



## THE GOSPEL OF MARK

**Study Guide Full**  
**Mark 9:14-29**  
**February 2, 2020**

While last week we saw the power of Christ on display in the radiance of the transfiguration, this week we see that same power on display in the healing of a boy afflicted by epileptic-like demon possession.

In both passages, Mark continues to teach us about what it means to follow Christ as his disciples. Atop the mount, we caught a glimpse of Peter's confusion, and the reassuring voice of God reminding us in such confusion, "This is my beloved Son; listen to him." Now, having come down off the mountain, before the crowds once again, we catch a glimpse of the cynicism of the scribes, the doubt of the disciples, and a father's honest assessment of his own faith.

So it is that, if we are speaking honestly, it should not be difficult to find ourselves somewhere in these texts..seeing our dire need to find the power of Christ in prayer.

*14 And when they came to the disciples, they saw a great crowd around them, and scribes arguing with them. 15 And immediately all the crowd, when they saw him, were greatly amazed and ran up to him and greeted him. 16 And he asked them, "What are you arguing about with them?" 17 And someone from the crowd answered him, "Teacher, I brought my son to you, for he has a spirit that makes him mute. 18 And whenever it seizes him, it throws him down, and he foams and grinds his teeth and becomes rigid. So I asked your disciples to cast it out, and they were not able."*



19 And he answered them, "O faithless generation, how long am I to be with you? How long am I to bear with you? Bring him to me." 20 And they brought the boy to him. And when the spirit saw him, immediately it convulsed the boy, and he fell on the ground and rolled about, foaming at the mouth. 21 And Jesus asked his father, "How long has this been happening to him?" And he said, "From childhood. 22 And it has often cast him into fire and into water, to destroy him. But if you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us." 23 And Jesus said to him, "'If you can't! All things are possible for one who believes.'" 24 Immediately the father of the child cried out and said, "I believe; help my unbelief!" 25 And when Jesus saw that a crowd came running together, he rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, "You mute and deaf spirit, I command you, come out of him and never enter him again." 26 And after crying out and convulsing him terribly, it came out, and the boy was like a corpse, so that most of them said, "He is dead." 27 But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up, and he arose.

28 And when he had entered the house, his disciples asked him privately, "Why could we not cast it out?" 29 And he said to them, "This kind cannot be driven out by anything but prayer."

## Mark 9:14-29

Notes:

### Commentary Notes:

**vv. 14-15.** If, as mentioned in last week's study, the mountain of the transfiguration is Mt. Hermon, then the presence of the scribes so far north testifies to their strong desire to monitor the teaching of Jesus. Yet there is little the scribes can do to curb the amazement of the crowd upon Jesus'

### Discussion Questions:

**Pray:** Pray that the city of Vancouver—especially those in our own neighbourhoods—would experience what it is to be greatly



arrival, such was the fame and reputation of our Lord.

**vv. 16-18.** The symptoms of the illness of demon possession are severe: loss of speech, foaming at the mouth, and grinding of teeth—actions likely indicative of a seizure.

The disciples, despite having been commissioned to cast out demons in Mark 3:15 and 6:7, and having already been successful in doing so in 6:13, are not able to do so here—leading thus to Jesus' lament. The situation makes clear: whether or not the boy's seizure-like symptoms are a form of epilepsy, the focus of the passage is on Jesus' authority and the disciples' faith.

**v. 19.** The antecedent of the "unbelieving generation" is grammatically unclear in Greek. Undoubtedly, it refers to the disciples; but might it also refer to the scribes, or to the crowds?

**vv. 20-22.** The simple presence of Jesus is enough for the demonic power to attack the boy with convulsions. Mark uses the rare New Testament word συσπάρᾱσω (*syspras-so*) that emphasizes the violent nature of the shaking. Yet, while *this*

amazed by Jesus, and to learn the joy that it is to come running to him.

*Discuss:* What do you suppose the life of this boy was like, considering his medical condition?

*Reflect:* Jesus has just come down from the mountain with Peter, James, and John—after the transfiguration experience—only to be bitterly disappointed by them. In this sense, consider: when has your own Christian experience been marked by the uncomfortable juxtaposition of glorious triumph and disappointing "reality check"?

*Confess:* When has a lack of faith prevented you from experiencing all that God had for you? What did you learn from that experience? If needed, confess your inability to live more in step with the faith of Christ, and rest assured in his forgiveness and grace.

*Lament and Pray:* Extending our passage through the centuries, even if in a bit of a forced manner, consider: in what ways does our contemporary culture in Canada have the marks of an "unbelieving generation"? In prayer, lament for those ways that our culture comes to Christ with cynicism and doubt.

*Meditate and Pray:* In what way do you identify with the father of the demon-possessed, mute child, crying out, "Have compassion on us and help us?" How are you in need of the compassion and help of Christ this week? Pray over your needs. Also consider: How have you seen the compassionate help of Christ rescue you in the past? Encourage one another with

convulsion is a direct response to seeing Christ, the reality is that the boy has been suffering these destructive symptoms of chronic demon possession *for years*, prompting the father's plea for healing.

**vv. 23-24.** It seems that the doubt of the disciples and cynicism of the scribes has led doubt to creep into the mind of the boy's father. Yet Jesus' rhetorically powerful repetition of the father's words—to the effect of "What do you mean if I can?!?"—encourage the father to want to trust more in the power of Christ for those who believe: "I believe, help my unbelief."

**vv. 25-27.** The conversation has apparently attracted an even greater crowd. Jesus, wanting to avoid further publicity and conflict, chooses immediately to rebuke the demon and heal the boy. Mark highlights the personal touch of Jesus, also alluding to death and resurrection. The church historian Bede writes in his *Homilies*, "As he revealed himself in the reality of his Godhead by his power to save, so he further exhibited the reality of his human nature by taking him by the hand."

**vv. 28-29.** Perhaps the disciples had taken for granted their power to cast out demons, not fully depending through prayer in the source of that power.

your testimonies.

**Confess:** Are there recent instances where you have not responded in Christ to another's pleas for compassion and help? Search your heart.

**Discuss:** What does this passage have to say about the place of doubt in the Christian life?

**Lament:** Lament over the reality that in this broken world, God does not always choose to heal, even when we fully believe in healing.

**Meditate:** Regarding what situations in your life are you crying "I believe, help my unbelief!"?

**Listen:** Have you ever heard Audrey Assad's song "I believe, Help my Unbelief"? Listen to the song now (YouTube), meditating quietly upon the lyrics.

**Discern:** How can you be working with Spirit to raise up those in need of "standing" (v. 27), in the context of the challenges of modern life in Vancouver? What would it look for your Connection Group to exhibit the saving touch of Christ to at least one specific group of people?

**Reflect:** How are you encouraged in your own circumstances by the fact that even though Jesus is dismayed by the dullness of the disciples, he does not desert them?