

## The Disciples Power Outage

### Mark 9:14-29

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I didn't know a great deal about power outages until I moved to LaHarpe. Now I know we are generally going to have one, two, or more outages in a year. The power can be knocked out by wires knocked down by the wind or ice, a pole knocked down by a vehicle, or the power company might be doing some work. Some power outages can last for several hours and when the outages are widespread, they could last for a couple of days.

A lengthy outage could result in your house getting very cold (or very hot) depending on the season. It could result in food spoiling or medical equipment failing. As a result, many have generators of some sort to hopefully compensate for an outage.

This morning we are going to look at a power outage in the disciples. In our text today we will read about what was happening with the nine disciples at the bottom of the mountain while Peter, James and John were up top with Jesus, Moses, and Elijah. The conversation must have been robust coming down the mountain. Oh, the questions the three must have been asking. However, all that glory came to an end when they got to the bottom of the mount. This is where we pick up our text in Mark 9:14

<sup>14</sup> And when they came to the disciples, they saw a great crowd around them, and scribes arguing with them. <sup>15</sup> And immediately all the crowd, when they saw him, were greatly amazed and ran up to him and greeted him. <sup>16</sup> And he asked them, "What are you arguing about with them?" <sup>17</sup> And someone from the crowd answered him, "Teacher, I brought my son to you, for he has a spirit that makes him mute. <sup>18</sup> 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." <sup>19</sup> 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." <sup>20</sup> 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. <sup>21</sup> And Jesus asked his father, "How long has this been happening to him?" And he said, "From childhood. <sup>22</sup> 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." <sup>23</sup> And Jesus said to him, "If you can't! All things are possible for one who believes." <sup>24</sup> Immediately the father of the child cried out and said, "I believe; help my unbelief!" <sup>25</sup> 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." <sup>26</sup> 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." <sup>27</sup> But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up, and he arose. <sup>28</sup> And when he had entered the house, his disciples asked him privately, "Why could we not cast it out?" <sup>29</sup> And he said to them, "This kind cannot be driven out by anything but prayer."

## Mountaintop Experiences are the Exception Rather than the Norm

We love mountaintop experiences,

- A week at camp or a conference with inspiring speakers
- A once-in-a-lifetime vacation
- A time when we excelled in our job and were recognized for our good work
- A marriage seminar when we felt a special closeness with our spouse and with God

We love these times! And we should. However, we must remember that these are exceptions rather than the norm. Too many people spend their lives seeking continuous mountaintop experiences. They want to feel what they once felt. They close their eyes and seek the experience (rather than the Lord.) They end up frustrated or end up with a very superficial (and sometimes short-lived) faith.

I love the story of the couple who went to a marriage conference. The speaker encouraged men to be the leader in the home. And that is what the husband of this couple heard. He missed the part about loving and respecting and honoring his wife. She was frustrated throughout the conference and on the ride home he spent the whole time talking about how insightful the conference was. He came home all excited. They walked into the house, and He said to his wife, "You know, I am going to take this to heart. I am going to lead our family and you need to submit to that leadership. So, from now on . . . some things are going to change around here, and you better get on board!" He didn't see her again for a month! But, they say he will make a full recovery and his sight will eventually return!

We should be grateful for the mountaintop experiences in life, but we need to remember that what we learn on the mountain will need to translate to the everyday life where we battle for consistency, people make demands, and things are not always pretty.

You may receive all kinds of compliments at work, and it will feel good, but the reality is people are going to expect that quality of work all the time now. And there will be times when the work is more of a grind than it is satisfying. You will come home from that conference (marriage or otherwise) and be all excited about the time you spent with others or the great time you had relaxing with your spouse, but . . . you will come home to demanding schedules and approaching deadlines, and you will have to fight to maintain any good time with your spouse, friends, or other believers. The relaxation of that great vacation will have to give way to the endless sprint of everyday living. That is the reality we must face.

Remember, Jesus told us, "In the world you will have tribulation, but take courage, I have overcome the world." (John 16:33) We are going to face opposition. We will meet struggles in our lives and times when God seems distant and quiet. Much of the time serving the Lord involves "grinding it out." Remember, Jesus told us, "anyone who wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me." (Luke 9:23) When you come down from the mountain top, it sometimes (perhaps even often) leads to the cross.

After a mountaintop experience, we may actually be a little more vulnerable to the Devil's temptations. We feel strong, powerful, and able to conquer the world. We are more vulnerable to attacks of the Devil because we may try to take him on in our own strength.

Peter, James, and John had a rude awakening when they reached the bottom of the mountain. The reality of an angry group of people, embarrassed disciples, and all kinds of needs, came crashing down around them. They were back in reality. Jesus, of course, was not surprised at all. He understood. He knew to cherish the mountaintop, but He kept in mind that he lived at the base of the mountain.

It is our job to learn to grow close to God at the bottom of the mountain. We must not let the difficult times turn us away from God. Instead, we need to learn to lean into Him in those times. We need to dig deep and hold on tenaciously.

The first step to surviving is to realize the mountain top will always give way to the reality of life. The second thing we learn from our text is:

### **Seeing God Work in powerful ways is about Trusting Him Rather Than Learning a Technique**

I don't really know why the disciples were not able to cast out the demon from this boy. Jesus had sent them out and gave them the power to heal, to cast out demons, and to do the miracles that Jesus himself had done. They had seen some incredible times and witnessed amazing miracles from their own hands.

Admittedly this seems like a very tough situation. This boy had been possessed for a long time. The demons in him were regularly trying to destroy the boy by causing seizures that landed him in fire or in water. Just try to imagine the heartache of this father who likely pulled his son out of the fire or the water the demons had thrown him into time and time again. Jesus too seemed disturbed the boy had suffered so much.

So, maybe this was too advanced a healing for these guys. However, I think it may have been something else. The apostles had had great success when they went out on their mission. The power of God flowed through them! Here's the question: did they reach a point when they thought, "We have this figured out. We know what to do. We have learned the formula." If that was the case, they were unsuccessful because they were actually trusting their ability, their knowledge, and their experience, rather than trusting the Lord.

It happens all the time. We take a class, have an experience, an ah-ha moment, and we believe we have now found the secret to spiritual health, power, and vitality. I think this is why Jesus healed people in so many different (and sometimes bizarre) ways. He didn't want the disciples to think all you needed was the right formula, and you too could become a miracle worker.

There will always be someone ready to sell and teach you materials on “how to perform miracles.” You should be very leery of those situations. I believe the disciples’ mistake was they focused on their technique or a particular mantra, instead of seeking the Lord Himself.

It is not about

- Trying to evangelize like Billy Graham
- Speak the same words of our favorite teacher
- Create a certain environment with soft lighting, emotional and repetitive music, smoke, or emotion tugging stories.

When I was young I thought I needed to learn the techniques of Billy Graham. I learned to bend my Bible back and hold it in one hand. I learned to say, “The Bible Says . . .” Let’s face it, we already had the same initials! But trying to be like someone else only makes us appear foolish and insincere.

Our Lord told his disciples they needed to seek God to cast out the demon. They needed to pray. They needed His strength, not theirs, to bring this healing about. I have found over and over again that when I get into the pulpit thinking I am a good speaker, I know how to communicate with the congregation, or when I trust my ability to ‘turn a phrase’ instead of seeking the work of the Holy Spirit in me, things generally go much worse than when I am uncertain and spend time asking God to speak His Words through me.

To serve Him we must always adopt the posture of humility and recognize that we cannot serve Him effectively unless He works in and through us. But there is a third lesson.

### **If you Lack Faith, Ask for Help**

All the finger-pointing was directed at the disciples for their power failure. Jesus turned to the father of this boy,

And Jesus asked his father, “How long has this been happening to him?” And he said, “From childhood. <sup>22</sup> 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.” <sup>23</sup> And Jesus said to him, “ ‘If you can’! All things are possible for one who believes.” <sup>24</sup> Immediately the father of the child cried out and said, “I believe; help my unbelief!”

Jesus picked up on the Father’s uncertainty. You can’t really blame him. He believed enough to bring his tormented son to the disciples (even though I am sure he was disappointed he did not get to bring him to Jesus himself), and it met with disappointment. But when the man said, “IF you can do anything . . .” Jesus called him on his waning faith. He told Him anything can happen for the person who believes.” Stop here! One commentator had an important clarification.

Jesus' words do not mean that we can automatically obtain anything we want if we just think positively. Jesus meant that anything is *possible* if we believe because nothing is too difficult for God, even when our experience seems to indicate otherwise. We cannot have everything for which we pray as if by magic; but with faith, we can have everything we need to serve Christ. We are free to ask whatever we want, as long as we realize that God will answer according to his will (1 John 3:21–22; 5:14).<sup>1</sup>

Give this guy credit, instead of justifying himself and trying to protest that he had plenty of faith, he said these great honest words that have been used by many of us over the years: “I believe . . . help my unbelief.” We know the Lord CAN do miraculous things; we may have seen Him do miracles in the past. We just aren't sure that He is going to do it for us right now.

Why is it so hard to have that kind of faith? Why don't we believe all things are possible with faith? I believe it is because we have prayed for things in the past and those prayers seem to have gone unanswered. We have prayed for people to be healed but they died (yes, we know death is the ultimate healing but that wasn't really what we were praying for). We have prayed for a door to open to show us the way and we watched and waited but nothing seemed to happen. Sometimes we pray tentatively because we want to give God an “out.” We don't want Him to look bad when He doesn't answer our prayers.

There are times when we don't really understand a situation. There are times when we don't see God working and answering our prayers . . . but He is doing so . . . but in His timing. Faith is trusting God to do what is best and what only He can do. In those times when it feels like our prayers are not being answered, we continue to hold on in faith knowing three truths:

- God ALWAYS does what is right.
- He can do anything
- He loves us and He will only do what is best for His children.

When Jesus commanded the demons out of this boy, it appeared the demons left him dead. But that wasn't the case. The people could not let the appearances keep them from trusting the Lord. I know it is hard sometimes. I prayed and prayed that the Lord would bring my dad back from Alzheimer's disease, but he wasn't healed in this life. I believe there was a reason. I don't know what that reason was. Perhaps my dad fulfilled what God wanted him to do. I know this experience caused my faith to deepen more through taking this hard journey of watching the man I admired slowly erode before me. I have much more anticipation for Heaven now than I would have had if he had been healed. I believe I have much more compassion because of the experience. I know my dad was ultimately healed the moment he took his final breath. Throughout that time I kept saying, “I believe, help me in my unbelief.”

We are to pray boldly, but we are also to pray confident in God's sovereign power and wisdom. What does that look like? It is saying, “*Lord, I don't want to see this person I love suffering, I want to see them well, and I know you can make them well with just a word. But I also know*

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<sup>1</sup> Bruce B. Barton, *Mark*, Life Application Bible Commentary (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1994), 258.

*you see what I do not see. I know that your purpose is deeper than what I want. I know that you want the hardships of life to help us grow and to magnify your name. Lord, I believe . . . help me in my unbelief. I continue to pray for restoration of this one I love, but I also pray that your purpose would be accomplished in them, and in me, for I know that is the best that answer to my prayer."*

A lack of healing does not mean a lack of faith. In fact, holding on to Lord when you must surrender to His wisdom over yours, requires a greater faith than it would if you got exactly what you asked for. There is one more important lesson we need to learn to tie all this together.

### **We Should Never Underestimate the Nature of the Spiritual Battle We Are In**

This boy was tormented horribly by the demons inside of Him. Jesus said the Devil wants to "kill and destroy." (John 10:10). Jesus also said he is the "father of lies" (John 8:44). Peter warns us, "Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour." (1 Peter 5:8). In Ephesians 6 we are told, "we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places"

Jesus brought His power against the Devil and He will do that in your life as well . . . but the Devil will not give up without a fight. Some, have a hard time believing because the Devil has blinded their eyes and told them the way to abundant life is to follow him into all kinds of behavior celebrated by the world around us. It is all a lie! He is leading people away from Jesus to the gates of Hell. He whispers to us: "everyone is doing it," "no one will ever know," "you can stop at any time." He will twist Scripture and say, "you can do anything you want, and God will forgive you." He will tell us that if things don't go as we expect, it is either because we lack "enough" faith, or because "this proves God doesn't care about you."

The Devil is the One who entices us to gossip, to give up, and to turn on each other. He wants to destroy our relationship with God and with each other. He wants to cut us off from OUR source of strength. If he can't take us FROM God, he will work to make us ineffective FOR God.

Make no mistake, we are in a battle that is fiercer than we can fully grasp. We need to prepare like we are in a battle. We must be vigilant. We need to stay in the Bible, keep talking to God in prayer, make time for worship and the study of God's Word with others, we must do what He tells us to do, avoid even little compromises with evil, remain teachable, and most of all we need to remember that our strength is not in ourselves, it is in the Lord. It is not about technique, it is about trusting, really trusting Him.

If we do this, if we hold on tenaciously to Him, then if the power goes out around us, we will continue to shine.