

The Gospel of *Mark*

The Servant Leadership of Jesus

The Servant's Ministry in and around Galilee (concluded) (1:14 – 9:50)

A Period of Withdrawal: *Jesus Casts out a Stubborn Spirit* (9:14-29)

9:14-16 Returning from the "transfiguration" ^{v.2-13}, Jesus, Peter, James and John saw the other nine disciples arguing with some of the scribes. Jesus asked the disciples about their discussion.

Mark is the only gospel that reported this and one other passage ^{v.21-24} in this narration.

9:17-19 A "man" came forward to explain he brought his son "who is possessed by a spirit" to Jesus. Undoubtedly with a wrenched heart, the man described many of the horribly grotesque actions the spirit made his son perform. He further stated he had asked Jesus' disciples to "drive out the spirit", but they were not able to help. Jesus responded with grief over the lack of faith shown by the people of His generation, especially His disciples. He then sent for the "boy" to be brought to Him.

In this passage, it states the boy is without speech ^{v.17}, later it is revealed he is also deaf ^{v.25}.

Jesus gave His disciples power ^{Mark 3:15, 6:7}, so their failure was due to wavering faith ^{James 1:5-8}.

A lack of faith grieves Jesus the most, especially in those who should know better ^{Psalms 95:8-11}.

20-24 As the boy was brought to Jesus, the evil spirit ^{Mark 1:26} immediately saw and recognized Jesus. The spirit threw the boy down, rolled him around in convulsions and made him foam at the mouth. Jesus' asked how long the boy had suffered in that way, and the father responded "from childhood". The father further explained the spirit "often" tried to kill his son in fire and water. The man then begged Jesus to help "if" He was able – showing his desire and hope, but not a confident faith. Jesus repeated the father's skeptical statement as a question: "If you can?", and then challenged him to believe, because belief is the doorway to Jesus' power ^{Luke 17:6}. In an astute response summarizing the fallen human condition, the boy's father replied: "I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!"

Other gospels: the boy was an only child ^{Luke 9:38} and the man knelt before Jesus ^{Matthew 17:14}.

The boy's condition must have been a huge hardship for his family, as they probably watched over him constantly in an attempt to protect him from harm, while they waited for a miracle.

Jesus did not say that with enough faith, God will do everything asked of Him, but that everything is possible ^{Mark 10:27}. God will do everything asked of Him only when the request comes from a heart of humble, confident faith and a will that is aligned with His ^{1 John 5:14-15}.

In the fallen state, earthly man can never reach the point of perfect faith (e.g., Peter thought he could ^{John 13:34-37}, but he could not ^{John 13:38, 18:15-18,25-27}). However, in the supernatural power of the Holy Spirit, man can come a lot closer to perfect faith (Peter after Pentecost ^{Acts 2:1-41}).

25-27 Seeing a larger crowd gathering and not wanting to turn the situation into a spectacle ^{Luke 23:8-9}, Jesus “rebuked” the demon and ordered him to “come out of [the boy] and never enter him again”. After a last shriek and convulsion, the evil spirit left the boy, leaving him looking like a corpse. However, knowing the boy was not dead, Jesus lifted him to his feet, and the boy stood up.

The physical healings of Jesus demonstrated His deity by His power over the natural world, while his authority over demons validated His deity by His power over the supernatural realm.

28-29 After withdrawing indoors away from the crowd (and remembering the many demons they were able to exorcise in the past ^{Mark 6:7,13}), the nine disciples asked Jesus ^{Mark 7:17} why they were not able to “drive [this particular spirit] out”. According to Mark, Jesus simply said “prayer” was the answer.

In Matthew’s account of this scene ^{Matthew 17:20}, the response of Jesus did not mention prayer, but Jesus expanded on His earlier comment concerning a lack of faith ^{v.19}.

After Jesus gave the disciples authority over demons ^{Mark 3:14-15, 6:7, Luke 10:19} and they were able to use this gift successfully ^{Mark 6:13}, perhaps they became overconfident and forgot the critical aspect of depending on God’s strength, obtained through humble prayer ^{Matthew 11:25-26}. The disciples’ inquiry: “Why couldn’t we...?” is the type of question all believers should pose. While presuming on the Lord is wrong, having confidence in Him is right ^{v.23}.

A Period of Withdrawal: *Jesus Defines Kingdom Greatness* (9:30-37)

30-32 Jesus left “that place” (Caesarea Philippi ^{Mark 8:27}) and began the long journey to Jerusalem.

Jesus wanted to avoid other people, because this was a time of preparation for Him and for His disciples. He used some of this time to teach His disciples; specifically He reminded them about His betrayal, death and resurrection ^{Mark 8:31}. The disciples remained confused ^{Luke 2:50, 18:34} and “were afraid to ask Him about it” ^{Mark 8:32-33}, but later they recalled/taught these lessons ^{Acts 2:22-24, 3:13-15}.

The OT refers to the Messiah’s death ^{Isaiah 53}, but the meaning was hidden at this time ^{Luke 9:45}.

33-34 Arriving in Capernaum, Jesus and His disciples went into a (Peter and Andrew’s? ^{Mark 1:29}) home. Jesus questioned His disciples about their disagreement as they travelled. The disciples were arguing about who was greatest among them ^{Luke 22:24}, so out of embarrassment, they remained silent.

The ‘discussion’ may have been the result of the inner circle’s privileged treatment ^{Mark 9:2-8}.

35-37 Assuming the position of a rabbinical teacher ^{Matthew 5:2, John 8:2}, Jesus began teaching about two characteristics of greatness from a Kingdom perspective, based on humility and service ^{Mark 10:43-44}.

The first example was based on a person’s willingness to allow others to go ahead, even when they were in a position first. The second emphasized willingness to treat others with love/respect, even though they have nothing to gain from them. Loving others, expresses love for Jesus and His Father.

These principles (humility and service) are Mark’s main themes, as applied to Jesus ^{Mark 10:45}. Being last to be first is the ultimate in humility and counter to everything the world teaches, as well as the antithesis of what triggered the earlier arguments among the disciples ^{v.33-4-34}.

Jesus spoke both literally and symbolically about the treatment of children. He used children as symbols of true believers, who humble themselves like trusting little children ^{Matthew 18:4}.

A Period of Withdrawal: *Jesus Identifies True Spiritual Fruit* (9:38-41)

38-41 John told Jesus the disciples told a man to stop “driving out demons in [His] name”, because he was not part of their group (headed by Jesus ^{Numbers 11:26-29}). Jesus rebuked them, because the man was doing good in His Name (not in their own name). Jesus proclaimed a variation of the exhortation he made later in the Olivet Discourse about His honoring of service toward His followers ^{Matthew 25:40}.

Jesus’ axiom “whoever is not against us is for us” is a variant of a later truth phrase ^{Luke 11:23}.

There are some Christian denominations today that claim their way is the only correct way, basing their positions on baptism, communion, Bible translation, apparel, worship day, etc.

The exclusiveness of the disciples in response to the man who was driving out demons was curious, considering the disciples had not been able to drive out an evil spirit just earlier ^{v.18}.

A Period of Withdrawal: *Jesus Warns of Possible Stumbling Blocks* (9:42-50)

In the next 7 verses ^{v.42-48}, Jesus used many illustrations to emphasize the seriousness of sin.

42 Tying a millstone (a large round stone turned by a donkey in order to grind grain ^{Isaiah 47:2a}) to a person and throwing them into deep water was a common form of execution for Gentiles. Jesus stated this horrific punishment would be preferable to leading a Christian into sin. ^{Luke 17:2}

43-48 In the next three verses ^{v.43,45,47}, Jesus was not promoting self-mutilation, but emphatically making the point that sin (a heart issue ^{Job 1:5, Proverbs 20:9, James 4:8}) must be responded to with drastic actions ^{Matthew 5:29-30}. These symbolic extreme measures must be taken to avoid sinning, because sin is the pathway to spiritual death ^{Romans 6:23} (the second death ^{Revelation 20:13-14} = hell ^{v.43,45,47,48}).

Verses 44 and 46 are missing from many manuscripts (and left out of the NIV translation).

When present, they are simply redundant quotes of the Isaiah 66:24 passage in verse 48.

Isaiah used the symbols of worms (alluding to rotting bodies/souls of the unregenerate) and fire (representing the suffering of non-believers) to create a descriptive picture of eternal hell.

49-50 Jesus makes the point that salt is an essential component for both physical and spiritual life.

Salt and fire are associated with each other in the temple sacrifices ^{Leviticus 2:13}.

Salt is a preservative, as well as something that accentuates taste and produces thirst.

Believers who are spirit-filled ^{Galatians 5:22-23, Colossians 3:16,4:6} are referred to as salt ^{Matthew 5:13}.

If a believer does not stay filled with the Holy Spirit ^{Acts 13:52}, they can lose their saltiness (not lose their salvation, but their witness and ability to serve the Kingdom of God ^{Matthew 5:13}).