

## How to overcome disappointments of life

**Scripture: Mark 9:14-29**

### Introduction

- Good Morning! I pray and hope that Lord is blessing you with His comfort and peace during this unsettling times of our world. As we have been following the recommendation, and perhaps now a mandate, of our government to practice social distancing, it has now been two full weeks since most of us saw each other in person. I must have underappreciated our gathering when things were normal because I really miss our gatherings, meetings, activities, and most of all people that I was accustomed to seeing at least on a weekly basis even it was only to say “hello.”
- During this time of isolation, I also thought a lot about what you might have been going through. I imagined that none of us were able to live a normal life; some of us were overwhelmed with concerns about how we should keep our elderly parents safe, some were desperately trying to figure out what to do with our children, how we should be spending time with them now and for foreseeable future now that they might not be returning to school for months, some of us might have been dealing with a terrible reality of getting laid off from our work because of work shortages, while some of our business owners are trying to figure out how to stay afloat when there are hardly any customers and was told to close because your business belongs in a non-essential category. What about people whose children are away to Toronto, USA, or other parts of the world for studies? There are endless cause for worries, anxieties, and disappointments that could be weighing us down physically, emotionally, and spiritually as well. So what is the message God wants us to hear?
- Sharing God’s word with you in times like this is obviously of great importance but at the same time a great burden because as a messenger my hope is to encourage you and help you to remain hopeful that we will be able to get through our current crisis. I have done my best to engage in prayer life and in reflecting on God’s word to arrive at the decision to share today’s text with you. I hope it speaks to us and helps us to recognize how we can continue to represent Jesus and do the work He has begun in our hurting and troubled world.

### Background:

- The text I chose for this morning is in the **middle of Mark Chapter 9 from verses 14 to 29**. It is a story about Jesus healing a boy with an evil spirit and is recorded in all three gospels which tells us of its importance. We will get to see why this story was so important when we read the text but before we do that, I would like to provide us with a brief background related to the story. For today’s message, we will be taking a look at each verses of text as I explain them to you so if you can follow along with an open bible that will work the best. At the beginning of Chapter 9 before our story begins, we are told that Jesus and three

Apostles Peter, James, and John went up the mountain, which many scholars believe was Mount Horeb. What happened at the mountain top was the most extraordinary event in the history of mankind as reality of heaven intersected with earthly world. There the apostles experienced the presence of God's glory as Jesus began to shine with bright rays of light. Then the prophets Moses and Elijah appear next to him and Jesus speaks with them. Soon after they heard a voice coming from the cloud saying "This is my Son, whom I love, Listen to him!" (**v.7**) Peter was so overcome with the whole experience, he offered to put up three shelters, one for Jesus, Moses, and Elijah so that they could all stay there permanently. Life was so much better, so much nearer to God, there on the mountain top. Do you remember the times when you were experiencing this amazing nearness to God? Why ever come down again? William Barclay responds. But it is the very essence of life that we must come down from the mountain top. It has been said that in Christian faith there must be solitude, but not solitariness. The solitude is necessary, for each of us must keep contact with God; but if, in our search for the essential solitude, we shut ourselves off from others, shut our ears to their appeal for help, shut our hearts to the cry of their tears, that is not Christian faith. The solitude is not meant to make us solitary. It is meant to make us better able to meet and cope with the demands of everyday life.

- I know it is very difficult to find silver lining amidst very challenging trials we are facing today but I want to encourage us to know that if all things are under God's control and I believe it is, our current state of life necessarily provides us with time to reflect and time to spend with God. Let's make the most of our time by enjoying it with our family members and spending time with God experiencing His provision, His love and affection for us during this trying time.
- While this highpoint of spiritual reality is taking place up in the mountain, 9 remaining disciples were experiencing the lowest point of their spiritual journey. As our story begins in **verse 14**, we find these 9 disciples surrounded by the large crowd being bombarded with scorns by the scribes. For your information, these scribes are otherwise known as the teachers of the law in the religious hierarchy, and they sincerely believed that Jesus was a fraud leading the people of Israel astray from God. They monitored all of Jesus' activity and closely followed his ministry, travelling everywhere Jesus went in order to discredit his ministry and persuade Israelites to get back to the religious norm of the day. Imagine the excitement they felt when the disciples could not cast out the evil spirit from the boy. Imagine their hostility trying to use the occasion for their advantage.
- When Jesus asks what his disciples were arguing about with the scribes, the disciples were so disappointed with themselves they couldn't respond, so one person from the crowd answers Jesus instead in **verse 17**. It turned out he was the boy's father and he explained to Jesus about his son's condition of how he was possessed by the evil spirit and was under constant threat of losing his life as a result of it. The father came looking for Jesus but he couldn't find him so he did the next best thing. He sought out Jesus' disciples and ask them to drive out the evil spirit but they couldn't do it.

- **Verse 19** describes the overall mood of the scene, everyone is disappointed and frustrated with themselves or with others. First from the words of Jesus we can sense the feeling of exasperation toward his disciples which may indicate his disappointment with them. **(PPT 2) READ.** As we read this text we can see that this was not the first time disciples were tasked with casting out demons. They have done it in the past but on this occasion, they failed miserably and they were experiencing humiliation and disappointment. The father is disappointed because he came seeking relief from a life-long pain and suffering of his son. I don't know if we can compare our current situation to the atmosphere surrounding this text but I think we all feel disappointed and discouraged particularly not knowing when our circumstance will change and whether we will ever get back to what we perceive as normal. But as we will see, as soon as Jesus enters the scene things change. If not the circumstance, certainly the state of people's hearts and their perspective.
- **Before we get to the next part,** I want to pause for a reflection. Let us ask this question. What do you think is father's objective at this time? I believe we will all agree that it was to find cure for his son who has been going through a very difficult and painful condition for a very long time. From what we can observe from the text, the father didn't have any concerns for himself at this time. He is a typical type of person in the bible who sought out Jesus. They have a problem and are desperate to find cure whether it be healing, forgiveness, to end suffering, or whatever else, so they seek God. Of course, God of the Bible invites people to do this, to seek God in times of their trouble but God of the bible wants to do more than simply provide cure, end suffering, or help them to regain the status quo. This is where I believe Christianity sets itself apart from other religions. Christ's primary concern as exemplified in the gospels is to help people to experience His salvation, complete salvation of body, mind, soul, and the spirit. He will do this by using every opportunity to minister to people's souls, reveal the true state of their heart, and invites them to experience his power to save.
- **Verse 20** tells us while they were still approaching Jesus and as the evil spirit saw him, it throws the boy into a convulsion. I used to have a very close relationship with one church member who suffered from epileptic seizures. Many of the information given in our story about boy's condition seem very similar to her. What might be helpful for us to appreciate the story is that when a boy is convulsing, rolling around, foaming at the mouth as we see in this text, this is normally a time when receiving medical treatment immediately becomes an urgent matter. Furthermore, according to **verse 22**, it is under this condition, the boy often throws himself into fire or water threatening his own life.
- This is the reason why **Verse 21** is the most thought provoking part of the story and really the important point of my message. It was during this dire condition, instead of rushing to the boy's aid giving him relief from his suffering as soon as possible, Jesus engages the father in a conversation by asking how long has the boy been like this? Why ask this question? Doesn't Jesus know? From the scriptures it is quite clear that Jesus possessed and demonstrated unique insight about the state of people's hearts, their characters, their

issues and their struggles. Does this mean Jesus is not compassionate, doesn't care about people suffering, why the delay? I think this is because Jesus is and always will be in full control of every situation. Jesus can heal the boy anytime but there is something more pressing under the circumstances.

- I have mentioned earlier that Jesus utilizes every opportunity to minister to people's souls, reveal the true state of their heart, and invites them to experience his power to save. Jesus initiates this conversation because he wants to minister to the father. We all agreed that the father's only objective at this point was to find relief for his son's predicament but Jesus thinks otherwise. Jesus invites father to hear from him of his pain because he cares about the father's pain as well as his son's pain. Jesus cares about our pain too. Jesus cared about the father's suffering, our sufferings, all of humanity's sufferings, because he loves people, he loves us. This is the reason why Jesus chose to die on the cross so that He can save us! Jesus wanted to engage the father for him to realize that he was not simply coming for Jesus' power, he was coming to a person who deeply cared about him. Often times we miss that truth. When we come to God in the name of Jesus, we are coming to a person who deeply care about us first. We are not simply accessing God's power as many different religious people do. I believe Jesus' invitation for the father of the boy to come to the compassionate person of Jesus was understood by the father evidenced when he pleads with Jesus in **verse 22**, "take pity on us and help us." Do we notice that now it is no longer just his son but the father himself too? Another truth that is revealed through Jesus' personal ministry to the father was the fact that the father of the boy didn't really believe that Jesus can heal. Jesus' amazing ability to probe people's hearts to reveal the true state of their faith always amazes me. I don't know if you recall the story of woman at the well. In that story Samaritan woman who was engaging in sexual infidelity come to draw water during peak hot hours in order to avoid people. Jesus shows up on the scene and engages in conversation with her. She tries to steer the conversation toward religion in many different ways but in the end was forced to confront her real issue. She leaves the scene spreading the news all over town about Jesus the messiah. In later part of **verse 22**, after explaining his son's condition, father tells Jesus, if you can do anything..." I believe it is safe for us to assume that the father came looking for Jesus because he has probably heard of Jesus' reputation and his works. But it is revealed by his own confession that the father wasn't sure whether Jesus can cast out the evil spirit. It is a very weak statement of faith.
- Jesus responds to father's confession being surprised. If you can? Which is probably equivalent to, "are you serious?" But he does not lose sight of ministering to the father by offering him a challenge saying "Everything is possible for him who believes." What Jesus is stating here is the condition of a miracle that the father was hoping for. Jesus was saying essentially, 'the cure of your boy depends not on me but on you.' In other words, Jesus is telling the father that everything is possible if the father has faith in what Jesus can do for him emphasizing the relationship of trust between the man and Jesus. William Barclay comments on how the cure of your boy depends not on me but on you. "This is not solely a

theological truth but a universal one. To approach anything in the spirit of hopelessness is to make it hopeless; to approach anything in the spirit of faith is to make it a possibility.”

- The father is now forced to examine his faith in what Jesus can do. In desperation the father cries out these words, “I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!” This statement can be quite confusing at first but essentially what the father was saying was this. I believe but if there is some discouragement in me, still some doubts, take them away and fill me with an unquestioning faith. His was an imperfect faith, a belief with a measure of doubt mixed in, but he sought the help of Christ with his faith. One commentator made wise observation regarding this statement. He said, two things are very remarkable here. First, The felt and owned presence of unbelief, which only the strength of the man’s faith could have so revealed to his own consciousness. Second, his appeal to Christ for help against his felt unbelief – insight he had attained into the existence of a power in Christ more glorious than any he had sought for his poor child. In other words, the father was able to recognize that Christ can help his felt unbelief because he had experienced the power of Jesus Christ which was greater than the healing power Christ can offer his son.
- **(PPT 3)** As I mentioned earlier, all three gospels record this story and when we read them in conjunction with this story we may gain more insight into the teaching of Jesus Christ so let’s turn to them now. We are reading from **Matthew 17:19-20**. In the story Jesus tells his disciples how much faith is needed in order to access God’s power in the things God wills to do. According to Jesus, the amount of faith that is required to do God’s work is a faith as small as a mustard seed. Jesus’ audience including his disciples would have recognized that as a minimal faith because mustard seed in the ancient world was the smallest of all seeds. With that faith we can access God’s power to remove even the mountains which was a symbol for insurmountable things we experience in life.
- Amazingly the model of the person possessing requisite faith in the story was the father who wants to believe but to make sure also asks Jesus to help purge doubts and discouragement in his faith. It was now, not “help my child,” but “help my unbelief.” He believed Jesus was able to remedy his unbelief
- We notice in **verse 25**, that when Jesus saw that a crowd was running to the scene, he hurriedly rebuked the evil spirit. Jesus didn’t care for the crowd to know what he was doing anymore because that time had passed. His main focus now is to prepare his disciples for life and ministry without Jesus as **verse 31** tells us Jesus is now predicting his death. Do you also notice that the evil spirit inside this young boy was deaf and mute spirit? If you read **verse 17**, even the father didn’t fully know the extent of suffering his son was going through because he didn’t know his son was deaf too. This confirms that God knows all of our problems better than we know it ourselves.
- In **verse 26**, the malignant, cruel spirit, now conscious that his time was come, gathers up his whole strength, with intent by a last stroke to kill his victim, and had nearly succeeded. But the Lord of life was there. In **verse 27**, there is a beautiful scene of Jesus’ person, humanity, and compassion. The boy looked dead at this point but Jesus takes hold of a boy

by the hand, lifted him up and boy rose to stand. Bible tells us that Christ is same yesterday, today, and forever. As I was imagining this scene, I visualized Christ doing the same with all the members of our church who are suffering through this terrible disease and economic crisis. Jesus will take us by the hand and we will rise to our feet again.

- **Verse 28 and 29**, is Jesus' teaching time as he takes his disciples away from the crowd to indoors, or perhaps someone's home, and provides a lesson for the day. 9 Disciples who experienced failure and disappointment asked "Why couldn't we drive it out?" And Jesus replied, "This kind (referring to the kind of evil spirit that was in the boy) can come out only by prayer." What does this mean?
- During the time of Jesus' ministry, Jesus taught and gave his disciples the ability to pray. It wasn't the kind of prayer that religious leaders were performing out loud in market places in order to get people's attention or the kind of repetition that people invoked like a formula for magic. It was a prayer that gave his disciples authority over things in Jesus' name. When Jesus mentions that his disciples did not pray that must have meant that the disciples weren't depending on Jesus but relying on themselves to do what they were trying to do. After all as we have seen at the beginning, they have done it before. But the difference between the past event and the current one may have been the fact that when Jesus sent his disciples for ministry in the past he was with them but on this occasion he was not. Jesus wanted to teach them that they couldn't do God's work without depending on Jesus even when Jesus would leave them in a short time. They can do it through prayer. The same principal applies today, we can be tremendously gifted in so many areas but when it comes to doing the will of God, doing the good work, we are going to need to pray because we have to rely on the power of God and not just our own resources because when God touches people they change and that's what we want.

**Conclusion:** In summary, I like to make following observation (**PPT 4**)

- (**PPT 5**) One of the thing that struck me reading through this story is how similar I am to the boy's father whenever I get into a difficult hardship, suffering, or a problem. I just want God to rescue me and get me out of my predicament as soon as possible. My tendency is to just look forward to the day of rescue instead of seeking what God might want to show me, or teach me, or want me to do for his kingdom even during my crisis. As in the story, God's eyes are always focused on saving people and the reason for his delay of rescuing us might be that he is using the trial to save someone. I have heard through few people in the church that some of the elderlies who has not placed their trust in Jesus are terrified by the events surrounding us. I am hoping that God will find means for us to reach out to them so that they can hear the good news, so that they would trust Jesus for their salvation.
- (**PPT 6**) The story teaches us that we can only do good works when we rely on Christ through prayer instead of ourselves and often our prayer life is a good indicator that we are sincerely trusting Jesus.

- My last point is borrowed from John Koessler's sermon titled "Back to Reality." In the story disciple's failure did not negate God's power. It is true that the failure of God's people often seems to put God in a bad light. People draw conclusions about God based upon the behavior of those who belong to him. Anyone who has tried to share the gospel with a friend or co-worker has probably heard this refrain at some point: "I used to know someone that believed like you, and they used to gossip something frightful...they were lazy... they..." we can fill in the blank with our own story of disappointment and failure. But Jesus makes it clear that the failure of God's people is not the same as the failure of God himself. They failed you? Jesus says. Then come to me.