabi visitor, the newcomer to our services, they are greater in Jesus understanding of greatness, greater than us all.
- 10. And when we live in Jesus understanding of greatness, then there is power to change lives.

3. THE POWER OF SERVING IN JESUS NAME

- a. The disciples still didn't get it. It is a hard lesson to learn.
[9:38] "Teacher," said John, "we saw a man driving out demons in your name and we told him to stop, because he was not one of us." [39] "Do not stop him," Jesus said. "No one who does a miracle in my name can in the next moment say anything bad about me, [40] for whoever is not against us is for us.
- b. My way more important than Jesus
 - i. It was another answer to their question, "Why couldn't we? Why didn't we have the power to change the life of that boy?"
 - ii. Well here it is again – we are greater than they are. We are better than they are.
 - 1. They were better because they were with Jesus.
 - 2. Paul admonished the Corinthians for their arrogant divisiveness. **1 Corinthians 1:12 One of you says, "I follow Paul"; another, "I follow Apollos"; another, "I follow Cephas, still another, "I follow Christ."**
 - 3. Were the ones John had seen not with Jesus? Jesus said they are doing it in my Name so they are with us.
 - iii. But the thinking of the disciples was:
 - 1. The way they did things was the right way – the only right way.
 - iv. You can hear them say:
 - 1. That is not the right way to do miracles. Stop it.
 - 2. But they are doing it in Jesus name. It's a devious trick.
 - 3. They are casting out demons. Yes but are they really cast out. And how long will they stay out.
 - 4. They wouldn't admit it, but they understood the Gospel well enough to tell God how to do church.
 - v. And we thought this kind of talk only happened after the reformation and after we had a bunch of denominations.
 - vi. Have you ever heard people talk this way? The way they do church can't be right, even if people are getting saved.

- vii. Jesus adds just key disqualifier, **No one who does a miracle in my name can in the next moment say anything bad about me**, I don't agree with some religious groups that use Jesus name, but I better be very careful about dismissing them.
- c. The power in the least likely task
 - i. And then he adds: [41] **I tell you the truth, anyone who gives you a cup of water in my name because you belong to Christ will certainly not lose his reward.**
 - ii. What has this got to do with the disciple's concern about the other group?
 - iii. Jesus is saying, even what seems like an insignificant task, when done in His Name, there is power. Even giving a cup of water in Jesus name can have the power to change a life.
 - iv. Here is the key – In Jesus Name
 - 1. Not my greatness
 - 2. Not my great tasks and ministry
 - 3. Not my sacrifice
 - 4. Not focusing on me and what I want
 - 5. Jesus and Jesus alone
 - 6. There is the power!
- d. The piercing question about my way
 - i. The series of incidents here would tell us there was still a lot God needed to do in their lives.
 - ii. I expect that was also the case for those over there casting our demons.
 - iii. And that is the case with us.
 - iv. Here is the questions all churches should be asking – we should be asking: **Is doing church my way making me better disciple? Can I tell of how that is happening now? If it is not obvious, what needs to change? If not, why would I ask others to do it my way?**

4. CUTTING OFF WHAT HINDERS POWER

- a. Jesus' startling analogy
 - i. Jesus then make a statement that startles us.
 - 1. This is still a part of what Jesus is saying to the disciples about their criticism of the other believers.
 - 2. It begins with "And.."
 - ii. [42] **"And if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to be thrown into the sea with a large millstone tied around his neck. [43] If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life maimed than with two hands to go into hell, where the fire never goes out. * [45] And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than to have two feet and be thrown into hell. * [47] And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell,**
 - iii. Whatever keeps us from being close to our source of power, cut it off.

- b. Even cutting off what seems most valuable
 - i. Hands and feet and eyes are very valuable to us. It is about me, a part of who I am and what I can do.
 - ii. Jesus says that even what seems so valuable to us in our ministry, in our church, in our lives,
 - 1. If it is getting in the way of where Jesus is the center of my life, the center of my church, get rid of it.
 - 2. That is hard.
 - 3. That takes a deep trust in God
- c. Seeing the eternal picture
 - i. It is about eternity, about entering into the kingdom of God.
 - ii. Nothing should get in the way.
 - iii. Everything is up for evaluation of how it contributes to the power of God working through us to change lives.

Here is the lesson Jesus wanted his disciples and us to understand:

- The power of God to change lives is possible for you
- You can be used of God to set people free – every one of you
- Maybe it is just a cup of water, but when it is given in Jesus name there is power
- Church isn't about you feeling good. It is about the power of God to changing lives.
- We are not alone. Celebrating the power of God at work in other churches.
- Joining together with other churches working in Jesus name, is a force that can change our community and our world.