

IF [Mark 9]

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INTRODUCTION

1. An interesting thing about having a child: watching their vocabulary develop.
 - a. Even though it's fun watching them work larger words, the smaller ones are interesting.
 - b. Observing someone learn a language makes you appreciate overlooked words.
 - c. Is there any word in the English language capable of holding promise all while presenting disappointment as the word "IF"?

If I had a million dollars

If the ocean was whiskey and I was a duck

If God was one of us.

If you can't do anything else, there's always acting

If I were a carpenter and you were a lady

If my heart was a house you'd be home

If you could only see the way she loves me maybe you

If loving you is wrong then I don't want to be right

If the shoe fits

If I were a rich man

If anything can go wrong, it will

If I go crazy then will you still call me Superman

If a tree falls in the forest does it make a sound

If at first you don't succeed, try, try, again

If I could stay I would only be in your way

2. Think of all the "if's" you've uttered in your life, about the past and future.
 - a. The word "if" is found almost 1,600 times in the Bible.
 - b. And this text contains a big "if" that can give us insight on our lives today.
3. We pick up the story after the Transfiguration, when Jesus appeared with Moses/Elijah.

VERSES 14-18

¹⁴ When they came to the other disciples, they saw a large crowd around them and the teachers of the law arguing with them. ¹⁵ As soon as all the people saw Jesus, they were overwhelmed with wonder and ran to greet him. ¹⁶ "What are you arguing with them about?" he asked. ¹⁷ A man in the crowd answered, "Teacher, I brought you my son, who is possessed by a spirit that has robbed him of speech. ¹⁸ Whenever it seizes him, it throws him to the ground. He foams at the mouth, gnashes his teeth and becomes rigid. I asked your disciples to drive out the spirit, but they could not."

1. "Overwhelmed with wonder." There was something peculiar concerning Jesus' appearance.
 - a. He had just transfigured with a heavenly glory. There was still a glow from his presence.
 - b. Like Moses in **Exodus 34:29,30** "When Moses came down from Mount Sinai with the two tablets of the covenant law in his hands, he was not aware that his face was radiant because he had spoken with the LORD. When Aaron and all the Israelites saw Moses, his face was radiant, and they were afraid to come near him."
2. The argument Jesus observes with the teachers of the law likely about legality of healing.
 - a. Recall that they were still in Gentile territory; it was odd for Jewish teachers to be there.
 - b. The disciples were unable to drive out the demon.
 - 1) It's like when a car doesn't work, the hood is up, and people are standing around.
 - 2) But when figuring out this demon situation, they can ask the still glowing Messiah.
3. Note the who: a man and his possessed son.
 - a. The symptoms of the boy seem to describe epileptic seizures.
 - b. Skeptical scholars believe that the text deals with a misdiagnosis (that is wasn't a demon).
 - c. Biblical scholar John Pilch is one of them: "*The Western tendency to rationalize the ancient understanding of spirits is rooted in the fact that the Westerners have much more power over their lives and circumstances than the ancients believe they had.*"
 - d. Like in most circumstances, just because you have WebMD doesn't mean you know all.
 - 1) We tend to think of ourselves as being far more enlightened than those in the Bible.
 - 2) But even we today are limited in our knowledge; we just don't admit it.
 - 3) Humanity's most frustrating experiences are with deaths/disasters that are inexplicable.
3. This isn't a mere healing situation: it's a struggle between God's power and Satan's power.

- a. Demon possession wasn't very widespread, but it was an issue.
- b. And since the boy was likely a Gentile, his people were unsure about the God of Israel.
- c. But this flows into an overall lesson from the book of Mark: Jesus is Lord of all.
- d. **Romans 1:16** "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes."
- e. IF the power of God can save eternally, it can most definitely defeat a demon.

VERSES 19-24

¹⁹ "You unbelieving generation," Jesus replied, "how long shall I stay with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring the boy to me." ²⁰ So they brought him. When the spirit saw Jesus, it immediately threw the boy into a convulsion. He fell to the ground and rolled around, foaming at the mouth. ²¹ Jesus asked the boy's father, "How long has he been like this?" "From childhood," he answered. ²² "It has often thrown him into fire or water to kill him. But if you can do anything, take pity on us and help us." ²³ "If you can't?" said Jesus. "Everything is possible for one who believes." ²⁴ Immediately the boy's father exclaimed, "I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!"

1. Jesus refers to the people as an unbelieving generation.
 - a. He's not referring to the disciples; there's no expectations with those students.
 - b. Most likely, Jesus is making reference to the teachers of the law.
 - c. They weren't really interested in healing, but in deconstructing Jesus' authority.
2. Note that the demon is wise to the scene: when called to come to Jesus, it acts up.
 - a. The demon is going to do everything possible to kill the boy.
 - b. Jesus talks to the father to further identify the issue with the young boy.
 - c. The demon has been trying to kill the child his whole life.
 - 1) Sense the desperation in the father's voice. That's the pain of parenthood.
 - 2) People will do anything for their children on a good day. When it's bad, they'll give all.
3. So let's isolate the "IF" exchange between the father and Jesus.
 - a. The father states, "if you can do ..." which Jesus brings back to him.
 - b. Obviously Jesus' power is sufficient, but this is about the faith of him asking.
 - c. **Luke 17:6** "If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it will obey you."
 - d. He responds to the "IF" with faith and a request for more.
 - 1) HEAL MY SON, BUT HEAL MY DOUBT AS WELL
 - e. This experience has transformed the father and spawns the exorcism.

VERSES 25-27

²⁵ When Jesus saw that a crowd was running to the scene, he rebuked the impure spirit. "You deaf and mute spirit," he said, "I command you, come out of him and never enter him again."

²⁶ The spirit shrieked, convulsed him violently and came out. The boy looked so much like a corpse that many said, "He's dead." ²⁷ But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him to his feet, and he stood up.

1. When he saw the crowd, Jesus wanted to hurry up to avoid an even greater scene.
 - a. He called out the spirit authoritatively.
 - b. Jesus answering the IF.
2. The demon had a last gasp release, appearing to have finally killed the boy.
 - a. This actually follows biblical precedent: demons cause great harm when exiting.
 - b. **Mark 5:12,13** "The demons begged Jesus, 'Send us among the pigs; allow us to go into them.' He gave them permission, and the impure spirits came out and went into the pigs. The herd, about two thousand in number, rushed down the steep bank into the lake and were drowned."
3. The crowd reaction is one of doubt; perhaps they thought that Jesus actually killed the boy.
 - a. Predicting outcomes is a default reaction for many of us.
 - b. Prognostication has always been a part of our human tendency.

- 1) Instead of predicting mystically, we practice educated prognostication.
- 2) We observe trends in order to project future occurrences.
- 3) If we do predict, it needs to be done with a spirit of humility, not by discrediting faith.

VERSES 28,29

²⁸ After Jesus had gone indoors, his disciples asked him privately, "Why couldn't we drive it out?" ²⁹ He replied, "This kind can come out only by prayer."

1. What the disciples are really concerned with here: what'd we do wrong?
 - a. Jesus clarifies that it wasn't their methodology, but their ideology
 - b. In the ancient world, magicians/healers had incanting combinations to expel spirits.
 - 1) They used special words, did special actions, used spells.
 - 2) Jesus responds that it's not about actions/spells, but about prayer.
2. Understand that prayer isn't a magical incantation to be used in emergencies.
 - a. Prayer is a continual posture, not a response to "break glass in case of fire."
 - b. Prayer is a way of understanding the world: we sift life through God.
 - c. Prayer is a way of testifying our faith.
 - 1) Our prayers might not yield the responses that we desire, but it conditions us.
 - 2) The more we pray, the more our thoughts are aligned to God's
 - 3) Disputed end to Lord's Prayer in **Matthew 6:13** summarizes the posture: "For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen."

CONCLUSION

1. Let's wrap up by coming back to IF.
 - a. The way that many of us live life is to cling to the IF. It's an issue of faith.
 - b. **Hebrews 11:1** "Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see."
 - c. If this is your struggle today, you need to reevaluate you usage of "IF."
 - 1) IF shouldn't be uttered amongst a people of strong faith.
 - 2) IF ceases when people immerse themselves in prayer.
 - 3) IF must be deleted from the vocabulary of those who know evil is defeated.
 - 4) IF should fade away from the minds of we who believe in the power of our Lord.
2. Let's go beyond the individual IF, and think what it means to our church.
 - a. As a community of believers, we have a collective faith.
 - 1) Our individual faith is intertwined with our church fellowship.
 - 2) All of us need to believe who God is & what he is capable of accomplishing through us.
 - 3) As a part of this church, you need to believe in what God is doing here.
 - b. Let's commit ourselves to erasing the spiritual IF from our lives.
 - c. Let's devote ourselves to prayer, trusting God to move in our lives.
 - 2) Again, this doesn't mean that we'll get everything that we want.
 - 3) It does, however, make us more accepting of life's imperfections.