

“IF YOU CAN”?

Mark 9:14-29

Key Verse: 9:23

“If you can”? said Jesus. “Everything is possible for him who believes.”

In today’s passage, Jesus laments over the unbelief of people by saying, “O unbelieving generation.” He declares, “Everything is possible for him who believes.” What does this mean? Does it mean Jesus will give us a red Ferrari if we believe in him? Let us think about what kind of faith Jesus wants us to have.

I. WHAT ARE YOU ARGUING ABOUT? (14-18)

When Jesus went up on the transfiguration mountain, he took with him only three disciples, Peter, James and John. Jesus sometimes invited only these three to observe certain important events (Mk 5:37; 14:33). On the mountain, Jesus revealed his original image as the Son of God. His face was shining like the sun. His clothes became dazzling white. And Moses and Elijah, two great prophets from the Old Testament, appeared to talk with Jesus. This was a spectacular display. Peter did not know that to say. He mumbled something about building three bungalows on the mountain. He felt like he was in heaven. He was so mesmerized by the glory of Jesus that he did not want to come down from the mountain.

God woke him up from his fantasy by thundering from the cloud. He said, “This is my son whom I love. Listen to him!” God told Peter to listen to Jesus. Peter did not want to listen to Jesus, especially about his upcoming suffering and death. But God told him to listen to Jesus. As they were coming down from the mountain, Jesus once again talked with them about his upcoming suffering, death and resurrection. No one wants to talk about suffering and death. But Jesus did so again and again. It is because the way of the cross is the way of salvation for all sinners like you and me. We will live forever in heaven only because Jesus suffered and died for us. This is the core of the gospel.

Meanwhile, an embarrassing scene was developing for the other nine disciples at the foot of the mountain. Look at verses 14-15. *When they came to the other disciples, they saw a large crowd around them and the teachers of the law arguing with them. As soon as all the people saw Jesus, they were overwhelmed with wonder and ran to greet him.* The nine disciples were arguing with the teachers of the law while a large crowd of people were watching them with curiosity. The scene resembled a circus and the disciples looked like clowns. Why? What were they arguing with the religious leaders about? It turned out that a situation happened to the nine disciples while Jesus and the three were on the mountain of transfiguration.

It happened this way. A man brought his boy possessed by an evil spirit, hoping Jesus could heal his son. But Jesus was not there. Only the nine disciples were there. The nine disciples at that time felt kind of left out, because Jesus did not take them. They were probably jealous of the top three. When the man with a sick boy showed up, they decided

that it was a good opportunity to prove themselves. After all, they had healed the sick and driven out demons when they were sent out two-by-two on a training mission. They were confident that they could help the boy and tell Jesus that they should be treated equally as Peter, James and John, if not better. So one of them told the boy's father, "The doctor is not in today, but don't worry. We'll take care of ya." Another disciple got up and said, "Just watch this and enjoy." He struck a Karate pose and showed a high kick. People began to gather around them and thought it was entertaining. Encouraged by the cheering crowd, the disciple shouted, "Hey, there, evil spirit. Come out of the boy!" But nothing happened. The boy seemed to roll his eyes in defiance. The disciple raised his voice one notch. "You, evil spirit, I said, come out!" Still nothing happened. The teachers of the law were watching and thought this was amusing. They shouted, "Try Taekwondo instead of Karate. Maybe the evil spirit does not know you have a black belt." The disciple's face became red with embarrassment. His voice was now strained. He said, "Hey, Mr. evil spirit. Please come out." The boy seemed to grin showing his teeth in a devilish manner. The disciple wanted to hide himself from the crowd, but he was on the center stage. His shoulders sank and he slowly walked to the other disciples who were equally embarrassed. When the teachers of law continued to shout demeaning words toward their direction, one of the disciples shouted back something like, "You guys cannot do it either. So just shut up."

As soon as the people saw Jesus, they were overwhelmed with wonder and ran to greet him. They were overwhelmed with wonder probably because Jesus' holiness was still lingering in him; Jesus' face was still brilliant and his clothes were still very white. He looked awesome. They were also excited to see Jesus, knowing that Jesus could heal the boy. They wanted to see another miracle performed by Jesus.

"What are you arguing with them about?" Jesus asked (16). The disciples remained silent. They were too embarrassed to talk to him about the incident. Instead, a man in the crowd stood up. It was the boy's father. He said to Jesus, "Teacher, I brought you my son, who is possessed by a spirit that has robbed him of speech" (17). He went on, "You know, every morning my son said to me, 'Good morning, Daddy! Have a good day at work, Daddy! Don't forget you promised to take me to bowling tonight.' He's the joy of my life and the apple of my eye because he is my only son. Suddenly, he was possessed by an evil spirit and he could not speak. When the evil spirit seizes him it throws him to the ground. He foams at the mouth. I feel like dying looking at him. I cry every night. I have tried everything to help him. Finally I brought him to your disciples. They made all kinds of motions, but could not drive the evil spirit from my son." It was a heart wrenching story. I am sure Jesus was moved by the father's heart toward his suffering son. He was not happy about what the disciples did. But Jesus had bigger fish to fry. What was that?

II. O UNBELIEVING GENERATION (19)

Look at verse 19. "*O unbelieving generation,*" Jesus replied, "*how long shall I stay with you? How long shall I put up with you?*" Jesus said, "O unbelieving generation." Jesus looked beyond the nine disciples' inability to help the boy. Jesus saw a generation of unbelieving people. Unbelieving people occupied the whole world. Men were unbelieving. Women were unbelieving. Old people were unbelieving and young people were unbelieving. Whenever they spoke, they spoke unbelieving words. People today may

consider unbelief not a serious problem. Many view problems such as recession, poverty and climate change more serious than unbelief in God. To the father of the boy in today's passage, his son's health was the most serious problem. Likewise, we may consider our problems with health, jobs, finance and school to be more serious than unbelief. But Jesus said, "O unbelieving generation." In his eyes, the unbelief problem was more serious than anything else.

Why is unbelief such a serious problem for mankind? Unbelieving people say that they can do fine without God. They sometimes even blame God for the problems of the world. Unbelieving people make decisions with no regard to God or his word. They believe that the world would be better off without God. But unbelief is the main source of many serious problems. Unbelieving people are cut from the source of their lives, the Creator God. They may look good for now, just as the cut flowers in a vase look beautiful for a while. The unbelieving people have no place in the eternal kingdom of God.

Unbelief also leads to many destructive behaviors on both the personal level and also the society. St. Paul describes this in the second part of Romans 1. Because of unbelieving hearts, their sinful desire leads them to sexual immorality with one another. Because of their unbelieving hearts, they exchange the truth of God for a lie. They worship and serve created things rather than the Creator. Because of their unbelieving hearts, they become filled with every kind of wickedness and evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, and malice, gossips, slanderers and god-haters; insolent, arrogant and boastful. Because of their unbelieving hearts, they disobey their parents; they are senseless, faithless, heartless, and ruthless. Although they know God, they pretend not to know God. Because of their unbelieving hearts, they know their evildoing deserves death, but they do not discontinue it (Ro 1:18-32).

Jesus lamented over the unbelieving generation. He saw the tragedy and miseries that came from their unbelieving hearts. They were not pathetic because they were occupied by the Roman Empire. They were pathetic because they were unbelieving people. Jesus tried his best. He tried to plant the hope of the kingdom of God by teaching them the word of God. He healed many sick people in order to let them appreciate God's love through his healing ministry. But still, the world did not listen to him. It was an unbelieving generation.

What would Jesus say to our generation? What would he say about people who celebrate his birthday with Santa Claus and his resurrection with a bunny? What would he say about people who spend more time on sports and entertainment than on his word and prayer? I have a suspicion that he would lament over our generation as well, saying, "O unbelieving generation!" Then, what can we do to change this?

III. EVERYTHING IS POSSIBLE FOR HIM WHO BELIEVES (20-27)

Jesus' heart went out to the suffering boy. A boy who should be full of life ahead of him was suffering greatly because of the evil spirit inside him. Jesus wanted to heal the boy. But the sickness of unbelief was even more serious. This sickness was killing people's souls. So he turned to the boy's father first. He wanted to heal the man's sickness of

unbelief. Look at verse 21. *Jesus asked the boy's father, "How long has he been like this?" "From childhood," he answered.* Jesus had a great compassion on the father. Jesus understood his agony. So he asked him, "How long has he been like this?" How did the man answer? He said, "From childhood. It has often thrown him into fire or water to kill him. But if you can do anything, take pity on us and help us" (22). His answer showed how much he had been suffering because of his son. He was in deep despair. At the same time, his answer showed his unbelief. He was talking to the Son of God, but all he could say was "If you can do anything, take pity on us and help us." He had no real faith in Jesus. He was different from other sick people who had come forward to Jesus. A man with leprosy came to Jesus and said, "Jesus, you can make me clean." A woman with bleeding problem believed that if only she touched the edge of Jesus' cloak, she would be healed. A Roman centurion said to Jesus, "Just say the word, and my servant will be healed." These people had faith in Jesus. But the boy's father was unbelieving. He was part of the unbelieving generation. How did Jesus help him?

Look at verse 23. *"If you can"? said Jesus. "Everything is possible for him who believes."* Jesus rebuked him. The boy's father had no conviction. His faith was 50/50. He brought his son to Jesus but did not believe Jesus could heal him with certainty. So Jesus told him: *"If you can? Everything is possible for him who believes."* What does this mean? Of course, this does not mean we can make God a vending machine—getting things we want on demand. It simply means that nothing is impossible for God, for he is the Almighty God. It means that when we have faith in God, we can have everything we need to serve him.

"Unbelieving" is a person's way of life that excludes God in his decisions. Unbelieving is a way of thinking based on doubt and fear. Hebrews 11:6 says that without faith it is impossible to please God. On the other hand, believing means to say, "I cannot do anything by myself but I can do everything with God's help." The apostle Paul declares in Philippians 4:13: "I can do everything through him who gives me strength." Paul said this when he was a prisoner in Rome. He was an old man. He was in chains. But he believed that God could use him to evangelize the world. So by faith he had a Bible study ministry in his prison. Everything was possible for Paul who believed in God!

Look at verse 24. *"Immediately the boy's father exclaimed, 'I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!'"* This father had suffered much and he was totally helpless. But now because of Jesus, a beam of hope was shining in his heart. He prayed, "Help me overcome my unbelief!" This is a good prayer we can adopt.

When Jesus saw that a crowd was running to the scene, he rebuked the evil spirit. *"You deaf and mute spirit," he said, "I command you, come out of him and never enter him again"* (25). Look at the scene of the evil spirit running away. The spirit shrieked, convulsed him violently and came out. The boy looked so much like a corpse that many said, "He's dead." An evil spirit never gives up his victim easily. He knew he had to come out of the boy. But he made a scene. The evil spirit made the boy look dead.

Look at verse 27. *"But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up to his feet, and he stood up."* Jesus drove out the evil spirit from the boy. He took him by the hand and

helped him to stand up. Jesus is the Son of God. Only Jesus can save us from the power of sin and Satan. Only Jesus can give us the strength to fight against unbelief.

IV. ONLY BY PRAYER (28-29)

After Jesus had gone indoors, his disciples spoke to him privately. In a whisper, they asked Jesus, "Why couldn't we drive it out?" Look at verse 29. *He replied, "This kind can come out only by prayer."* The work of God is what God does. We are only the instrument that he uses. We don't have the power. It comes from God. So we must pray. We should not be proud, thinking that we can heal someone just because we have done it before. Our prayer is telling God that we are weak but he is strong. We cannot do anything alone unless he enables us. So prayer and faith go hand in hand.

Msn. Isaac wanted to invite Adam to our Summer Bible Conference at JMU. But he initially had no faith to invite him. He was afraid of asking Adam to give up his income for a couple of days and also pay the conference fees. So he prayed to God. Then God gave him the faith to ask. And God opened Adam's heart to attend the spiritual feast and be blessed with the word of life.



Today's passage is very relevant to us. We live in an unbelieving generation. Jesus would rebuke us, "If you can? Everything is possible for him who believes!" May God help us to fight against unbelief in ourselves! May God help us to pray, "Help me overcome my unbelief!" so that by faith we can do the good works that God prepared in advance for us to do!