

(Mark 9:14-29)

14 When they returned to the other disciples, they saw a large crowd surrounding them, and some teachers of religious law were arguing with them. **15** When the crowd saw Jesus, they were overwhelmed with awe, and they ran to greet him.

16 "What is all this arguing about?" Jesus asked.

17 One of the men in the crowd spoke up and said, "Teacher, I brought my son so you could heal him. He is possessed by an evil spirit that won't let him talk. **18** And whenever this spirit seizes him, it throws him violently to the ground. Then he foams at the mouth and grinds his teeth and becomes rigid. So I asked your disciples to cast out the evil spirit, but they couldn't do it."

19 Jesus said to them, "You faithless people! How long must I be with you? How long must I put up with you? Bring the boy to me."

20 So they brought the boy. But when the evil spirit saw Jesus, it threw the child into a violent convulsion, and he fell to the ground, writhing and foaming at the mouth.

21 "How long has this been happening?" Jesus asked the boy's father. He replied, "Since he was a little boy.

22 The spirit often throws him into the fire or into water, trying to kill him. Have mercy on us and help us, if you can."

23 "What do you mean, 'If I can'?" Jesus asked. "Anything is possible if a person believes."

24 The father instantly cried out, "I do believe, but help me overcome my unbelief!"

25 When Jesus saw that the crowd of onlookers was growing, he rebuked the evil spirit. "Listen, you spirit that makes this boy unable to hear and speak," he said. "I command you to come out of this child and never enter him again!"

26 Then the spirit screamed and threw the boy into another violent convulsion and left him. The boy appeared to be dead. A murmur ran through the crowd as people said, "He's dead." **27** But Jesus took him by the hand and helped him to his feet, and he stood up.

28 Afterward, when Jesus was alone in the house with his disciples, they asked him, "Why couldn't we cast out that evil spirit?"

29 Jesus replied, "This kind can be cast out only by prayer."

How can we have access to the presence of God through Jesus? How can we experience true worship? There are three things that we learn from this moment of truth between Jesus, a father and his boy, and a demon.

Do you know what the last verse of this section tells us? The disciples had been trying to get rid of this evil spirit without prayer. How foolish they must have been- clueless to just how powerless they were to the evil that is in this world. They just don't have the strength. Meanwhile in verse 14 we see that there are teachers of the religious law who are there arguing about what to do and a crowd has gathered to check out the spectacle.

Only one person in this entire scene has demonstrated the humility to admit his own weakness. Only one individual is willing to acknowledge that he does not have what it takes to handle the suffering, and difficulty that is before him. That's the boy's father. He and Jesus share in a very important conversation. It's a memorable interaction. The father asks Jesus, "Can you heal my boy?" What does Jesus say? "I can, if you'll believe." That's essentially what he says. "Anything is possible if a person believes." So how does the father respond? He says, "I'm full of doubts, help my unbelief." "I'm trying, but I'm still struggling with doubt." That's what the father says.

Jesus says, "If you believe, I'll heal your son." The father says, "I'm trying to believe but I'm still full of doubt." And Jesus heals his boy. What do we learn here? I think we learn three key things about

drawing close to God. The first is such good news for us. Helplessness not holiness is the first step. Helplessness- not holiness- is the first step. Isn't that good news?

Jesus does not say to the Father, "I am the Word Made Flesh- the Son of God- how dare you come before me with your doubts?! Purify your heart! Confess your sin! Get rid of all your doubts! Go away, and when you have really surrendered to me completely, when you've purified your heart and eliminated all doubt, then you can come back before me and ask for healing." Jesus doesn't say that. Not even close. Jesus is telling us here in these verses that saving faith, is not us coming to God and saying, "I've been faithful, now bless me." That's not faith in God. That's faith in me. That's being my own savior and lord. That's not faith in God. But when we say- like the boy's father says in this passage- "I am not faithful. I am full of doubts. I am not strong enough to overcome my moral and spiritual challenges- but help me!" That's saving faith. It's faith in Jesus instead of myself. Do you see?

And Jesus responds to that kind of faith by releasing His power into our lives. Remember, the difference between the religions of the world and Christianity. Religion says, "If you give God a good record, then God owes you His blessing." But Christianity says, "God gives you- at tremendous cost to Himself- a perfect record through the grace of Jesus and then you live, gladly, for Him." Do you see the difference? Religion starts by saying, 'God look at me- I'm holy; I'm faithful- so now you have to work in my life.' But here's a man in our text saying, 'I don't have what it takes; I'm full of doubts- but help me' and Jesus says, "I can work with that." Because that is saving faith- it's saying, 'God, please accept me- not because of who I am- but because of who You are.'

That's good news, right? But the second thing we learn in this passage is much more challenging. I just wanted to warn you. If you want to be able to handle this journey of life, you must be able to bring Jesus your most precious things- even though it looks as though He'll make everything worse.

Please notice what happens to this father. This dad might have had other kids and a wife back home, but I do know that when one of your children is struggling, they draw all of your energy and attention. At this point, what I think he's doing when he comes to Jesus and places his son at Jesus feet, he's giving Jesus the most precious thing in his life.

So what is the first thing that Jesus does with this young child? Apparently, the boy gets worse. Before he was deaf and mute. Now he's dead. You see that, don't you? The first thing that happens when Jesus begins to deal with this father's precious boy- it looks like He's making everything worse. I can't tell you how many times over the years as a pastor I've had people say to me, "You know I gave my life to Christ and my life has been one obstacle and difficulty after the next ever since. What's the deal?"

In our text it takes only moments before it becomes clear what Jesus is really doing. In our lives it might take a much longer time, but here's what I want you to consider- you still have to give Jesus your most precious things to make it through this journey of life. Why is that so important?

Let me explain it this way. Everyone has a sense of our own insignificance. We sometimes try to over-compensate for these feelings in order to avoid them, but when we're alone with our thoughts, all of us knows that we're not the center of the universe.

We're glory and attention starved at times because we realize that the world doesn't actually revolve around us. So we need people to love us and we want family around and we'll even reach out to help others sometimes. These become our precious things.

Please understand, it's ok to love family and to want to show compassion on others, it's great to do well at a job and achieve something and really make a difference, but if you're doing it to get glory- to convince yourself that you're ok- if any of these precious things are the ultimate source of your

significance and security- then when things go wrong in life (and they will); when these precious things are threatened or even taken away, you won't just be sad (which would be a reasonable reaction), instead you'll be completely devastated.

There are a lot of people who are present at this scene watching this father hand his precious boy over to Jesus, but which ones are most likely to be sitting back and saying, "Jesus isn't going to fail here." Who are most likely to be thinking, "I don't know what He's doing, but I know it's going to be alright"? It's Peter, James and John. Do you know why? Because just moments before all of this happens they were on a mountainside and they saw the transfiguration of Jesus. Elijah, Moses and Jesus were present together in a dazzling light and they witnessed the whole thing. They saw Jesus glory and the reality of who He was.

Now they're back in town and there's no glorious light surrounding Jesus- there's no halo overhead to signify who He is- but they remember. Everyone else is freaking out. Certainly the father has to be beside himself, but Peter, James and John are sitting there saying, "You just wait..."

Here's the thing. Worship is like this. It's one thing to be told that someone is beautiful- and you believe it's true- but it's another to actually see him or her in person and recognize it for yourself. "Wow!" What happened? Did you get new information? No, but seeing is believing. Or maybe someone has told you about a restaurant that's really fantastic. "Oh, the food is amazing!" they say. And you believe them, but it's not until you actually eat the food for yourself and you say, "Oh man!" Now what happened there? Did you get new information? No. You're experiencing it for yourself.

It's one thing to know God loves you- that our glorious Creator, God- cares for you, but it's another to experience it. If you know it and you don't sense it then other things will be what you look to functionally for glory- our precious things become the foundation for our lives. But if Jesus really is someone who you have experienced- then He becomes foundational, and all these other things are simply there to be enjoyed, not to build our lives around.

Listen, you'll never get through life- you'll never find that suffering makes you wiser and deeper and stronger- instead you'll just find that it makes you harder and more bitter, unless you're able to trust God with your most precious things.

Some of you might be saying to yourself, 'ok, but how do you learn to do that?' Here's the third thing we need to learn and it's probably the key.

In the verses that lead into our passage today, Peter James and John watched a cloud come down from heaven and they heard God say to Jesus, "This is my dearly loved Son." At the heart of the glory of God is the love of God for His Son. And Peter James and John are enveloped by it in those moments. They're surrounded by it. That is the ultimate experience. That's what C.S. Lewis was talking about when he said, "What is glory? It means welcome into the heart of things. The applause, the approval, the acknowledgement of God."

On the cross, Jesus does not call God "Father," which is how He always refers to Him everywhere else. Instead, Jesus says, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?" Look at that. On the mountain He is surrounded by God, on the cross He is forsaken. On the mountain Jesus is clothed with the love of God, but on the cross He is naked in the dark.

Why did He do that? In Romans 8, Paul makes a statement that has been such a consolation to me over the years. (Romans 8:16-17) **16** *For his Spirit joins with our spirit to affirm that we are God's children.* **17** *And since we are his children, we are his heirs. In fact, together with Christ we are heirs of God's glory. But if we are to share his glory, we must also share his suffering.*

Here's what Paul is saying. Sometimes, through the Spirit we can hear God make this same statement of unconditional, permanent love. Peter James and John experienced it that day and later, this father and his son experience it too. Sometimes we can actually experience this ourselves. That's what Paul is talking about. Our spirits join with His spirit to affirm that we are God's children. If you choose to follow Christ you may say, "Well of course I know God loves me and all of that." But sometimes the spirit joins with our spirit to affirm it. Sometimes we actually sense God telling us, "You are my daughter. You are my son."

And you may say, "I would love to have that experience." Well listen to me here. If you see Jesus losing the embrace of God on the cross, losing His "Son-ship," and if you know that He did it for you- if that moves you then you'll begin to experience your own sense of being a beloved child of God. The Son of God was willing to lose everything so that you be a part of the family