

Power Failure

MARK 9:14-29

Some of you may have seen the pictures from the snow and ice storms they recently had back east. Many people had to deal with power outages and all the inconvenience of not having electricity. I remember a few years ago when we lived in Kansas we had a huge ice storm that knock out power to thousands of homes for more than a week. People were stuck in the dark and cold.

In Mark 9 today we see how some of the disciples had a power failure. They were unable to help a man who had a demon-possessed son. The lights went out for them, and they sat in the dark. They were frustrated and confused.

To set the stage for our story today, we need to realize that Jesus had just been up on the Mount of Transfiguration with Peter, James, and John. It was a tremendous experience for those three disciples; they saw Jesus transfigured before them. Jesus Christ shined with glory and power. Here was a brief glimpse of the divinity of the Son of God.

Afterwards, when they came down the mountain, they arrived in the town below. So we pick up the story in verse 14, follow along in your Bible as I read it:

- 14 And when He came to the disciples, He saw a great multitude around them, and scribes disputing with them.**
- 15 Immediately, when they saw Him, all the people were greatly amazed, and running to Him, greeted Him.**
- 16 And He asked the scribes, "What are you discussing with them?"**
- 17 Then one of the crowd answered and said, "Teacher, I brought You my son, who has a mute spirit.**
- 18 And wherever it seizes him, it throws him down; he foams at the mouth, gnashes his teeth, and becomes rigid. So I spoke to Your disciples, that they should cast it out, but they could not."**
- 19 He answered him and said, "O faithless generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I bear with you? Bring him to Me."**
- 20 Then they brought him to Him. And when he saw Him, immediately the spirit convulsed him, and he fell on the ground and wallowed, foaming at the mouth.**
- 21 So He asked his father, "How long has this been happening to him?" And he said, "From childhood.**
- 22 And often he has thrown him both into the fire and into the water to destroy him. But if You can do anything, have compassion on us and help us."**
- 23 Jesus said to him, "If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes."**
- 24 Immediately the father of the child cried out and said with tears, "Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!"**
- 25 When Jesus saw that the people came running together, He rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, "Deaf and dumb spirit, I command you, come out of him and enter him no more!"**
- 26 Then the spirit cried out, convulsed him greatly, and came out of him. And he became as one dead, so that many said, "He is dead."**
- 27 But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up, and he arose.**
- 28 And when He had come into the house, His disciples asked Him privately, "Why could we not cast it out?"**
- 29 So He said to them, "This kind can come out by nothing but prayer and fasting."**

We are told in verse 18 that the disciples of Jesus failed in their attempt to cast out a demon from the boy. The boy's father summed up their efforts by saying "...**but they could not.**"

He was right! He came to these men hoping to find some help for his family, but he found that these men had no help to offer. They could not! Why did they fail?

They failed because they lacked spiritual power. They lacked spiritual power because they were missing the one thing on which spiritual power depends.

I would like for us to look into these verses today because we need the message they teach us. We are here trying to carry out the Lord's business in these dark, sinful days and too many times people walk away from churches saying, "...**but they could not.**" We sometimes have the same problem as the Lord's disciples.

By God's help, I want to unpack these verses today. Let's listen carefully to what the Lord has to say to us today, both as individuals and as a church. I pray that we will hear the truth and heed the truth so that it will never be said of New Covenant Baptist Church, "**But They Could Not!**"

I. THE LACK OF SPIRITUAL POWER vs. 14-19

When Jesus and the three disciples come down from the mountain, they find the other nine disciples engaged in an argument with some scribes, v. 14. It seems that a distraught father had brought his demon possessed son to Jesus for healing. Jesus was gone up on the mountain when he arrived, so he asked the disciple to heal his son. They could not cast out the demon and the scribes are probably mocking them for their lack of power.

Jesus walks upon this scene and asks for an explanation, v. 16. The father, in agonizing detail, describes the pitiful condition of his son. The father's language describes a horrible, ongoing situation of demonic torment.

It is a sad state of affairs and when Jesus hears the details, He voices His Own dismay over the all that He has heard.

The word "**O**" in **verse 19** is a word of deep anguish. It was usually reserved for a time of burdened prayer. He cries out, "**O faithless generation.**"

Jesus is distressed because of their unbelief. Who is He rebuking? Who was He speaking to? His disciples. Why does He call them a "generation"? He is saying, "You disciples are no different than the rest of this generation." He's lumping them in along with everybody else. The problem was not a lack of education among them, it was not cultural or social awareness, it was not a lack of being relevant or attractive or contemporary, it was a lack of faith!

These men had seen Jesus perform countless amazing miracles, yet they still lacked genuine faith. These men had even cast out demons in the past, **Mark 6:7; 12-13**. There the Lord had given them power over unclean spirits. These men had seen the miracles and they had performed the miracles themselves, but now it is said of them "**and they could not.**"

What do you think Jesus might say about our churches in the US today? Would He cry out, "**O faithless generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I bear with you?**" How often the Lord Jesus must be grieved with us the way He was with the disciples when He thinks of the resources He has given us and yet we seem so practically powerless to do anything for the hurting people who need the Lord.

Can I ask you today: if the Lord asked you how long, what would your answer be to that question? How long has He been with you? How long have you been

saved? How long have you been walking this Christian life, and yet there is a powerlessness in serving the Lord that meets the needs of others.

The saddest aspect of this whole scene is not the condition of the boy; the spirit of the scribes, or the anguish of the father. The saddest part of this whole account is the powerlessness of the disciples.

Their problem was unbelief. They believed in the process, they believed in themselves because they had done this before, they had cast out devils before, but they were not relying on the Lord Himself.

In many ways these nine disciples are a picture of the modern church. Like them, we have the reputation that we have power. This father came to Jesus, he thought the disciples could help his son. But, they lacked the power to make a difference. As a result, they have lost face with the father, the crowds and with the scribes, who are mocking them for their lack of power and ability.

The modern church has so much more than those first believers did. Most churches have nice facilities in which to meet. Most churches have skilled people preaching and organizing the work of the church. We have libraries of Bibles and Christian books. We have Christian radio and music and more. But, most churches and most Christians today lack what they need most: ***The power of God.***

Thomas Aquinas was a Roman Catholic scholar who lived between 1225 and 1274. He was a brilliant thinker who left an indelible imprint on the fabric of his time. III.

During one a visit to Rome the Pope is said to have looked at Thomas Aquinas and said, "*Behold, Master Thomas, the church can no longer say, as St. Peter, 'Silver and gold have I none!'*"

Aquinas was quick to reply, "*Alas, neither can we say what follows, 'but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk.'*"

Thomas Aquinas understood a truth that many people never grasp. The real measure of success for a church or a ministry is not how fine its buildings are; how large its offerings are; or how great its crowds are. The real measure of success for a church or a ministry is in whether or not it operates in the power of God.

Just by being here our church is making a promise to the world. "*If you need God, we can help you get to Him. If your life is broken, we can show you how God can fix it. If your family is coming apart, we can show you how God can put it back together again. If you are lost, we can show you how to be saved.*"

This church makes a promise to the world that we are different than they are; that we are able to help them; and that we care about them.

Most churches in our day lack genuine spiritual power. There is no touch of God. There is not power of God. The world comes in and there is no help in the church for their condition. What does the world do? It stands around us and it mocks our weakness. May it never be said of this church "***...but they could not.***"

II. THE LORD OF SPIRITUAL POWER vs. 19b-27

Jesus hears the father's story and commands the boy be brought to Him. When he arrives, the demon in the child recognizes Jesus and attacks the boy again. The child is gripped by convulsions, and he wallows on the ground, foaming at the mouth, v. 20. It is a pitiful scene.

As the child writhes on the ground, Jesus begins to question this father. Jesus seeking to grow this father's faith. Jesus asks him about how long the child has been this way, v. 21. The father's answer is graphic and telling. He tells Jesus that things have been this way since the boy was little. He also tells Jesus that the demon has attacked the boy repeatedly, trying to burn him to death or drown him in the water, v. 22.

Then, the father reveals the true condition of his faith. He looks at Jesus and he says, **"But if You can do anything, have compassion on us and help us."**

This father had trusted that the disciples of Jesus could heal his son. When they failed, his faith in Jesus and His abilities was shattered as well. His faith has been reduced to **"if You can do any thing..."**

When Jesus hears this man's words, He responds immediately! Jesus replies in verse 23, **"If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes."** I think it was more like this: **"If you can? Believe! All things are possible to him who believes!"**

When the father hears this, he makes one of the most honest and transparent prayers in the entire Bible. He looks at Jesus and says, **"Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!"** He is saying, *"Lord, I do believe in You and in Your power. But, my faith is weak! Help me to grow in my faith."*

Then Jesus commands the spirit to leave the boy and to never return, v. 25. The demon attacks the child one more time and comes out. The child becomes so quiet and so still that the onlookers assume that he is dead, v. 26. Then, Jesus does what He does best; He takes the child by the hand and He lifts him up. The child rises and he is free, v. 27.

There are some spiritual lessons we need to glean here before we move to our final thought today. Let me share them with you.

1. **A powerless church portrays Jesus Christ in a bad light** – Because the disciples lacked power, the father assumed Jesus lacked power too. The same is true about us. When a lost world walks into a church building and it sees deadness, coldness and apathy; the lost assume that Jesus is just as lifeless, just as powerless and just as dead

It's time the church told the truth about Jesus! He changes lives! Knowing Him is exciting! His church is alive and active in the world. His Gospel has power.

Someone put that thought into verse this way:

You are writing a gospel, a chapter each day,
By the deeds that you do, and the words that you say;
Men read what you write, distorted or true,
Say: what is the gospel according to you?

2. **Weak faith is better than no faith at all** – This father was filled with doubt, but there was still a kernel of faith in his heart. God is not put off by our doubts, but total unbelief slams the door on His power in our lives. We need to remember that it isn't large faith that receives big answers from the Lord. It is simply genuine faith that sees Him move in great power. In Matthew's account of this story Jesus tells His disciples that they could not, **"Because of your unbelief; for assuredly, I say to you, if you have faith as a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you."** (Matthew 17:20).

3. **Jesus is still in the “lifting up business”** – Just as Jesus took this poor, dead boy by the hand and lifted him up into a new life, Jesus can do the same for all who come to Him by faith. He can lift that dead sinner out of his sins and into a new life in Christ, **2 Cor. 5:17**. He can lift that cold, apathetic church member out of his complacency and into a new life of joy and blessing, **Rev. 3:20**. He can lift that burdened believer out of his fears and give him peace that passes all understanding, **Phil. 4:6-7**.

III. THE LESSONS OF SPIRITUAL POWER vs. 28-29

When this episode is over and the disciples are alone with Jesus, the nine who failed to deliver the child ask Jesus about why they failed, v. 28. These men were concerned about their spiritual failure, and they should have been!

The answer Jesus gave them is both simple and telling. His answer is that these men failed they failed to pray. Prayer is a state of close communion with the Lord. Fasting speaks of a lifestyle of total submission and surrender to the Lord.

The disciples had a lack of faith because they had a lack of prayer. These men failed because they were not leaning on the Lord Jesus Christ for the power they needed. Their lack of prayer showed their lack of faith.

We lack His power for the very same reasons. We lack the power of God in the modern church because we are not depending on the Lord! We are no longer a praying people. We are no longer a surrendered people. We are no longer a people who walk in total dependence upon the Lord Jesus Christ.

The truth is, there will be no power; there will be no glory; there will be no revival in the church until God’s people learn to lean on Jesus and on Him alone for what we need. What do we need?

1. **We need to pray** – I am referring to prayer that seeks the face and the will of God. I am referring to prayer that comes boldly before the throne room of God, refusing to be silenced until the answer comes. I am talking about the church returning to the days of lying on the altars, seeking God and His power.
2. **We need to become totally dependent on the Lord for everything** – Until we reach the place where we understand that the power of God does not come because of our preaching, our singing, our working or our manipulation of people and things. The power of God rests on us as we learn to rest in Jesus, **John 15:5**.

We do not need new programs. We do not need to become more “seeker friendly”. We do not need to change our music or our message. What we need is the power of God. That power will come when God’s people get serious about seeking His face; walking in His ways and leaning on Him for all we need. It will come then and only then.

“But they could not!” What a tragic statement! When people come to New Covenant Baptist Church and worship with us, what is their thought when they leave?

Can they say, **“The power of God is in that place; they serve a mighty, wonderful Lord”**? Or do they leave here saying, **“I went there for help; I went there for fellowship; I went there for love; I went there for hope; I went there for peace; I went there for acceptance; I went there for Jesus, and they could not”**?

Has God spoken to you about your lack of power? Your lack of faith? Your lack of prayer? Has He spoken to you about how much you depend on Him? If He has spoken, you need to hear His voice and do what He is telling you to do.

Has He spoken to you about your salvation? If so, you need to come and be saved.

We can either be a people who can or a people who could not. Jesus said, "**all things are possible to him who believes.**"