

Mark 9:14-32 | The Compassion of Christ and the Frailty of Man

Tyler Velin | March 5th, 2015

I remember early college when my mom's side of the family took a big vacation down to Puerto Vallarta, Mexico. We rented out this really big house right on the beach, we had our own pool and volleyball net and we were just walking distance away from a big part of town called 5th Avenue.

On 5th Avenue they had all these fancy shops, restaurants and tourist attractions. They had armed security guards everywhere, the streets were clean, and it was really just a fun atmosphere.

But I remember one morning I went for a walk downtown with just my parents and we walked the whole length of 5th Avenue and we came to the end, and kept walking. As we walked, the streets got dirtier, the shops got more sketchy, and pretty soon we were standing in the middle of a poverty stricken neighborhood.

We all felt kind of weird, because here these people were living under cardboard boxes, and we were a mile away in a two story six bedroom house. It was the intersection of two worlds. One of worldly glamor and amenities, and one of simply survival. And I remember feeling guilty because as I looked at these people I realized I had so much more than they ever had, but at the same time I was unable to do anything for them.

You can only imagine the contrast Christ experienced when he came from heaven and entered into our world. Christ came from the presence of God, where he dwelled in holy perfection. The actual and real heaven. And yet he gave it up to come into our mess. But unlike me in Mexico, Jesus didn't just observe humanity. He came to serve it. Jesus said so in Matt 20:28

Tonight in the book of Mark we are going to see that Jesus is compassionate to the oppressed and faithless by calling them to the cross. Let's pray.

For those of us who were with us two weeks ago, we just read about the Transfiguration of Jesus. And basically what happened is that Jesus took Peter, James and John up onto a mountain and there on that mountain the three disciples got a glimpse of Jesus that we will never see this side of death.

They saw him glorying in perfect majesty, they heard the audible voice of God. And for the first time in their ministry rather than just seeing miracles and teachings which testify to the Kingdom of God, they saw the Kingdom of God in fullness, because they saw Jesus fully glorified.

And they are coming down the mountain mulling this over, wondering why this Christ has to die and immediately they encounter a harsh contrast to what they had just seen. Mark 9:14-19

They come from an experience of God's full glory into a world where there is doubt, controversy, arguments, evil, and limitations. I don't think it had ever been more clear to Peter, James and John that they weren't on the mountain anymore.

Life on this world is exactly how God has planned for it to be at this current point, but it is not what it will be. Our future reality inside the Kingdom of God is not like this. And for the disciples this is the point where they were probably wondering, in light of what we saw up there, what does Jesus mean down here? What does Jesus mean in this mess?

You see each and every one of us has to answer this question. Everyone likes Jesus. People just hate what Jesus is often identified with. But we like Jesus. But the real Jesus, a right view of Jesus, is not simply a warm fuzzy feeling in our hearts. It is not just morality or love. The real Jesus does work here. Does your view of Jesus reflect that? Can your Jesus hold up to the sorrow, suffering and controversy we face here on earth?

As we are about to see. The real Jesus does.

Here is the first thing we see: Christ has compassion on the oppressed and faithless.

Now this is one of the most compelling Biblical stories in my book, so rather than picking it apart in pieces, I want us to read it as a whole and then come back and look at the two perspectives inside of it. Mark 9:17-29

The first perspective I want to look at here is the perspective of the boy.

This is not the first time we have run into demon possession in the book of Mark. We saw a story in Mark 5 of a man who was possessed and lived among the rocks on the outskirts of town, so strong that he couldn't even be bound by chains. The demon was always seeking to harm this man, making him cut his arms so that he would cry out.

But Jesus went up to that guy and cast the demon right out of him. Here in Mark 9 we hear another story. The story of a boy who has been possessed since he was a child. And just like in the instance in Mark 5, the demon was hostile towards him.

This just goes to prove that Satan never has your best interests in mind. His lies and deception, his false promises might seem attractive, but Satan desires your destruction not your joy. The promises of sin are empty.

And this boy was enslaved. Destined to a life of pain and torture. The father couldn't fix him, the disciples couldn't fix him. Only Jesus could fix him. And so he did.

You see the salvation of the boy goes to show that no one has power like Jesus has power. In Mark 3 Jesus calls Satan the strong man, and then he goes on to say this Mark 3:27. Jesus has bound the strong man, and he is coming to rob Satan blind.

And Jesus not only casts out the demon in this story, he commands the demon and the demon has to listen. Mark 9:25. That's because the presence of Christ and the presence of Satan are mutually exclusive. For someone who has been saved by Christ there is no longer any room, or any power for Satan. Christ is greater. Here we have a boy who is oppressed beyond compare, and Christ has compassion on him and frees him.

He doesn't ask why, he doesn't join with the disciples debate. He frees. He heals. He saves. That's our Jesus.

The second perspective is my favorite. The perspective of the father.

Because in one sense the boy isn't the main character in this story. The father is.

As I read this story, I was impressed with the heavy weight of the father's concern. By God's grace I have two children who are wonderfully healthy. But I have known parents who have kids with severe mental retardation. I have seen parents selflessly serve those children, with all the humility of Christ. Dealing with then with grace in their lack. Stooping to their level to care and love them.

But I have also heard their desire. Their desire that their children would be healed. That they would be safe. And my heart breaks for them. But I can't even fathom the pain and distress in the heart of this Father.

A father who has seen his son since he was a child tortured by a spirit. Writhing in pain, being thrown into the fire, into lakes. Not being able to take care of him or to help him. The weight was crushing as I read this story.

The father hears of this man named Jesus, a man who does what no men can. And you take him to see him, but he is gone. Even his disciples can't help but then Jesus comes, and he desires to see the boy.

Imagine the nervous anticipation you have as you go home and bring your only son to this stranger. And the terror you have when the spirit sees Jesus and starts thrashing the boy. Jesus then asks, "How long!" With grief and exhaustion the father cries out, "Since his childhood it has been seeking to destroy him." Look at this wonderful interchange: Mark 9:22-27.

You see the father cried out for the son with every fiber of his being. He hoped with all of his power that this Jesus would be able to do what no man could have done. And he yielded his hope to this Jewish carpenter. And Jesus delivered.

You see when Jesus came from the mountain he was confronted with a boy with an evil spirit and a faithless crowd, but in Jesus's compassion he restored the boy and brought faith to the father.

And you too need to learn to cry out to Jesus in feeble faith. We should be feeble because no one does what Jesus does. But it should be faith because we have seen the beauty of Christ. We have heard of his power, we have read of his faithfulness. And with weak knees and shaky legs we ought to cry out to Christ, "I believe, help my unbelief."

The best faith is a weak faith. Broken and feeble at the understanding that this faith, this Jesus, is not only all we have, but all we need.

It is this feeble faith that cries out for Christ's mercy in salvation. It is this faith that cries out for Christ's touch in resisting sin. This faith believes that Christ can lift depression. This Christ can calm our anxiety. This Christ is sufficient for my family. It is on the weak knees of this father that we can choose to resist sin even when it seems impossible to resist. Why? Because true faith recognizes the need for Christ's power not our own.

The posture of a Christian is that of mere faith in a strong Christ. Are you willing to be weak? Are you willing like this father to put all your eggs in the basket of Jesus? Even when it looks like your son is dead, will you trust that Christ is working for you good?

Will you join with the Psalmist and taste and see that the Lord is good. The only thing which will strengthen your faith is Christ himself. And praise be to God that Christ has compassion on the oppressed and the faithless.

But he also does this Christ has compassion on the oppressed and faithless by calling them to the cross.

Look at what happens immediately after this story: Mark 9:30-32.

This is kind of an odd appendage isn't it? Why did Jesus want to leave so fast? I mean we just saw that Jesus sped up the process when he saw the crowds coming. Why? Jesus wanted to leave because in addition to this miracle Jesus was telling his disciples that he would be delivered over into the hands of evil men, and that he would be killed and after three days rise again.

Didn't we just see a story of a boy who was held in the hands of the evil one? Who was thought to be killed at the hand of the demon, but was raised again by the hands of Christ himself?

Jesus wanted to leave this place because the miracle that just happened mirrored the coming redemption that he was about to bring on the cross.

You see on the cross Jesus showed his full power. On the cross Jesus died so that that oppressed might be freed. On the cross Jesus bore your sin and rose again to life so that we could believe in him. Through the cross we have the object of faith, through the cross we have the freedom of Christ.

What we just saw, was the gospel in action. What this story presented on a small level, the gospel presents on a global one. The good news of the gospel is that Christ has compassion on the oppressed and faithless. But here is the point of application tonight.

In this story we have the boy and his father. Now why didn't the boy come to Jesus? Why did the father have to take him? Look at Mark 9:20. The boy wouldn't go to Jesus because the demon inside wouldn't let him. When Jesus is in eyesight the demon does everything in its power to keep the boy away. But even if the boy where to go to Jesus look at Mark 9:17. The boy is mute. Not only could the boy not go to Jesus, the boy couldn't cry out to Jesus, so the Father cried out for him.

You see in this text we see the beautiful integration of the Father's plea, and the Saviors delight. The father spoke, and Jesus came. In one sense this story illustrates something specific, and evil spirit controlling the physical body of an individual. But on the other hand it speaks to a more broad level.

For those who are dead in sin, they will not cry out to Jesus. Those who are under the oppression of unbelief, they will not go to Jesus. Rom. 8:7-8. If they will not come to Jesus on their own, we need to bring Jesus to them. This is the task of evangelism. Being so driven by love that we bring the gospel of freedom to those who are oppressed and we say Jesus have compassion on them. Jesus enliven their hearts like you have enlivened my. And we preach, and we pray, and we hope and we labor for the salvation of the lost.

And we do so with wonderfully feeble faith. Knowing that the task at hand is monumental. People being brought from spiritual death to spiritual life. Eternal suffering to eternal glory. Who can do that! Who can accomplish this task! Jesus can! Jesus has!

And so we, knowing the glory of God in salvation we labor in hope knowing that through Christ the impossible is made real. And we trust that Jesus has compassion on us in our sins, and compassion on the lost in theirs because on the cross he demonstrated his power, glory and compassion for all to see.