

Only Through Prayer

From the daily news and from our daily lives, we know that we live in a sinful, broken, and unbelieving world. It's the same world Jesus lived in, and He did some things that have enabled His people, not only to endure the chaos, but also to flourish in it.

Let's observe these things in our text:

Mark 9: 14-29

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! 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."

I. Jesus has entered our sinful, broken, and unbelieving world. (9:14-19)

Look at the world He faced:

1. Moralistic, turf-guarding religious leaders (v.14)
2. Star-gazing mobs (v.15)
3. Devastated children (v.16-18a)
4. Impotent church (18b)

It is mind-boggling to observe the vicious schemes of Satan, who seeks to destroy us and our children. It is also disconcerting to observe that the Church, who has been given the commission and power to dispel evil (cf. Mark 6: 7, 13), often finds herself completely impotent to face the challenge.

But look at the words Jesus speaks to our world:

1. A word of admonition: our problem is lack of faith (v.19a)
2. A word of invitation (v.19b): "Bring him to me."

O, that parents and grandparents and brothers and sisters would hear and heed this gracious invitation to bring our loved ones to Him!

II. Jesus has overcome our sinful, broken, and unbelieving world. (9:20-29)

1. He loves the oppressed (vv.20,21).
He wants to know everything about this boy's need.
He knows everything about your needs.

2. He inspires the hopeless (vv. 22-24)

Jesus challenges our doubts of His ability to help us.

3. He defeats the devil (vv. 25,26a)

He rebukes the devil for his perverse desire to destroy human beings, and He commands the devil to get out and stay out of His people's lives.

4. He raises the fallen (vv. 26b, 27)

After the devil does his worst, on his way out of this boy's life, it appears that the boy is dead and all is lost. Sometimes we feel the same way, especially at our loved one's funerals. But notice that Jesus reaches down and takes His devastated people by the hand and raises them up! (The same word is used here for "resurrection.")

5. He disciplines the disciples (vv. 28,29)

The disciples are obviously dismayed and curious as to why they were unable to cast this demon out. Jesus explains to them why this can only happen through prayer. Why? Because prayer, as John Calvin said, is the chief exercise of faith. We must not depend upon ourselves, not even upon the gifts of ministry that He gave us. Those gifts can only bear fruit when we cry out to Him in total dependence upon His grace and power.

Although we live in a broken, sinful, unbelieving world, Jesus Christ has done for us what we nor anyone else could possibly do: He has entered our world and has overcome it. Glory be to His Name!

Discussion Questions

1. What are the aspects of our fallen world which cause you the greatest dismay?
2. Why is it so amazing that Jesus entered our world? Why is it so comforting? What did His entrance into our broken world cost Him?
3. What has God authorized His Church to do in our day for which we seem to be completely impotent? What can we do about this?
4. How do you explain why all of our prayers do not seem to be answered?
5. What is the most important principle for your own life that you have derived from your study of this text?

Going Deeper

Develop a plan to be in prayer regularly for the most important issues in your personal life, family life, work life, and ministry life.

Share your plan with your small group.