

## AN IMPRESSIVE INCIDENT

Mark 9:14-29

Great leaders have a select inner circle with whom they discuss the more delicate matters. During the earthly ministry of Christ there were three disciples who stood in this peculiar relationship to Him. Seemingly Peter, James and John were nearest to Christ in sympathy and understanding, so He chose to have them with Him at times of special stress and importance.

Leaving the nine disciples down in the valley to grapple with the multitude and to deal with the ordinary, commonplace things of life, Christ took the inner circle with Him and ascended a lofty mountain to pray. On that mountain He was transfigured before them. His whole appearance became wonderfully glorious. His magnificence flamed and His majesty flashed.

Following His transfiguration, our Lord and His disciples descended the mountain. Peter, James and John did not come down as they had gone up the mountain. Revelations of Christ never leave a person as they found him.

On the mountain top, in the presence of the glory, Peter had said in substance, "This is a good place to be." Life was so much better there on the mountain with the Lord. Why ever come down? But it is of the very essence of life that we must come down from the top of the mountain.

There was a pathetic contrast between the picture which the three disciples saw on the Mount of Transfiguration and the scene which awaited them as they followed their Master down into the valley. There they found their nine companions surrounded by a multitude, disputing with the scribes, and near them was a broken-hearted father in anguish because of the sufferings of a demoniac son.

### I. The Hopelessness of The Father.

The broken-hearted father, in anguish because of the sufferings of his demoniac son, had brought his demon-possessed and epileptic son to the disciples, who had remained in the valley and requested them to cast out of him an evil spirit. A sad feature of this incident was the fact that they had failed in the accomplishment of the task.

Ever since this boy was just a little fellow he had been afflicted with this demon. No one knows how his father must have suffered on account of the condition of his boy. The realization that his son could not live a normal life was a heavy burden for him to bear. Naturally he would have been grieved deeply because his boy could neither hear nor speak. But we cannot even imagine how the father felt when he saw his son in one of those terrible paroxysms of suffering, gnashing with his teeth, foaming at the mouth, and furiously tearing his body.

Surely that devoted father must have prayed many times for the relief of his afflicted son, but his condition had remained unimproved. Doubtless, he had done everything he knew to do to help the boy. Likely he would willingly have given his own life if it had been possible by so doing to set the boy free from demon possession. But he was quite helpless to do that. In all probability the father had made many sacrifices to have his boy treated by the best doctors. But every effort that he had made in behalf of his boy had ended in another disappointment. However, he refused to give up and quit trying, even though the case appeared to be hopeless.

### II. The Heartlessness Of The Scribes.

As the multitudes gathered, the scribes began to question and possibly to deride the apostles for their inability to heal the demoniac. At this juncture Christ and His inner circle of three suddenly appeared. When the people saw Him they were astonished.

They had been so engrossed in their argument that they had not seen Him approaching. It was at His sudden and unexpected arrival that they were surprised.

When Christ arrived on the scene the situation changed rapidly, as has been the case through the centuries. Observing the great crowd of curious spectators gathered around His disciples, who were at their wits' end to know what to do, and the scribes questioning and arguing with them, our Lord walked up to the scribes and asked them what they were discussing with His disciples. He said, "What question ye with them?" That was as much as to say, "If you want to know anything, ask Me; I will answer your questions." The scribes asked questions, and the curious spectators asked questions, and the Holy Spirit moved Matthew, Mark and Luke to keep a record of the incidents on that occasion, but not one of their questions was worth recording and preserving for the future generations. These scribes were heartless with reference to the needs of the demon-possessed man. They did not have any interest whatsoever in his being healed.

### III. The Helplessness Of The Men.

The demon-possessed man was severely vexed and utterly helpless. Mark and Luke minutely described his symptoms. The symptoms were severe convulsions, general rigidity of the body, grinding the teeth, and foaming at the mouth. The attacks came upon him so unexpectedly that as a consequence of them he frequently fell into the fire and into the water. These conditions were complicated with deafness and dumbness, so that all communication between the sufferer and others was exceedingly difficult.

The loving and devoted father did everything he knew to do for the healing of his afflicted son, but he was quite helpless to effect the cure.

The father brought his son to the disciples who remained in the valley and requested them to cast out of him an evil spirit, but they had been powerless to do so.

Another sad feature of the incident was the distress of the nine disciples who failed in the accomplishment of their task. Christ had sent them forth to preach and to cast out demons. In Christ's absence a poor demoniac had been brought to them for healing, but to their surprise and chagrin they were unable to give him relief. Their helplessness provided a first-rate opportunity to belittle them and their Master. Deploing their helplessness without His presence, Christ told the distressed father to bring his son to Him.

### IV. The Helpfulness of Christ Jesus.

As they approached Christ, the very sight of the Lord stirred the evil spirit which was dwelling within the boy. The demon was irritated greatly by the presence of Christ, for he knew about His mighty power and feared that the Lord would cast him out. The demon decided to do all of the injury and harm he could. He seized the lad in such a manner that he threw him on the ground, and there he had his last violent convulsion.

With characteristic calmness Christ turned from the sad spectacle, held a semi-private interview with the father, questioning him as to how long the boy had been afflicted, whereupon he replied that it had been since he was just a child. He proceeded to give Christ a detailed description of the malady and its tragic effects. At length, he brought himself to a pause with the pathetic and almost despondent appeal, "But if thou canst do any thing, have compassion on us, and help us." The man evidently still had some doubts about Christ's ability or His willingness to handle this extreme case.

Our Lord quickly seized upon his words, "If thou canst." Having the case before Him, and having heard the earnest and tender appeal of the loving father, Christ rolled the responsibility over on the man's faith. Our Lord reminded him that it was not a question of the Saviour's ability or willingness. He certainly had a sufficiency of

power, but the faith of the man had to elicit its operation. Christ emphasized the fact that, if a difficulty existed, it was on the side of the man. It was as if He had said, "The if does not lie with Me, but with yourself; there is no question about My ability in this case; the only question is whether or not you have faith in My ability, for 'all things are possible to him that believeth'."

Since the power of the Lord is limited only by man's faith, Christ said, "If thou canst believe, all things are possible." In other words, the principle of ability is that of perfect faith in God. Realizing that the responsibility rested upon him, the father said, "If that be so, then I believe; and yet I am conscious that my belief is imperfect; therefore Lord, help Thou my unbelief." Wanting to believe heartily and fully in Christ's ability and willingness to heal his afflicted boy, the man said, "Help Thou mine unbelief." Christ will always honor the faith of any true believer in Him and answer his genuine and persevering prayers.

Our Lord turned to the boy and addressed the demon in terms of majesty and power: "Thou dumb and deaf spirit, I charge thee, come out of him, and enter no more into him." At once the demon came out and the boy was set free. However, he lay as one who was dead. He was limp and unable to move. All anyone could see him do was to breathe. Christ then took him by the hand and lifted him up. Triumphant Saviour, happy boy and delighted father! Christ gave him back to his father.

Privately the disciples asked the Lord why they were not able to work this miracle. He replied, "This kind can come forth by nothing but by prayer and fasting." Fasting represents an emptying process -- ridding the life of wrong, forsaking those things and attitudes which are contrary to the Spirit and will of God, taking self out of the picture and putting God first. Prayer is the process of filling the life with God.