

Title: “Whose Light is Shining?”

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Mark 9:14-29

9/12/2021

Whose light do we let shine through our actions and our decisions? Do others see our work or the work of Christ in our lives?

Message:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

Maybe if they had just said the right words in the right order. Maybe then they could have expelled the demon from the man. Or maybe they just were not trying hard enough. Were they not putting their “all” into it? Were they not “believing” enough that they had the power to find success in this task? Clearly there was something wrong with their approach, their execution, because they had done this before and had been successful. Mark records how they had recently returned from the mission that Jesus had sent them out to complete.

⁷ And he called the twelve and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits. ... ¹³ And they cast out many demons and anointed with oil many who were sick and healed them.

If they could do it then, they should be able to do it now. And if they cannot do it now, then the problem lies with them. It had to be that simple. So, what were they doing wrong?

That is the view from the disciples. The view from the boy’s father looks quite different:

¹⁷ And someone from the crowd answered him, “Teacher, I brought my son to you, for he has a spirit that makes him mute. ¹⁸ 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.”

This father had faith in Jesus. He believed that an encounter with him would bring healing and restoration to his son and peace to his family. It was this hope that drove him out of his home and into the presence of God. And it was this hope that he clung to for he knew that hope would be found nowhere else.

²¹ And Jesus asked his father, “How long has this been happening to him?” And he said, “From childhood. ²² 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.” ²³ And Jesus said to him, “‘If you can’! All things are possible for one who believes.” ²⁴ Immediately the father of the child cried out and said, “I believe; help my unbelief!” “Help my unbelief,” he says. He knows that he cannot do anything to bring healing to his son. He knows that he can contribute nothing to the restoration of the body. All he can do is lay his son at

the feet of Jesus and then step back. There is nothing more that he can do, and anything he tries risks *interfering* with that healing work.

But interference is what he experiences. Not from his own actions but from the actions of Jesus' disciples – the very people that should have known better! While they were looking *inward at* themselves for the power to heal, they were blocking access to the only one who could *save* the boy. Their self-serving actions were not just failing, they were delaying healing to the very patient they were trying to save! Imagine their conversation: “Let’s try one more time! Do it this way, instead! Say these words!” Meanwhile, the poor father is probably begging for them to stop trying and to go find Jesus! And they are probably telling him that they don’t need Jesus – they have it under control. They just need to try again.

You see, it had nothing to do with how hard they tried or how much they believed. The healing that was to come to this child could *never* come from these disciples. That problem was outside of their control and after a try or two they should have realized it. What they were *supposed to do*, was to identify it as a “God” problem. They were to analyze the situation and know that it was so much bigger than them, so much more than their abilities could handle. But they didn’t. They insisted, instead, to remain in control, to cast Jesus aside and try to claim the spotlight for themselves.

And in some small way, this passage is like a summary to the work of Christ. Like the disciples, we focused inward on our own abilities and in doing so, introduced sin into the world. All creation was now possessed by evil but instead of turning to God for healing we continued to turn into ourselves, believing that we had the solution. But God knew that this was much bigger than we could handle, that it was far outside any solution we could achieve, and so he sent his son. And through the death of Jesus, evil lost its grip on creation and we were healed. No longer did Satan have control over us; no longer would death be our eternal destination.

But we *still* try to wrestle control away from God. It may not manifest itself in situations like exorcism but how often do we make decisions or try to create favorable outcomes *before* or even *without* approaching Jesus in prayer? Do we select our careers, our relationships, even our marriages without first approaching him? Scripture tells us not to be anxious about anything but that is not limited to just problems. It means *everything*. Every decision we make, every situation we face. *Everything*. “In *everything* by prayer and supplication let [our] requests be made known to God.” We are to be in constant communication with him, constant conversation. We are to listen for him to help guide us, direct us. And we are to do this not to show the world our glory but to show the world his. *Our lives* are to be lived to bring him glory and we can only do that when we allow him to lead us. We can only do this when we stop trying to control everything and trust in Christ. And so, as the disciples should have first called on Jesus before they attempted to heal the child, so we are to call on Jesus before we attempt anything.

And this passage also warns us that our selfish actions have consequences to others, not just ourselves. In trying to solve the problem themselves, the disciples created an obstacle to Jesus. How often do we do this ourselves? How often do we send the message to others that calling on Jesus can be reserved for the last effort, when all else fails? How often is our message to the world that Jesus is our safety net, our “hail Mary” and not our initial choice? We are to be the light to

others; we are to attract others to Christ but how can we do that when we shine the light on ourselves? How can others find Jesus when they are blinded by our own light?

What I think is truly beautiful about today's passage, what is so reassuring in my mind, is that even when the disciples were focused on themselves, even while acting as an obstacle to Jesus, Jesus enters the situation. He doesn't wait for the disciples to realize what they are doing. Jesus enters and takes back control. Even as they try to outshine him, Jesus shines brighter. And what is reassuring, at least for me, is that even when the disciples made mistakes Jesus did not reject them or cast them aside and look for better ones. He continued to call them his own, to pour into them, to protect them and encourage them. And he does this for us as well. There is nothing that we can do, no sin that we can commit, that will make him reject us. He is, and will always, seek us and count as brothers and sisters.

And so, this morning the message for us is this: go *first* to Jesus in prayer. Turn to him *first* for all things – all situations, all decisions. Go *first* to him when you sin and need forgiveness. Trust in his forgiveness and rely on his council, always. And invite him into your lives and allow him to lead and to guide you in everything you do. Seek his will instead of your own. Shine his light instead of your own. And rest on the promise that he will always be with you in every situation, always be there to call upon even when you fail to do that first.

Let us pray.

Lord,

You are with us, always. In every situation, in every decision, you are there. We are reminded of this today and pray that you would help us turn to you first, to seek your will instead of our own.

In your name we pray.

Amen.