

International Bible Lessons Commentary

Mark 9:14-29

New Revised Standard Version

International Bible Lessons

Sunday, March 6, 2016

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The [International Bible Lesson](#) (*Uniform Sunday School Lessons Series*) for **Sunday, March 6, 2016**, is from **Mark 9:14-29**. **Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further** follow the verse-by-verse *International Bible Lesson Commentary*. **Study Hints for Discussion and Thinking Further** discusses *Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further* to help with class preparation and in conducting class discussion: these hints are available on the [International Bible Lessons Commentary](#) website along with the *International Bible Lesson* that you may want to read to your class as part of your Bible study. If you are a Bible student or teacher, you can discuss each week's commentary and lesson at the [International Bible Lesson Forum](#).

International Bible Lesson Commentary

Mark 9:14-29

(Mark 9:14) When they came to the disciples, they saw a great crowd around them, and some scribes arguing with them.

Peter, James, and John came down from the mountain with Jesus where they had seen Jesus transfigured and speaking with Moses and Elijah. When they reached the other disciples, they saw them arguing with some scribes (teachers of the law). They were arguing about something related to a father whose son needed to have a demon cast out in order to be healed. It seems the disciples repeatedly failed to cast out the demon. The arguing might have concerned Jesus casting out demons, whether Jesus was the Messiah, and the failure of the disciples to cast out demons if Jesus was the Messiah. It does seem the source of the argument related to the failures of Jesus' disciples.

(Mark 9:15) When the whole crowd saw him, they were immediately overcome with awe, and they ran forward to greet him.

Throughout the Gospels we learn of people rushing to see Jesus that they might be healed or have a loved one healed or see a miracle. The stories about Jesus were so amazing that when the crowd saw Jesus they ran to greet Him. If the disciples had been arguing with the scribes about Jesus' ability to heal and the source of Jesus' power, then the enthusiasm of the crowds would have been heightened, and they would have run to Jesus with great expectations, perhaps to see Him settle the argument or see Him perform miracle or see if Jesus could heal the boy that the disciples had failed to heal.

(Mark 9:16) He asked them, “What are you arguing about with them?”

Of course, Jesus knew what they had been arguing about, but Jesus had no intention of creating a spectacle through His ability to read hearts and minds – that was not His purpose. When Jesus did read the hearts and minds of the scribes and Pharisees, He demonstrated to them that they could not hide anything from God or Him. Jesus wanted to build up the faith of a father and heal his son, who had been afflicted with a demon for many years. Jesus would also lead some in the crowd to believe that He was the promised Messiah. By His words and actions, Jesus would demonstrate that He was from God and give the scribes good and sufficient reasons for believing in Him; therefore, they (and any in the observing crowd) would be guilty of the sin of unbelief if they did not repent of their sins and believe in Him.

(Mark 9:17) Someone from the crowd answered him, “Teacher, I brought you my son; he has a spirit that makes him unable to speak;

Immediately, the father indicated that the real problem was not an argument between Jesus’ disciples and the scribes. He told Jesus that he had brought his son for healing, but had only found Jesus’ disciples, who had tried and failed to heal his son. The father recognized the signs of demon possession and began to describe what the demon was doing to his son.

(Mark 9:18) and whenever it seizes him, it dashes him down; and he foams and grinds his teeth and becomes rigid; and I asked your disciples to cast it out, but they could not do so.”

The first problem the father told Jesus about was his son’s inability to communicate by speech: the evil spirit had made him mute. Second, the evil spirit would seize him and control his body in order to bring him physical harm. Finally, the spirit would immobilize his son and do frightening things through his son’s mouth. The disciples had tried and failed to cast out the evil spirit or heal his son.

(Mark 9:19) He answered them, “You faithless generation, how much longer must I be among you? How much longer must I put up with you? Bring him to me.”

Jesus’ immediate response may seem harsh or uncaring to us; however, Jesus dealt daily with myriads of unbelieving people. The problem in this situation was related to unbelieving people, not to His disciples’ failure. The “unbelieving generation” Jesus spoke to had strayed so far from God, and had been so subjected to the false teachings of the scribes who disregarded the Scriptures, that they did not recognize the power of God or a person sent from God. Jesus came to help, teach, and save some in this “unbelieving generation” from their sins, and also help, teach, and save some in future “unbelieving generations” through His disciples and the Scriptures the Holy Spirit would inspire them to write. When the scribes and others persistently argued about and with Jesus, and refused to believe in Him and continued to mislead others in spite of His many miracles, Jesus expressed the fact that at some point the divine patience will cease to be

a virtue. God's anger and judgment because of this faithless unbelief will be appropriate after God has given so much evidence of His existence and virtues through His Son. Jesus' time on earth in bodily form would soon end with His crucifixion by unbelievers. After all Jesus had said and done, His annoyance at persistent unbelief is appropriate and to be expected, especially when one knows the outcome of unbelief. Later, after Jesus cast out the demon, Jesus would tell the disciples why they had failed.

(Mark 9:20) And they brought the boy to him. When the spirit saw him, immediately it convulsed the boy, and he fell on the ground and rolled about, foaming at the mouth.

When they brought the boy to Jesus, the demon did through him exactly what the father had said. The "unbelieving generation" heard the truth about his demon possessed son and they saw and heard what the demon would do. They had no reason to doubt that the boy was afflicted by a demon, and they would soon see Jesus cast the demon out and heal the boy. However, the question remained, "Would any persist in unbelieving?"

(Mark 9:21) Jesus asked the father, "How long has this been happening to him?" And he said, "From childhood.

Jesus also wanted the crowd to know that the boy's demon possession was not something recent or just a passing phase. His possession by the demon had been permanent from the time the boy was a child; therefore, the boy's situation was extremely desperate and put him in danger of losing his life. The demon could do whatever he wanted whenever he wanted – even in front of Jesus and a large crowd.

(Mark 9:22) It has often cast him into the fire and into the water, to destroy him; but if you are able to do anything, have pity on us and help us."

The father had brought his son to Jesus, but in His absence Jesus' disciples saw his son first and failed to help him; therefore, his son's situation began to seem more and more hopeless. Since the disciples could not do anything, he asked Jesus if He could do anything to help his son. The father appealed to Jesus' compassion and he challenged Jesus to help them, for the son's affliction afflicted his father too as he saw him suffer time after time and almost die at the demon's whim.

(Mark 9:23) Jesus said to him, "If you are able!—All things can be done for the one who believes."

Jesus indicated that the father could do something to help his son. The father could believe in Him. Jesus replied that the problem was not beyond His ability, power, and compassion to solve. The problem was in part the father's lack of faith in Jesus. The father doubted Jesus' ability and perhaps Jesus' compassion. Jesus did not teach that "faith" or "believing" in and of themselves were the solution. Jesus taught that God the Father and He should be the true objects of faith and the true Persons to believe in, for everything was possible through the Father and the Son when believers trusted them.

(Mark 9:24) Immediately the father of the child cried out, “I believe; help my unbelief!”

Jesus knew the source of the father’s lack of faith and Jesus knew the father had some faith: the father even said “I do believe.” He had faith the size of a mustard seed (Matthew 17:20). Jesus and the father both knew there were still some areas of unbelief in the father’s heart and mind. In some fashion, the father did believe Jesus could heal his son, and that is why he brought him to Jesus. Perhaps the failures of Jesus’ disciples had shaken his faith in Jesus; for surely they had not strengthened his belief in Jesus. The father expressed faith the size of a mustard seed and Jesus would help him overcome what he still lacked in belief by working a miracle of healing and compassion.

(Mark 9:25) When Jesus saw that a crowd came running together, he rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, “You spirit that keeps this boy from speaking and hearing, I command you, come out of him, and never enter him again!”

Jesus determined to heal the boy before an even larger crowd had gathered: His primary concern was expressing compassion and helping the father and son, not creating a big scene or impressing a crowd. Those who did not see the miracle would hear of it from others and believe in Jesus or refuse to believe in Him as part of the “unbelieving generation.” Jesus called the impure spirit by what it did to the boy and commanded it to come out of the boy and never enter him again: the father and son would know that he was permanently freed from the demon and healed. When the demon failed to return, the father’s faith would be further strengthened, as well as the faith of his son (who would be told how he was freed from the demon and healed by Jesus). Jesus said in a parable that a demon could return with additional demons and make a person’s life worse than before, but in this case it could not return and harm the boy (Luke 11:26).

(Mark 9:26) 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.”

Mark’s report makes it obvious that the boy was indeed possessed by an impure spirit and his problems were greater than a physical or mental disease. The spirit did not give up its possession of the boy easily, but demonstrated its power as it left him at the command of Jesus. It became obvious to the crowd that Jesus was more powerful than the demon; and yet, there was some fear that the demon had killed the boy as it left him.

(Mark 9:27) But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up, and he was able to stand.

Jesus showed His compassion and the fact that He had no fear that the demon would return and attack Him when He took the boy by the hand and lifted him up and he stood up freed from the demonic possession. No one could doubt the fact that Jesus had freed the boy from a demon and Jesus could do everything for the person who trusted in Him. Still, the question remained, “Would any of the ‘unbelieving generation’ come to believe in Jesus as the Person Jesus revealed himself to be?”

(Mark 9:28) When he had entered the house, his disciples asked him privately, “Why could we not cast it out?”

The disciples waited until they were alone with Jesus to learn why they had failed to cast out the impure spirit. After Jesus called His disciples, He had given them the authority to cast out demons: “He appointed twelve that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach and to have authority to drive out demons” (Mark 3:14, 15). Later, Jesus had sent them out to cast out demons by themselves: “Calling the Twelve to him, he began to send them out two by two and gave them authority over impure spirits” (Mark 6:7). The disciples knew from experience that they had the authority under the Lordship of Jesus Christ to cast out demons, and they may have been arguing with the scribes about their authority from Jesus, their failures, the reason for their failures, and the impact their failures had on belief in Jesus as the Messiah.

(Mark 9:29) He said to them, “This kind can come out only through prayer.”

Jesus did not condemn His disciples for a lack of faith. Lack of faith was not their problem. Their problem was a lack of prayer. They would need to take some situations to their Father and to Jesus directly through prayer in order to succeed in helping others with some of their problems. We may not know the cause of an illness or something that might appear as a demonic possession or persecution, but with Jesus everything is possible, and we can go to our heavenly Father and to Jesus with believing prayer – even asking Jesus to help us overcome any areas of unbelief in our lives.

Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further

1. Discuss what you might be thinking if you were in the crowd listening to the disciples and the teachers of the law arguing. Whose side would sound most convincing to you?
2. Discuss the effect it would have on your faith if you had been the father and the disciples had failed to help you and your son.
3. Discuss how you would feel if you looked up and saw Jesus walking toward the crowd.
4. What do you think Jesus did that helped the father overcome his unbelief in Jesus?
5. Do you think Jesus criticized His disciples for failing to cast out the demon? What did Jesus say to them in private after they failed?

Begin or close your class by reading the short weekly *International Bible Lesson*.

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