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Sermon Summary #25

The Reason the Son of God appeared was to Destroy the Works of the Devil Mark 9:14-29

The title to today's message is a direct quotation of **1 John 3:8**. When people talk about Jesus, whether they are non-Christians or professing believers, they rarely if ever describe his coming to earth in these terms.

If nothing else, this statement gives us some added perspective to what we've been reading about and studying in Mark's gospel. We've seen Jesus engaged in battle with Satan in the wilderness; we've seen him in multiple encounters with demonic spirits as he provided help and brought freedom to those in bondage. So if you've been listening closely these past several months, it really shouldn't come as a surprise to you that John would say something like this.

In fact, here again today we come face to face with the undeniable reality of demonic activity and the **horribly ugly and destructive things that Satan and his demons attempt to do** to those who bear the image of God.

Let's think for a moment about what John is saying in 1 John 3:8. The word "**destroy**" = lit., to loose, to unbind, to unravel, to dissolve. Thus, Satan's works are conceived as chains that bind us, which Jesus now breaks. His works have a coherence, an inter-connectedness, being somehow intertwined, as if a tapestry of sorts. Jesus came to undo and dissolve the enemy's efforts.

What are Satan's "works"? *Morally*, he entices us to sin. *Physically*, he inflicts disease and seeks to destroy those who bear the image of God. *Intellectually*, he seduces us into error. And *spiritually*, he blinds the minds of unbelievers lest they see and believe the gospel.

How did Jesus "destroy" the works of the devil? Without going into too much detail, we can answer this by pointing to several things:

- 1) *His life and ministry* –
- 2) *His death* (Col. 2:13-15) –
- 3) *His resurrection and exaltation* (Rom. 5:8-11; 1 Cor. 15:16-17; Eph. 1:18-23; Rev. 1:17-18) –.

But if Jesus so thoroughly defeated the Devil and his demons through his life, death, and resurrection, why should we have to worry about them today? Why is there still a war on-going?

D-Day (June 6, 1944) and VE (Victory in Europe) illustration . . .

Jesus has sealed Satan's ultimate defeat and demise. The legal ground on the basis of which he seeks to undermine our relationship with God has been overturned. **We wage war against a defeated enemy!** But he is still our enemy and he is still active, out on bond, if you will, before his ultimate and eternal imprisonment, and his primary aim is to convince us that he still has authority and power over our lives. And to the degree that we open the door to his presence or grant him access to our lives, he can still wreak

havoc. But **you don't have to** suffer from Satan's debilitating presence or yield to his temptations or experience the shame and paralyzing guilt that he tries to inflict. That's what this story in Mark 9 is all about. ***It is about the victory of Christ over the demonic and the authority and power that is ours if we believe, if we take our stand in the name and authority of the risen Christ.***

Jesus, along with Peter, James, and John had just come down from the Mt. of Transfiguration. They were about to rejoin the other disciples when they encountered a crowd of angry and argumentative people. Evidently the dispute was somehow related to the attempt by the other 9 disciples to cast out a demon from a boy who was severely afflicted.

Many have insisted that the boy suffered from a typical case of *epilepsy*. But I'm not so sure. Although some of his symptoms are **similar** to what those who suffer from epilepsy experience, in fact that may **not be** the nature of his affliction. Three reasons:

(1) This young boy didn't merely experience seizures and foam at the mouth, but he **was also both deaf and mute**. He couldn't hear or speak. In v. 25 Jesus clearly identifies his problem as a demonic spirit that was responsible for his inability to hear or speak. **So this is clearly a case of demonic oppression that had numerous effects:** not only the inability to hear or speak but also numerous physical seizures that were similar to those of an epileptic.

(2) This young boy doesn't simply experience seizures but ones that are **an attempt to maim, injure, and even kill him** (v. 22).

(3) Note also that in v. 20 we read that the boy experienced a convulsion "when the spirit saw" Jesus! I find it hard to believe that the sight of Jesus could induce an epileptic seizure! The cause of the boy's condition, therefore, was far more than a physical affliction. There was a spiritual force behind it (see v. 26).

Note: If this is in fact epilepsy as we know it today, Mark is not saying that all such cases are caused by a demon. He has referred to many illness in the gospel record, some of which are demonically induced and others not. It is possible that in some cases epilepsy can be the result of a demonic presence but that in no way requires us to believe that all cases of epilepsy are demonic in origin.

First, how did such a young boy come to be demonized in the first place? One of the most difficult lessons for a Christian to learn is that protection against demonic attack is *not automatic*. Simply being a child of God does not guarantee that we can waltz through life insulated from demonic influence and invulnerable to the schemes and strategies of the enemy. The implements and weaponry of a soldier are not for decoration. They are to be utilized in fighting a war. There are a number of things a person can fail to do that might result in demonic attack.

- a. Failure or refusal to *resist* the devil (Js. 4; 1 Pt. 5). Is Satan required to flee from us if we don't resist him? No.
- b. Failure or refusal to wear the *armor* of God (Eph. 6). What happens if we engage the enemy unadorned?
- c. Failure or refusal to *put on* (or clothe ourselves with) Jesus (Rom. 13:14).
- d. Failure or refusal to *pray* for protection from the power of temptation (Mt. 6:13).
- e. Participation in occultic activity (Deut. 18:9-14)
- f. Idolatry (Deut. 7:25; Acts 19:18-19; Lev. 17:7; Deut. 32:17; Ps. 106:34-39; see especially **1 Cor. 10:19-21**).
- g. Willful, unrepentant, unresolved sin (1 Tim. 3:7; 1 Pt. 5:8; 2 Cor. 2:11; Eph. 4:26-27).

- h. Embracing demonic lies or heresy (1 Tim. 4:1; Rev. 2:24).
- i. Inner vows or oaths.

Some insist that there is no such thing as **involuntary demonization**. They insist that no demon can gain access or a foothold apart from the willful, voluntary complicity of the individual. But the case described in **Mark 9:14-29** proves otherwise. Here we see that a child is demonized. See also **Mark 7:24-30** and the young daughter of the Syrophenician woman. What willful sin could he/she have committed to warrant this condition?

I don't have solidly biblical answers to this question, but what's most important is that we realize how important it is to pray for our children from an early age and to teach them how to adorn themselves with the armor of God as described by Paul in Ephesians 6. Don't pretend that it could never happen to your family or your child.

Second, what accounts for the failure of the disciples to minister successfully to this young boy? Their earlier success in deliverance ministry is described in **Mark 6:7,13**. So what went wrong?

Evidently, due to their previous success in deliverance ministry, they had come to believe that divine power was at their disposal to use as they saw fit, apart from constant reliance on God. Was it arrogance or pride? Was it a failure to realize that it was only "in Jesus' name" that the demons are subject to us (cf. Luke 10)? **Had they treated deliverance in a somewhat mechanical fashion or even as magic: say the right words, repeat the right spiritual formula and out pops a miracle!**

Third, note what this episode tells us about the degrees of power and authority among demons (v. 29). Evidently the "kind" or "sort" of demon that was afflicting this young boy was extraordinarily powerful and insidious and thus called for extraordinary measures to cast out.

Fourth, we also learn from this story something important about the way Jesus ministered to the demonized (v. 25). He "rebuked" the spirit, probably in compelling it to be quiet. He identified the spirit as one that is responsible for the boy being deaf and mute. He commanded the demon to leave (there is never a prayer for deliverance in the gospels; only commands!). And he commanded it never to return again. Note: Even though it is Jesus who commands it to leave, it only does so after trying one last time to harm the boy and leaving him in a death-like state.

It is important to note that Jesus did not always consign demons to the abyss or in some place of permanent detention. Here in Mark 9, Jesus simply said, "I command you, come out of him and *do not enter him again*" (v. 25). This implies that the **recurrence of demonization after deliverance** was a possibility and steps had to be taken to prevent such from happening. Evidently, often after being cast out from a person, a demon was free to return to the person or to enter someone else.

Fifth, and surely the most important lesson of all, is the role of faith and how essential it is in the ministry of deliverance. For "faith", see vv. 19, 22b-24, 29.

The words in v. 22b, "if you can do anything," betray a veiled accusation against the powerlessness of the disciples. Their failure had caused the man to doubt whether even Jesus was capable of helping.

Contrast the "if you can" of this passage with the "if you will" of Mark 1:40. The leper had no doubts about Christ's ability or power. His purpose was another matter. In humility the leper refused to presume upon Jesus. Whether or not it was his will to heal him at that time is something he did not and could not know. That he was able to do so was all that mattered.

This man in Mark 9, on the other hand, was unsure even of Christ's power. The others said, "I know you can, but will you?" This man said, "I don't even know whether you can."

Jesus immediately sets him straight. "**My ability is not the issue,**" says Jesus. "**The issue is your faith, or the lack of it**" (v. 23). On other occasions Jesus delivers people when there is no faith evident. But in this case he makes it clear that the problem is lack of faith.

But here's the question that all of us want answered: "**Faith in what?**" Without repeating what I've said repeatedly in our study of Mark, I think it comes down quite simply to this:

Faith in God's goodness and greatness: (1) confident trust that God is a good God who enjoys blessing his people, a God whose heart is for healing and deliverance, faith in the truth of what Jesus said in Luke 11:11-13; (2) confident trust and belief that God is able to heal and deliver, that God is not limited or restrained by anything outside himself.

Jesus is **not** saying that this sort of faith **guarantees** that God will do what we believe or what we have faith that he is able to do. **God is no man's slave.** He is sovereign and free to act in whatever way he wills.

Jesus declares that "for one who believes" "all things are possible" (v. 23b). His point is simply that **there is no limit** to what God might do when we turn from trust in ourselves to complete dependence upon him. This is what Jesus means in the parallel passage in **Matthew 17:21** This reminds us that **it isn't a question of the quantity of our faith.** Jesus says that if you have faith the size of a mustard seed it is sufficient to move mountains. By "little faith" he means faith lacking in quality, faith that is badly flawed and riddled with doubts. Yet, only a tiny amount of genuine and sincere and heartfelt and God-honoring faith will move mountains! By the way, "moving mountains" was proverbial for doing what appears to be beyond human ability; it refers to overcoming what seems to be an insurmountable obstacle or barrier.

Faith is not the spiritual equivalent of a positive mental attitude! The issue is not negative thoughts versus positive ones, but true vs. false, biblical vs. non-biblical. **Thus, when God suspends his power on our faith it isn't because faith has forced his hand but because he longs to be glorified in our dependence upon him alone!**

Note the man's response in v. 24. He is certain of two things. First, he does have the kind of faith that Jesus calls for. "I do believe that with God all things are possible. He **is** able to do whatever he wills." But second, he is also certain that this faith in his heart was far from perfect; it was beset with fears and he still struggled with doubts. It was present and growing, but far from complete. "Purge my faith from self-reliance! Purify my faith of hypocrisy and insincerity! Focus my faith on you and you alone!"

Finally, Jesus says to his disciples: "This kind (of demon) cannot be driven out by anything but prayer." Does he mean that we pray to God and ask him to drive out the demon? Or does it mean we pray to God for wisdom and strength and renewed confidence in Christ and an increased awareness of our authority in him and the sufficiency of his atoning death and the power of his resurrection as we then engage the demonized and command the spirit to go? The latter!

There is not a single instance of deliverance by prayer in the NT. Deliverance elsewhere always occurs by the word of *command*. One can only conclude that in particular cases where an especially powerful demon is involved, prayer may be needed. "Mark focuses on the need for prayer because it clearly demonstrates that divine power is not under human control; it must always be asked for. Manifestations of the power of God, such as are needed when dealing with the forces of evil, come only in response to the attitude of trust and reliance upon God that is expressed in humble prayer" (Page, 164).