

God's Servant Conquers

Mark 9:14-29

The day after Jesus shines with glory on the mountain, Peter, James and John walk with Jesus to a nearby town. The other nine disciples have remained there during their trip with Jesus.

While Jesus had been away, these nine are having a rough time in the town. The trouble began when a dad brought his demon-possessed boy to see Jesus. The nine told the dad that Jesus was away, but that they could help his son. Yet for all their efforts, the demons continued to enslave this young child. The dad is forlorn, but the religious leaders are delighted. They finally have something to throw in Jesus' face!

The teacher of the Law confront the disciples with the purpose to ridicule and discredit them publicly.

"Ha! You give devotion to your rabbi as though He is the Messiah? You guys cannot even cast out a demon from a little boy. What good are you if you are too weak to do that? You act like Jesus is the King, but what good is a King who does not have authority over demons?"

The disciples, frustrated by this line of accusation, argue passionately with the scribes. Both sides are raising their voices and pointing fingers at each other.

As there bickering escalates, the crowds begin to form around the arguing groups. And then Jesus abruptly shows up with Peter, James and John.

When Jesus arrives, the crowds turn their heads and the people exclaim,, "Jesus is here! Jesus is here!" The multitude is no longer interested in the quarrel and they run towards Jesus. **Jesus is the center of every gathering.**

Now Jesus has seen His disciples as they are waving their hands and quarreling with the teachers of the Law. So when He reaches His disciples, He nods in the direction of the scribes and asks loud enough for the crowd around to hear Him, *"Hey, what are you arguing about with them?"*

The disciples look down sheepishly at their feet and shuffle a bit back and forth. Not one of them wants to tell Him how they failed the boy and his dad when they tried to cast out the demon. They do not want their Master to know why they were so frustrated with the teachers of the Law.

From the crowd, the dad of the demon-possessed boy suddenly burst forward, kneels down before Jesus and cries, *"Teacher, I can tell you exactly what the argument was all about!"*

I brought my son to you because he has a demon that makes him unable to speak. Whenever the demon seizes him, it throws my precious son down on the ground and he foams at his mouth, grinds his teeth and he stiffens like a board. The demon often throws my boy into the fire and into the water . . . nearly killing him. My boy . . . my boy, he suffers so terribly! And I cannot protect him! I know that one day, I will not be there to rescue him from being burned alive or from drowning. Jesus, this is my son . . . my ONLY son.

So when I came to you, your disciples told me that they could help my son. What hope I had for my boy's salvation from this dark demon. And your disciples tried, they really tried . . . but they could not cast out the demon. They could not help my precious boy. Jesus, I have looked everywhere. NO ONE has been able to help my son!

Teacher, this is what your disciples were arguing about with the scribes. The scribes were ridiculing them for not being able to help my son. They were arguing that their failure proves that You are an imposter and a fake.

Lord Jesus, I beg you! Have mercy on my son!"

Jesus looks intently at His disciples. His face is filled with sadness and disappointment. Jesus reflects that His disciples have so often been slow to believe!!

He remembers them crying out on the sea asking Him if He cares whether they perish or not (4:40).

He reflects upon their doubt about his ability to feed the crowds not once, but twice!

He considers their resistance to His telling them that the Son of Man must suffer and be killed by the religious authorities and will rise the third day.

Jesus then rebukes His disciples. He looks deep into their eyes as He says, *"O faithless generation! How long am I to be with you before you learn to believe in Me? How long am I to bear with your hard hearts? Bring the boy to me now."*

So the disciples take the boy by the hand and walk him to Jesus. Jesus sees that the boy is covered with burn scars on his face, arms and legs. As the boy comes within a few feet of Jesus, the demon in him panics at the presence of Jesus and the demon convulses the boy. The boy falls to the ground with a scream and shakes violently. His mouth foams as he rolls uncontrollably in the dirt."

Jesus looks at the boy and then to the father. He asks, *"How long? How long has this been happening to him?"*

With tears, the dad says, *"From the time He was a toddler. The demon often has tried to kill him by casting him into the fire or drowning him in water. Lord, if you can do anything . . . I beg you to have compassion upon us and help us!"*

Jesus looks with tenderness upon this hurting dad, *"If You can? Did you say 'If You can.'? All things are possible for one who believes."*

The dad is now convicted. And yet he is also at the end of hope. He feels his own weakness as he responds, *"Lord, I believe. Help my unbelief."*

Jesus looks down at the boy and rebukes the unclean spirit within the boy, *"You mute and deaf spirit, I command you, come out of him and never enter him again."*

The boy cried out with a loud voice and violently convulsed. The demon came out, but the boy lay still on the ground. He is so still, he looks like his life is now drained from him. The dad's heart skips a beat as he hears the crowd say, *"The boy is dead!"* No! No! No! This cannot be!

Then Jesus leans down and grabs the boy's hand. He gives a big pull and when He does, the boy's eyes open, the boy's legs hold firm, the boy's ears hear, and the boy's mouth begins to speak! He is restored! The dad and boy embrace. The crowds cheer. After a bit, the dad and his son walk home talking and laughing for the first time.

The disciples and Jesus traveled to a house where they spent the evening debriefing the events of the day. The disciples asked, *"We have been able to cast out demons in the past. Why could we not cast out the demon from this boy?"* Jesus said, *"This kind of problem cannot be resolved through anything but prayer."*

What to do when we face a problem bigger than us?

We face lots and lots of problems that are NOT bigger than us. Every day we have some problem that is not so large that we cannot handle it with our own resources.

Often we have financial problems that we look at and say, "Well, this is going to cost me, but I have the money to fix that."

Often we have physical problems and we say, "OK. This is bad, but I can exercise, diet, take medicine or have a surgery to fix that."

Often we have emotional problems and we say, "I am deeply troubled, but a little time away alone or with a friend will fix that."

We so often have resources within our reach to meet the problems we face that we get used to relying upon OURSELVES to solve them. Then along

comes a problem that is WAY bigger than us. And we unravel. We collapse under them.

Main Idea: Jesus is always bigger than any problem we face. When we come to the end of ourselves, Jesus avails Himself to us. He designs our big problems to help us look to Him and see His glory.

Action #1: Do not get frustrated.

“And when they came to the disciples, they saw a great crowd around them, and scribes arguing with them.” (Mark 9:14 [ESV](#))

The nine disciples who failed in the work of helping this demon-possessed boy, are now being heckled by a group of Jesus-hating religious leaders. *“You guys are all phonies. And so is your Rabbi! Ha! What a bunch of impotent imposters.”*

How do you think you would respond under this kind of belittling confrontation? First, you are discouraged that you cannot help this boy and his dad. But then, the scribes add insult to this injury. **These nine were frustrated and I think we likely would have been too!**

When we initially face a problem bigger than we are, we often get very frustrated. If we have a medical problem, we get frustrated at the medical team caring for us. If our flight is delayed, we get frustrated at the airline. If we have a relational conflict, we get frustrated at the people involved. If we have a spiritual problem, we get frustrated at the sins of others.

Truth: Frustration is the refuge of a proud heart.

We get frustrated because we think we should be able to control our environment and big problems confront us with the fact that we are not in control. Yet often frustration seems to be a little problem to our proud hearts. Frustration almost feels righteous. It deceives us into thinking that its presence in our heart is not a spiritual deficiency.

As a pastor, I have often become frustrated with the situations in front of me. Frustrated by my failures. Frustrated by people who attack. Frustrated by the trials that God sends my way. One day years ago, I was thinking about some of my frustrations as I was reading Galatians 5. Galatians 5 contrasts the fruit of the Spirit with the deeds of the flesh. And as I read the nine qualities of the fruit of

the Spirit, the Holy Spirit said to me, **“Ritch, do you notice that “frustration” is not listed as a fruit of the Spirit? If you are walking in frustration, you are not walking by the Spirit of God.”**

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.” (Galatians 5:22-23 [ESV](#))

I think the nine disciples responded to the scribes’ taunts with defensive frustration rather than humble confession. They felt righteous as they defended Jesus’ honor, but the frustration in their hearts kept them from having any good spiritual influence. This is why Jesus asked, “What were you arguing about?” Their frustrated defense was only creating more and more spiritual darkness.

Truth: Until we are free of frustration, we are not able to be an instrument of God to resolve the big problems that confront us. Our frustration removes us from being a godly influence in hard situations.

How the conversation would have turned if they would have said to their foes, *“Hey, guys. I know you hate us and you hate Jesus. But you have a point. We have failed here. We do not even know why. When our Master returns, we are going to talk with Him. He will know what to do.”*

If you have become frustrated by a problem in your life, the answer to your frustration is not outside of you. The first step is to get rid of the frustration that is inside of you. Only when peace reigns in your heart will be able to see clearly and be used by God to be a help to the problem.

Action #1: Do not get frustrated.

Action #2: Lean deeper into Jesus.

And immediately all the crowd, when they saw him, were greatly amazed and ran up to him and greeted him. And he asked them, “What are you arguing about with them?” (Mark 9:15-16 [ESV](#))

And someone from the crowd answered him, “Teacher, I brought my son to you, for he has a spirit that makes him mute. 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.”” (Mark 9:17-18 [ESV](#))

“And he answered them, “O faithless generation, how long am I to be with you? How long am I to bear with you? . . . ”” (Mark 9:19 [ESV](#))

Why did the nine disciples fail? Jesus tells them that they had grown careless in their faith. They had grown confident in their own experience, their own resources to handle the problems that they faced. As a result, they neglected prayer. They stopped leaning in to Jesus in absolute dependence upon Him.

Truth: God intends for our problems to be a platform upon which God reveals His love and power to us. Without big problems, we would never know God for the faithful, compassionate and sufficient God that He is. Without big problems, we would not learn to lean upon Him.

Regardless of how long we have walked with Jesus, it is our present connection to Him that gives us power to address the problems that we face daily.

“I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.” (John 15:5 [ESV](#))

Jesus urges us in John 15 to “abide in Him”. He tells us that one reason why it is so important to abide in Him is that “apart from Me you can do nothing”. He tells us plainly that through abiding in Him we will bear “much fruit”.

What an opportunity we have to experience the life-giving power of Jesus flow through us to our family, our neighbors, and our church!

Our ability to influence others toward new birth, toward comfort in sorrow, toward strength in temptation, toward hope in despair . . . does not rest in our personality, compassion or kindness. Our ability to bring eternal, profound good to others rests in our abiding in Jesus.

How much do we fail to experience of God’s working through us simply because we have become too busy to “abide”? Only God can accurately measure that. But Jesus wants us to consider that often our influence to help a hurting friend, a prodigal child, a wandering brother/sister in Christ . . . is not so much our words and actions toward them as it is our abiding in Jesus.

Friends, the most important, impactful thing we can do with this day is something that no one else will see. It is the simple act of taking time to open the

door to Jesus and invite Him in to talk with us and dine with us. **We desperately need Him if we are to be fruitful today!**

When my son Jackson was four years old, he often would pray, “Lord, please be in my heart, not just for one day, but for all the days.” May this be our prayer!!

Action #1: Do not get frustrated.

Action #2: Lean deeper into Jesus.

Action #3: Take the problem to Jesus.

“And he answered them, . . . Bring him to me.”” (Mark 9:19 [ESV](#))

While Satan is not necessarily behind EVERY problem we face, he is often present in them. His malice toward God rages inside of his person and he loves to cruelly destroy God’s image bearers at every opportunity. Friends, Satan will not leave your children alone. He is after them too! He looks for openings to harm them. **It is never too early to pray over and to prepare your children for spiritual battles.**

Truth: A spiritual dimension lies at the heart of the problems we face. The question is not whether we will find a solution to the problem, but whether we will be brought near to God through them.

When Jesus said to these specific disciples, “Bring him to me.”, Jesus was speaking to every disciples who faces an impossible problem. “Bring the problem to Me.” We are completely dependent upon our Shepherd Jesus for protection and provision. **Left to ourselves, we will perish. But with Him we will prevail!**

Friend, what are you doing with the problems you face today? Are you still holding them in your own lap, hoping you can solve them? I urge you to take your problem to Jesus. He is the Savior and there is no problem bigger than Him!

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. And Jesus asked his father, “How long has this been happening to him?” And he said, “From childhood. 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.”” (Mark 9:20-22 [ESV](#))

Hudson Taylor was a missionary to inland China in the 1800's. He faced many trials and problems in his life — severe illness, the death of his wife, the death of his children, desertion by fellow-workers, persecution, financial pressures, persistent unbelief around him.

When I was in high school, I read a biography about him and he strengthened me in this principle of learning to take my problems to Jesus. I could not find the exact quote, but I remember Taylor saying that the big issue is not the impossibility of the problem, but where we let the problem be placed. If we let the problem stand between us and God, then the pressure from the problem will push us away from Him. But if we place the problem on our other side, the pressure will push us closer to God. And as we are drawn near to the LORD, we will find Him sufficient for our every need.

"My path is far from easy. I was never more happy in Jesus, and I am very sure He will not fail us; but never from the time of the foundation of the Mission have we been so utterly cast upon God. It is well, doubtless, that it should be so.

Difficulties afford a platform upon which He can show Himself. Without them we could never know how tender, faithful, and almighty our God is.

How much we may and ought to trust Him!

(from Hudson Taylor and the China Inland Mission, vol. 2, p.218)

This past week, Pastor Josh wrote in our daily devotion Together Day by Day, "Even when we are stretched to our breaking point and beyond, Jesus is more than able to deliver. Where has God brought you to the end of yourself? What is your immovable mountain? A persistent temptation? A past guilt? A prodigal child? A passive spouse? Can you trust him today to the 'impossible'?"

"Ah, Lord GOD! It is you who have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and by your outstretched arm! Nothing is too hard for you." (Jeremiah 32:17 [ESV](#))

Action #1: Do not get frustrated.

Action #2: Lean deeper into Jesus.

Action #3: Take the problem to Jesus.

Action #4: Ask Jesus to strengthen your faith.

"Immediately the father of the child cried out and said, "I believe; help my unbelief!"
(Mark 9:24 [ESV](#))

Jesus is ever willing and able to solve the problems we face. No matter how large and impossible that they are . . . Jesus is sufficient for them. But the LORD wants to grow our faith. He often delays His provision so that we would see our need for stronger faith and call out to Him for it.

I love this man's honesty. I love this man's heart. He is honest when he confesses, *"I believe!"* He is humble as he acknowledges that his faith is weak. He is trusting when he asks, *"Help me! Help my unbelief!"* How often faith and unbelief are present in the same heart! Trust and doubt dwell side by side within us. How we need the Spirit to strengthen our faith! We are right to fight unbelief and we are right to press forward toward faith!

How long has it been since you prayed for stronger faith. My dad taught us to pray that at nearly every meal. *"Strengthen our faith."*

Truth: Our problems provide motivation for us to ask God to strengthen our faith. The Lord loves to hear our prayers for our faith to be made strong. He delights to answer our cries for more faith.

Illustration: My brother Jim has been experiencing a trial with terminal Stage 4 cancer. When he was diagnosed 15 months ago, the doctor thought he only had a couple of months to live. Thankfully, God led him to a drug that the LORD used to give him more time and more energy. But now the drug has stopped working and they are not finding another one at this point.

My prayer, "Lord, strengthen Jim's faith in this. Strengthen the faith of his wife Kathy. Strengthen my faith through it." And God has answered that prayer for Jim and Kathy in amazing ways. I have not witnessed someone have more peace and more joy through such a trial as I have seen in my brother Jim. I have learned some things about trusting God from Jim that I would not have learned had the Lord not ordained this trial for him.

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." 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." But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up, and he arose." (Mark 9:25-27 [ESV](#))

The devil NEVER defeats Jesus. Jesus exerts complete dominion over him. Yet faith is necessary for us to experience Jesus' victory in our lives.

Faith is the victory that overcomes the enemy.

"And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith." (1 John 5:4 [ESV](#))

This story teaches us that we each need strong faith as we walk with the LORD and serve Him. But the story also highlights that we need strong faith as a group too. The failure does not rest on one specific disciple. But the failure is attributed to the whole group of nine. **As Mark lays out the story for us, all nine are being rebuked for their little faith.**

Christianity is a team sport. Our motto at Bethany is "Following Jesus Together". **We believe that the glory of God rests not only on our personal walk, but on our shared family walk.**

This "together" emphasis is often missing in modern discipleship, but it was not missing in the way Jesus led the twelve nor in the way Jesus loves and builds His church today. Our ability to glorify Jesus in this life depends not only upon our own spiritual strength, but also the strength of our church family.

As disciples of Jesus, we have to ask, "How am I doing in my faith?" But Jesus also wants us to ask, **"How are WE doing in the strength of OUR faith?"**

We ask this question of our church community, not with a posture of accusation or condemnation. But with a posture of leaning in to each other to encourage and stimulate faith!

The LORD places us INSIDE a church family for His glory. Each disciple of Jesus is intricately woven in to a church family to grow and serve Him together. This is Jesus' design for us. This is the way Jesus is glorified.

Jesus' ministry to our world depends upon us working together by faith as a team. It does us no good to lose as a team and then point our fingers in accusation at the other players. God calls us to contribute to the strengthening of the faith of the whole.

Illustration: High school ran cross country. We had a very mediocre team. At the one of the big meets, a team from York in Elmhurst captured my attention. Sweats that had the words "The long green line." And then all the dates that this team won the state meet. Sure enough at the meet, York defeated all the other high schools by an shocking margin. What did this high school have that Limestone did not. We would occasionally have very gifted runners. But York had

a team environment that elevated everyone. The culture made each runner better. Each runner contributed to the growth of the other runners. Each runner received the benefit from the others.

When we ask Jesus to strengthen our faith, let us ask Him to do so for our church family too!

Action #1: Do not get frustrated.

Action #2: Lean deeper into Jesus.

Action #3: Take the problem to Jesus.

Action #4: Ask Jesus to strengthen your faith.

Action #5: Pray, pray, and then pray.

And when he had entered the house, his disciples asked him privately, "Why could we not cast it out?" And he said to them, "This kind cannot be driven out by anything but prayer." (Mark 9:28-29 [ESV](#))

Prayer is the expression of a helpless, but dependent soul. Prayer is God's means to connect us to His Person and His power.

The problem with the nine disciples is not that they did not TRY. The problem is not that they did not do their best. The problem is not that they did not care. The problem is that they did not pray!! They did not get down on their knees and petition the Father for ability to help this boy.

And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us. And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests that we have asked of him." (1 John 5:14-15 [ESV](#))

When we pray in faith, demons lose their hold. When we pray in faith, our hearts receive God's peace. When we pray in faith, our soul is made whole. When we pray in faith, our problems lose their power over us.

Friends, as we face problems, let us begin with prayer. Then let us continue through prayer. And finally, let us finish by prayer.

Throughout his life of service Hudson Taylor personified faith that prays. He encountered innumerable difficulties and setbacks in the work he did, but through prayer he overcame them all. His attitude to the works produced by faith is summarized in his own words: *"I have found that there are three stages in every great work of God: first, it is impossible, then it is difficult, then it is done."*

Conclusion:

Main Idea: Jesus is always bigger than any problem we face. When we come to the end of ourselves, Jesus avails Himself to us. He designs our big problems to help us look to Him and see His glory.

Big danger of trusting in our past experience, our present resources, our personal strength, our vibrant community to prevail when we have problems. And each of these are blessings to us . . . UNLESS we begin to trust in them instead of trusting in the LORD.

Illustration: 250-year anniversary of our nations army. I thank God for our military. I believe that our country and the freedoms we enjoy are worth dying for and I thank God for the men and women who put their lives on the line so that we can worship without fear of missiles hurling toward us. I watched much of the parade in Washington D.C. and was encouraged by our nations resources to defend ourselves. BUT . . . we must not trust in our own strength. The motto "In God We Trust" is not a nice saying. It is essential to our very survival.

The king is not saved by his great army; a warrior is not delivered by his great strength. The war horse is a false hope for salvation, and by its great might it cannot rescue." (Psalm 33:16-17)

What is true of a nation is also true of our church and of our individual lives.

What to do when we face a problem bigger than us?

Action #1: Do not get discouraged.

Action #2: Lean deeper into Jesus.

Action #3: Take the problem to Jesus.

Action #4: Ask Jesus to strengthen your faith.

Action #5: Pray, pray, and then pray.