

Mark 9:14—29
September 9, 2018

What do you need?

Depending on the context, THAT question can elicit a variety of responses. Here is what I mean—The question—‘What do you need?’ can be answered in a wide variety of ways.

If you are standing in front of a cash register at In-n-Out staring up at an order board and someone says, “What do you need?”

You answer with a double/double at least.

If you have a phone pressed to your ear with as your airbag deflates and you dial 911 and someone says, “What do you need?”

Maybe all you can say is, ‘Help.’

If you find yourself sitting in your boss’ office needing to get a day off to attend a nephew’s wedding, you’ll say something else entirely when you hear, “What do you need?”

Depending on the context, the same question can elicit a variety of responses—when you come to Jesus—what do you need?

An extra day.

What do you need to take with you when you come to Jesus.

Our passage today tells us the answer—what do you need to come to Jesus?

- Confidence?
- Purity?
- Morality?
- Determination?
- Religious tradition?
- Holiness?

No.

Our passage tells us what we need when we come to Jesus—do you know what it is?

You need to be weak.

I don't just mean that you need to be aware that you are weak—you need to be weak and know it. More

than that, you need to be weak and believe only Jesus can help.

PROP: Jesus came to help those who have only weakness to offer.

He came to help the needy.

This passage is long and there are many elements that need close investigation, while we are going to go from vs 14 all the way down to vs 29 we will take them in chunks.

PRAY

1. An Argument: Mark 9:14-18

“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.”

The disciples were both in trouble and making trouble. When Jesus sees them, they are embroiled in a dispute with the scribes. The scribes were Jewish leaders whose job it was to teach the Old Testament.

So we have the scribes and disciples yelling and hollering at each other—this is all the more remarkable considering what just happened.

Do you remember?

Last week, we witnessed the transfiguration of Jesus Christ. We stood there with Peter, James and John and beheld the unfiltered glory of Jesus. For a brief time, the veil of skin was removed and Jesus radiated shekinah glory.

And while he was radiating glory—two of the greatest heroes from Israel's past—Moses and Elijah—stood there talking with Jesus. Peter then made a famously idiotic and tone-deaf suggestion. He suggested that Jesus stay shiny and impressive and start to rule and reign from that mountain. Moses and Elijah could be there too and there would be no more talk of suffering and death.

Peter was staying—stay up here above the fray and grittiness of life—and begin to set up your kingdom.

While he was mid-sentence, the cloud of the presence of God came down and a voice echoed forth, 'This is my beloved Son, listen to him!'

And the mountaintop experience was over. He left the company of Moses and Elijah and the comfort of his father's presence for the company of confused and arguing disciples down in the valley.

Jesus quit the mountain for the valley.

The peace and tranquility on top of the mountain is not matched down at the bottom. When Jesus walks up on them, his disciples and the scribes are in the middle of a pitched verbal battle.

And as any child on playground can attest, fights draw crowds. That happened here. The crowds were so focused on the verbal altercation that they weren't even aware that Jesus had come down the mountain and standing among them.

And he looks to his disciples and said, vs. 16:

"What are you arguing about with them?"

Before any of the others can answer, Mark tells us that someone else responded.

[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."

While Jesus was on the mountain a desperate father came to see Jesus about his son. The spirit that makes him unable to speak also throws him to the ground and thrashes him about.

And the disciples could not cast the unclean spirit out.

But why were the disciples arguing with the scribes?

It probably went something like this—

The father comes to the disciples and says, "My boy needs serious help. Where is Jesus?"

They respond, "He's up on that mountain and we are not sure when he is coming back. What's the problem?"

"The boy has an evil spirit bent on killing him."

The disciples respond, "Evil spirit? Today is your lucky day—back in Mark chapter 6 (three chapters ago) Jesus gave all of us authority to cast out demons. We went on an exorcism tour it was epic. We can handle this."

At that point the scribes overhearing the conversation must have objected and said something like,

"Wait, what? You guys are lowly fishermen stick to casting out nets. Leave the casting demons to the professionals."

The father brings the boy and the disciples can do nothing.

And the scribes say, "You guys are stupid."

And the disciples say, "You are stupid."

And then there is yelling and probably guys holding each other back. We've all seen the ramp up of guys fighting. That is what is going on here.

And I'm sure the desperate father buried his head in his hands.

Then Jesus comes.

2. A Frustrated Response: Mark 9:19-24

[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."

Jesus saying, "O faithless generation, how long am I to be with you?" Is not directed toward this poor father. He is talking about everyone else.

Jesus sounds a lot like Jeremiah here.

He is essentially saying, No one listens not even my closest followers. They continue to misunderstand who I am. They have faith in their ability—instead of 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]

The demon takes control and thrashes the boy about and while he is in the midst of the seizure and

foaming at the mouth—Jesus is calming asking questions of the father.

Did you notice that?

The boy is writhing in torment and Jesus is talking to the father.

When you come to Jesus sometimes things get much worse before they get better. Christians sometimes things get harder before the Lord gives you a remedy. Don't assume that greater troubles mean he is absent or unaware.

No. He might be about to move. You don't know.

The father answers Jesus' questions and asks Jesus for help. If you can do anything please help me.

Vs. 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!"

It is as if Jesus is saying—"Do you know who I am? I can do all things. The question is not if I can do

something but it is all-together different—the question is do YOU believe I am your only help?

This is not just general trust. Faith in a feeling.

Jesus is not saying, I can be your genie giving you all that you could ever want or need if you believe in me. No, he is saying, If you give yourself to me—do you believe I will do what is best?

Jesus can do anything and part of following Jesus is recognizing that he knows best what is best for you. That he will only do the exact right thing for you.

And the father's response has been repeated by multitudes of saints from that time until this—"I believe; help my unbelief."

Does Jesus say—You doubt me! How dare you! I spoke and all things came to be and you think that I can't send away something as trifling as a demon?

No.

Does he say—I get that. Why don't you go fast and pray and see if you can get rid of those doubts. We will be around here for a couple of days—come back later.

No.

Does he say—Go and make a sacrifice to make up for your lack of faith.

What does Jesus say? “Bring the boy to me.” And he goes and gets to work. This man brought nothing but an awareness of his helplessness and the honesty to admit them to Jesus.

This statement describes so much of the Christian life, “I believe; help my unbelief.”

I believe you—help my unbelief.

Trust always has a direction. The disciples we will find out could not expel the demon because they trusted in their own ability to do what needed to be done.

This father does not. He trusts in Jesus but is honest enough to express his doubts.

Jesus does not expect our faith in him to be without doubts.

There is a massive difference between doubt and unbelief.

Doubt is something everyone—especially Christians struggle against. When you have doubts about Jesus and his promises you are experiencing a normal condition of human weakness.

Unbelief is different. If the father here did not believe Jesus could do anything—he would have said: I don't believe you can do anything.

And that is the difference between doubt and unbelief. Doubt always accompanies normal faith in Christ. Unbelief rejects the entire idea of Jesus helping.

3. A Willing Helper: Mark 9:25-29

[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."

Jesus went to work and dispatched that evil spirit from the boy forever. Notice the rousing faith of the crowd after Jesus sends the demon away.

Most of them said, "He is dead."

That is unbelief. Jesus can't do what he said—he should not be followed. Don't listen to him. He said he can help but he is more trouble than he is worth. He came in and tried to help but he has gone and made things worse. That poor boy is dead.

It would have been better if the father left well enough alone. But Jesus was not done.

Vs. 27,

[27] But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up, and he arose.

This boy who had lived his whole life up until this point with a terrorizing demon that tried to take his life and made his life a living hell—that demon was now gone forever.

Do you see what Jesus did for the boy?

He gave him his life back.

The demon rendered the boy deaf and mute. Think about that. Unable to speak and express his horror and unable to hear—no one could comfort him.

But with a word and a touch, this boy was given life by Jesus. When Mark reports to us that Jesus took him by the hand to lift him up and that he 'arose.'

That word in the original is resurrected.

Jesus gave this boy life. That is what he does. Then and now.

Here is Jesus—earlier that day he was reminded of home and he spoke to two people who were not of this faithless generation. He experienced the physical presence of his father.

But he came down the mountain to help a boy who could not help himself. That is a picture of his entire mission.

He did not just come down the mountain to the valley—he would descend to every greater depths.

He would descend still further. From this mountain he would go to Jerusalem and descend to unimaginable depths. Yes, to be murdered—that is for sure—but most seriously he was charged by God for the sins of his people.

But he would descend still further.

Not only was he charged with the sins of his people—he was also abandoned by his father. On the mountain the son heard, “This is my beloved Son—Listen to him.”

And yet when that same beloved Son on the cross called out to his loving father—there was answer. No cloud. No comforting word. No response to his cries.

But he would descend still further.

Not only was he rejected by God—he died. The author of life, the creator of all things, the Alpha and Omega—died and was buried.

At his death his descent was complete. He could go no lower.

And just when it seemed like all was lost, on the third day, Jesus got up. He arose. And he reversed all of the descending.

He was restored to his disciples.

He ascended from earth to the Father’s right hand.

He who was utterly rejected now is lifted high above all things.

No one could go lower than Jesus so that means he can restore any who come to him asking for help. He is all-powerful. Because he died and lives again, at a touch from him will lift you up. And if you are a Christian—a touch from him has lifted you up.

Vs. 28,

[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 9:25–29

The disciples trusted themselves and could do nothing. They did not say—I believe in you help my unbelief.

What Jesus did in this passage for the desperate father and helpless son he does for us. He came from glory to find you and give you life.

He is the high and lofty one that came low. He came from heaven to earth. The one with no beginning was born a baby. The infinite one became finite. The sinless one came to be among sinners.

He came down.

Do you see why?

To give life.

“In him was life, and the life was the light of men. [5]
The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has
not overcome it. John 1:4–5

He and he alone gives life. We preach a message
centered on a savior who doesn't just forgive sin—he
does—but who gives life.

Just as Jesus gave life to this boy—he gives life to any
who believe in him. That he is their only hope. He
welcomes any who have the courage to admit they
need help and he is the only one who can do anything
to help them.

One of the reasons I want you to look so closely here
to Jesus is to see his love. See his compassion. See
how far he came.

Jesus comes.

Jesus speaks.

Jesus commands.

Jesus raises the boy.

What did he ask of the man?

What? Nothing.

To believe in him. Not perfectly. Not without doubt.
But honestly—saying I believe Jesus is my only hope.

Any who are honest with their need Jesus gives life.

Do you need help?

Maybe you feel like you have nowhere to go. Maybe
you would say, Jesus help me—

I'm ravaged by sadness.

I'm scourged by loneliness.

I'm hounded by anxiety.

I'm harassed by fear.

I'm shackled with loss.

I'm wracked with regret.

I'm not sure how you would describe how you feel—
but I can tell you this—only Jesus can help you. More
than that—No one cares like Jesus. No one has come
so far to help you than him.

What do you need to come to Jesus?

Needs and the honesty to ask for help from him.
That's all.

Jesus came down to give life.

As this book continues you will see that the way he gives us life is by giving up his life. There is no one like Jesus.

Christians—

- Jesus is patient with our doubts

This means we don't have to fixate on the question—do I have enough faith. In fact, I will go so far as to say this—the focus in the scriptures is never on the amount of faith—but the presence of faith.

In other words, It is always the wrong question to ask: Do I have enough faith?

One of the things that bothers me to no end is when a person experiences a tragedy and someone says, "Maybe you didn't have enough faith. Maybe if you were more sincere."

The answer to that is always no. NO you don't.

No. Jesus did not take the father to task and blame him for his son's troubles. Jesus asked—in the midst of your troubles—will you trust me?

The right question is: Do I have faith, even if it is small and fledgling in Jesus?

Jesus knows we are weak and are going to be apt to struggle with doubts. He is patient.

Alistair McGrath tells us what happens when we fixate on our doubts—

“You will stop looking outwards, away from yourself and toward the promises of God, confirmed and sealed through the death and resurrection of Christ. The more you worry about your doubts, the less you will look to God. Gradually, those vital links with the life-giving grace of God will wither—and your spiritual life will wither and shrivel.” Alistair McGrath

Fix your view on Jesus.

- Jesus never explains how and why.

When he comes to the saints to lift them up he never explains himself. When he came to the father, he did not say, “Listen, the demon is going to get all stirred up, the boy is going to go to the ground again—its

going to seem like I don't care—but I do. Oh yeah, all of these people here are going to think that he is dead—but I've got it—he's not."

No. The father takes in the scene trusting that Jesus knows what he is doing. The same is true for us.

Why was this boy consigned to an early life with a demon? Jesus never gives that answer. There are many answers that we will never receive.

What we must do, is hold onto the promises that we have been given. Jesus promises that he will work in our lives and mold us increasingly into his image.

He doesn't explain how. Or why.

The means he uses to mold us is entirely up to him.

What do we know?

"And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose." Romans 8:28

All things are not good. But God will use all things for our good. And sometimes when you feel like you are thrown to the ground and being thrashed about—

sometimes you need—to say I believe all things will work out for God, help my unbelief.

He promises to take us home, but he doesn't give us much information on the route he we will take.

He promises to protect us, but he doesn't let us know how much life troubles will hurt.

He promises to do what is best for us, but he doesn't promise that we will always understand.

He promises to be with us, but he doesn't promise that we will always be comfortable with where we are.

Jesus is patient with our doubts.
Jesus doesn't explain how or why.

- Jesus is always with us—even in our valleys

While we are not promised understanding, we are promised that he will always be with us. The last thing he said was,

"I will be with you always even until the end of the age."

That is a much better promise than, "I will give you complete understanding always."

He is with us always.

We need it—After all, he came to help the needy.