


The Gospel of Mark
Part 30
How to Access
God's Power & Presence

TALKINGPOINTS WALKINGPOINTS

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Talk together about the glory of God's kingdom. –Psalm 145:11
Love the Lord your God and **walk** in all his ways. –Joshua 22:5

Questions for Reflection or Discussion

- What from Sunday's message interested you? ...made sense to you? ...confused you?
...intrigued you? ...upset you? ...encouraged you? ...and **why**?

- Read Mark 9:17-18 and 28-29.

According to v. 29, **why** couldn't the disciples cast out that demon? What did they lack?

But in Mark 9:19a, **what** critique did Jesus make? What did the disciples lack?

What do you think is the **connection** between those two assessments Jesus made?

Read 2 Kings 5:1-7. In what ways is this incident similar to, and different from, that of Mark 9:17-18?

Pastor Doug suggested that receiving a foretaste of God's glory—as Peter, James and John did at the Transfiguration—equips us for trusting God when we confront difficulties in this life. Notice the confidence of the little Jewish girl in 2 Kings 5:2-3. How do you think **she** gained **her** confidence?

What resources or experiences are available **to you** for growing such faith?

- Have you ever seen a shrine to an idol, either in a temple or in an individual's home? Tell us about it.

Do **you** have any idols? Tell us about them.

Pastor Doug noted that it's OK for us to view things in our lives as **precious** (things such as family, career, health or status), but that if ever they take **ultimate** place in our lives, they have become idols. Read Ezekiel 14:1-8. According to v. 3, 4 & 7, **where** had these people erected their idols?

Those who have idols are told to "turn back and turn away from your _____ and turn your faces away from all your _____" (v. 6). To what does the Bible equate idols?

Look up "abomination" at WebstersDictionary1828.com. What do you learn?

If an idol is in our heart, **how** do you think one "turns away" from it?

Sermon Summary **Mark 9:14-29**

We are working our way through the Gospel of Mark verse by verse and last week we looked at Jesus' transfiguration. The veil of Jesus' humanity was lifted and we got a foretaste of Jesus' glorious second coming—definitely a “mountaintop experience”! Today we see Jesus, Peter, James and John coming down from the mountain. The other nine disciples, surrounded by a huge crowd, are arguing with some Jewish scribes. Mountaintop experiences are important, but they are not the norm in the Christian life (John 16:33). Jesus gave Peter, James and John a glimpse of his glory to strengthen them for the suffering they would undergo as his followers. A foretaste of resurrection glory helps any of us endure difficulty and suffering.

This incident with the demonized boy can help us learn how to access God's powerful presence. The disciples had been unsuccessful in exorcizing this demon because they arrogantly had failed to pray. They were clueless to the fact that they were inadequate on their own to face the evil and difficulties of this world. The scribes are arguing with them about all of this; I can just hear them: “You're doing it all wrong!” Only one person in this entire scene seems to acknowledge their own weakness, their inability to handle this demonic attack. And who is that? This boy's father. He's honest. He admits: “I believe—but help my unbelief,” which means, “I'm really trying Lord, but I'm riddled with doubts.” And then Jesus heals his son. From this incident we learn two important things about accessing the presence of God in the face of life's challenges.

1. Helplessness— not holiness—is the first step to accessing the presence of God. When this father confessed his flawed faith, Jesus didn't rebuke him. “How dare you doubt me? You need to get on your knees, confess your unbelief and get rid of all of your doubts. When you have surrendered totally to me and have banished all that doubt out of your heart, then you will be ready for a blessing.” This incident is telling us that the kind of faith that pleases God doesn't say, “I've lived a faithful life; now bless me.” That's faith in you. That's saying that something in you is the ground or merit for the miracle you want. The kind of faith that pleases God is the kind that admits, “I'm not faithful; I'm riddled with doubts. I don't have within me the strength necessary to meet my moral and spiritual challenges. But Lord, please, help me, despite myself.” Now that's the kind of faith God works with. That is the kind of faith that pleases God.

2. Bringing to Jesus what is most precious to you—even when it looks like he's going to make everything worse—is the second step to accessing God's presence in the midst of trials. This man put his precious son in Jesus' hands—and after Jesus expelled the demon the boy became so much like a corpse that most of them said, “He is dead!” This man brought his precious son to Jesus—and then it appeared that things got worse! (In a matter of moments it became clear that Jesus actually improved this boy's life. In my life and yours, it probably will take a lot longer to see Jesus' victory.) There were a lot of people in this scene, but only Peter, James and John would have been thinking, “I don't know what Jesus is up to, but in the end, I know it's going to be alright!” Remember—they were the only disciples who'd witnessed the Transfiguration. As the boy began to convulse, everyone else had to be freaking out! But I suspect Peter, James and John—although concerned—were thinking, “Wait, just wait.” They knew from personal experience how powerful and glorious Jesus is. They experienced firsthand His great power, love and compassion.

The secret to trusting Jesus with those things that are most precious to you is to love and worship him above everything else. But too often, when those precious things in our lives are threatened, we feel hopeless. Why? Because that precious thing has become an idol in our life. It has become an ultimate thing. That is where we find life. Without it, we feel as though we can't go on. But Peter, James and John had personally tasted of Jesus' power and glory at the transfiguration. That experience was fresh in their minds. They knew his love firsthand. Consequently, I think that they were much more ready to trust Jesus with precious things than was anyone else in the crowd that day. Thanks to the Transfiguration, Jesus had become most precious to them. He was the ultimate object of their worship, and so they could trust him. Until Jesus becomes the ultimate object of your worship, you'll never trust him in the hard times. Suffering won't make you wiser and deeper and stronger and sweeter. Instead, it'll make you more anxious and bitter.

If you have placed your trust in Christ as your Savior, you can know on the authority of God's Word that you are God's beloved child. Meditate on that truth and see if the Holy Spirit does not bear witness with your spirit that you are a beloved child of God! You will experience his sonship, his daughtership for yourself. God loves you so much!

Life for the disciple of Christ involves trials and temptations and suffering of different kinds. To access God's presence in the midst of life's struggles, we must come to him in helplessness, not holiness. The ability to entrust to God those things most precious to us, we must have no other gods before him. We must see and experience Him for who He is—the glorious God and Savior who died for you on the cross. God wants us to come to him in our pain and helplessness, knowing that we don't have the resources on our own to cope. But we know that He does. That is called “faith”.

Digging Deeper in Your Daily Quiet Time

The apostles said, **“Lord, increase our faith!”** *Is that the cry of your heart as well?*

Let us notice in Luke 17:5-10 the important request which the apostles made. They said unto the Lord, "Increase our faith." We know not the secret feelings from which this request sprung. Perhaps the hearts of the apostles failed within them, as they heard one weighty lesson after another fall from our Lord's lips. Perhaps the thought rose up in their minds, "Who is sufficient for these things? Who can receive such high doctrines? Who can follow such a lofty standard of practice?" These, however, are only conjectures. One thing, at any rate, is clear and plain. The request which they made was most deeply important—"Increase our faith."

Faith is the root of saving religion. "He that comes unto God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him." (Heb. 11:6.) It is the hand by which the soul lays hold on Jesus Christ, and is united to Him, and saved. It is the secret of all Christian comfort, and spiritual prosperity. According to a man's faith will be his peace, his hope, his strength, his courage, his decision, and his victory over the world. When the apostles made request about faith, they did wisely and well. Faith is a grace which admits of degrees. It does not come to full strength and perfection as soon as it is planted in the heart by the Holy Spirit. There is "little" faith and "great" faith. There is "weak" faith and "strong" faith. Both are spoken of in the Scriptures. Both are to be seen in the experience of God's people. The more faith a Christian has the more happy, holy, and useful will he be. To promote the growth and progress of faith should be the daily prayer and endeavor of all who love life. When the apostles said, "increase our faith," they did well.

Have we any faith at all? This, after all, is the first question which the subject should raise in our hearts. Saving faith is not mere repetition of the creed, and saying, "I believe in God the Father--and in God the Son, and in God the Holy Spirit." Thousands are weekly using these words, who know nothing of real believing. The words of Paul are very solemn, "All men have not faith." (2 Thess. 3:2.) True faith is not natural to man. It comes down from heaven. It is the gift of God.

If we have any faith let us pray for more of it. It is a bad sign of a man's spiritual state when he is satisfied to live on old stock, and does not hunger and thirst after growth in grace. Let a prayer for more faith form part of our daily devotions. Let us covet earnestly the best gifts. We are not to despise "the day of small things" in a brother's soul, but we are not to be content with it in our own.

Let us notice, for another thing, in these verses, what a heavy blow our Lord gives to self-righteousness. He says to His apostles, "When you shall have done all these things which are commanded you, say we are unprofitable servants--we have done that which was our duty to do."

We are all naturally proud and self-righteous. We think far more highly of ourselves, our deserts, and our character, than we have any right to do. Self-righteousness is a subtle disease, which manifests itself in a hundred different ways. Most men can see it in other people. Few will allow its presence in themselves. Seldom will a man be found, however wicked, who does not secretly flatter himself that there is somebody else worse than he is. Seldom will a saint be found who is not at seasons tempted to be satisfied and pleased with himself. There is such a thing as a pride which wears the cloak of humility. There is not a heart upon earth which does not contain a piece of the Pharisee's character.

To give up self-righteousness is absolutely needful to salvation. He that desires to be saved must confess that there is no good thing in him, and that he has no merit, no goodness, no worthiness of his own. He must be willing to renounce his own righteousness, and to trust in the righteousness of another, even Christ the Lord. Once pardoned and forgiven, we must travel the daily journey of life under a deep conviction that we are "unprofitable servants." At our best we only do our duty, and have nothing to boast of. And even when we do our duty, it is not by our own power and might that we do it, but by the strength which is given to us from God. Claim upon God we have none. Right to expect anything from God we have none. Worthiness to deserve anything from God we have none. All that we have we have received. All that we are we owe to God's sovereign, distinguishing grace.

What is the true cause of self-righteousness? How is it that such a poor, weak, erring creature as man can ever dream of deserving anything at God's hands? It all arises from ignorance. The eyes of our understandings are naturally blinded. We see neither ourselves, nor our lives, nor God, nor the law of God, as we ought. Once let the light of grace shine into a man's heart, and the reign of self-righteousness is over. The roots of pride may remain, and often put forth bitter shoots. But the reign of pride is broken when the Spirit comes into the heart, and shows the man himself and God. The true Christian will never trust in his own goodness. He will say with Paul, "I am the chief of sinners." "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ." (1 Tim. 1:15; Gal. 6:14.)