

From Mountain to Mess (Part 1)  
Mark 9:14-29

## TWO IDEAS WORTH CONSIDERING FIRST

### From Mountain to Mess

As we move with Jesus from the glory of the transfiguration, we descend with Him to the every day chaos of fallen and broken humanity. A scene of heavenly wonder gives way to a episode of human worry. From a powerful meeting with Holy God we descend to a confrontation with an unholy demon, an unbelieving crowd, a powerless band of disciples, a desperate dad, and an even more desperate child. Mark takes us from mountain to mess in one short journey.

### Short Detour

Don't think for one minute, however, that the glory of the mountain is missing from the mire of the mess. This incident in the life of Jesus testifies as every other incident Mark reports, that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. But, before we get to the point of this passage, I'd like us to take a short detour.

We're becoming familiar with detours, given the Highway 61 reconstruction project. We come into town and have to turn one way or the other, down into town or up to County Rd 7 to avoid the construction zone. But not all detours are about avoiding something. Sometimes we detour specifically to encounter something we might have missed taking our normal route. Such is the case today.

### Two Topics We Might Not Have Noticed

I'd like to speak to two topics that we might have missed. Two topics that are present in this passage but are not the point of the passage. I think that even though these two are not the main points, they are not the main reason Mark includes this episode in the gospel he is writes, I believe these ideas are helpful and worthwhile and deserve the time and effort to identify them, consider them, and implement them. These ideas are about us. Mark's point is about Jesus, so I want to mention these two ideas, move past us, and get to Jesus.

Both of these topics relate to the demonized boy in the passage.

### Parenting Spiritually "At Risk" Children

First, I want to say something to the parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles, teachers, babysitters, and to every adult here who interacts with children in their lives. Look with me, please, at verse 21 in this passage.

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

When Jesus asks the boy's father how long the boy had been suffering under the influence of this spirit, the man answered, "From childhood." The boy is probably a young teenager now. He is likely covered in scars from the fires the demon has thrown him into. He bears the emotional

scars of near drownings, not to mention the bindings of fear and shame that must certainly have accompanied these experiences that he had no power to explain. And this chronic oppression has been his life experience since he was a little kid, probably toddler age. Arguably, this had been his lot in life for at least a decade.

### Don't Wait to Disciple Your Children

Parents, grandparents, family members, care providers: **don't wait until your children have been brutalized by the world to begin their discipleship, to bring them to Jesus.** Children are little humans. As humans they are targeted just like adults for the destructive onslaught of the enemy of their souls. No matter how cute your babies are, no matter how innocent they appear, how smart they seem, how capable or athletic or remarkable your child is, Satan has them in his sights. He is out to get them, destroy them, ruin their lives, fill them with bitterness, steal their joy, annihilate their love, and send them to hell despite any redemptive work of Christ on the cross. And if he can defeat you by destroying them, all the better for his team.

### The Danger of Waiting

Peter writes that *our adversary, the devil, is like a roaring lion roaming about seeking whom he may devour.* If you saw your child about to be attacked by a ravenous wild animal, would you just stand back, fold your arms and say, "You know, I'll just wait until he's a teenager to talk to him about the danger he's in"? Would you say, "I'll wait a few years and let her decide for herself what she wants to do about being eaten"? Would you settle for some weak, half-hearted warning, "Honey, that's not a big kitty there. Be good for mommy and daddy and don't get eaten"?

You would not! You would do anything and everything in your power to rescue your child, even to the point of giving your own life. I remember one of the first emergency calls I got to Temperance River State Park was to be with a family whose father had drowned rescuing his young son from being swept out into Lake Superior. **If you believed your child was in real danger you would do anything in your power to save them from that danger.**

Your children, from the moment they draw their first breath are in danger. They are targets for Satan's jealous rage against God and you, godly parents, are your children's God-given first line of defense against the devil's destruction. That boy lived years bound by the evil one. **Parents, engage early and don't give up!**

### What You Can and Should Do Now

#### Train the Children

**Proverbs 22:6 ESV** *Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it.*

Proverbs 22:6 is an important verse in spiritual child development. It is our mandate from the Almighty! **Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn away from it.** Train them when they are young for their spiritual success when they are old. Train a child. Pray for them, but also pray with them. Teach them to pray themselves. Empower them to

stand against the evil one, and having done all to stand. Instruct them with God's word, but also teach them to love and learn God's word for themselves. Teach them how to study the Bible, how to understand it, how to apply it. Don't just encourage Bible memory, memorize God's word with them, so that they can see and hear you using the word in the course of life.

Speak of Jesus and the cross. Tell them about their sin, their need of a Savior, the eternal risks of refusing God's grace, but the eternal joys of accepting and trusting God's love as fully demonstrated in the death of Jesus on the cross. Let them know that *"all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God"* includes them. Show them how *"the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord."* And don't just speak to them of Jesus but let them hear you speaking of Jesus often to others. Let them see just how much you love Jesus and how important He is to you, and how important it is that others come to know Him. **Don't wait to disciple your children. Do it. Do it now. Do it well.**

### Train Yourself

That means, folks, you will have to tend to your own discipleship as well. You will need to learn to pray. You will need to learn how to study the Bible and understand and implement God's word in your life. If you don't have a mentor, someone to instruct you in the basic skills of following Christ, then find one. If you've never really learned how to pray, stop using that as an excuse, start praying, and know that the Spirit will instruct you as you pray. If you don't have the habit of personal Bible study, listen, come to Sunday school and let us help you get started, or join one of the home Bible studies. Neither you nor your children can afford for you to sit on the sidelines and hope you'll go unnoticed by the hungry lion. You won't.

### Don't Fail the Children

**Don't fail the children.** They are as vulnerable, if not more vulnerable, than anyone else. You have something the dad in this passage did not have. You have the full knowledge of Jesus, Who He is and what He came to do, both in His life and in His death and resurrection. All this man knew was what he'd heard, that this Jesus person healed people. That was enough for Him to bring his son to Jesus. He didn't know Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God. He didn't know that Jesus would die on the cross for the sins of the whole world and be raised from the dead on the third day by the power of God. He didn't know that all God's promises are "yes," and "amen" in Christ. All he knew was that Jesus healed people and that was enough for him to bring his child to Jesus. And you know so much more than he did. **Don't you see how much more reason you have to bring your children to Jesus?**

### LET THE SCIENCE LEAD YOU TO JESUS

That's the first idea: Start discipling your children early because they need it sooner than you might imagine. The second idea comes from the father's description of his son's condition.

**Mark 9:17–18 ESV** *And someone from the crowd answered him, "Teacher, I brought my son to you, for he has a spirit that makes him mute. 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."*

Jesus asks the disciples what is going on with the crowd and the argument they are having with the scribes. The father speaks up. He says that his son is possessed by a spirit that prevents him from speaking. And, beyond that, “whenever it seizes him, it throws him down, and he foams and grinds his teeth and becomes rigid.”

### **Scientific Analysis of the Scene**

Does that description sound a little familiar to you? It sounds like epilepsy to me. It sounds like a grand mal seizure. And you know what? We might be right, but here is the point: ***Don't let what you think you know about the world get in the way of what you need to know about Jesus.***

### **Jesus is the Point**

#### **Satan Directs Away from the Point**

It may very well be that the boy here is epileptic and that the spirit that possesses him exploits and exacerbates his vulnerability in order to torment him and create fear, distrust, loathing, and unbelief in him and in others around him. Paul wrote, “We are not unaware of the devil’s schemes.” **Satan will use any vulnerability to destroy people, destroy the image of God in them, and destroy any hope they will find their way to God.** And he will use the experience in both victim and observers to minimize and chance of faith.

#### **Letter to the Editor**

Back when I was writing a weekly column for the local newspaper, I got a letter from a reader. These folks challenged the validity and the veracity of what I was writing about God and His love. They wrote of a baby, just a few months old, who was sucked out of his home by a tornado and impaled on a tree branch a mile away. They could not imagine a God who loves doing such a thing to an innocent baby.

There’s a lot that must be said to such an objection, but the point here is that the devil used a tragedy in the life of that victim to change the attitude of observers against God. That is a real scheme the devil uses all the time, exploiting the vulnerabilities of one person to destroy both that person and others by creating fear, distrust, and unbelief.

### **Jesus is the Point**

Mark is not writing a medical school textbook on the identification and treatment of epilepsy in post-pubescent males. Mark is writing the testimony, the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. We are not investigating how the ancient world interacted with the physical anomalies they encountered. We are discovering Jesus and the way He handled the world we encounter. **We can't let misunderstanding divert us from Jesus.**

### **Our Culture and Science**

Our culture often gets this wrong, particularly because many people are looking for something called “science” to be their savior. They are looking for an intellectual system rather than a divine person. I recently asked someone some questions about the Pfizer COVID -19 vaccine. Rather than respond to my questions with reasonable, intelligent information, they simply responded with disgust, “You just need to trust the science.”

Listen, THAT response is cancel culture, and it's stupid. Now, science isn't stupid. Asking questions isn't stupid. Trusting science isn't stupid either, but not understanding the essential relationship between science and theology, so that you reject theology entirely? That, in my opinion, is stupid.

If you haven't heard by now, my undergraduate degree from Asbury University is in biology and chemistry with an emphasis in human anatomy and physiology. That degree included course work at both the University of Kentucky Medical School and Old Dominion University in Virginia. I have no trouble "trusting the science."

### Trust the Science to Lead You To Jesus

But here's our question: What do we do when we, as Christians, encounter situations in Scripture that are defined in spiritual terms (like the effect of demon possession) that may also be described in scientific terms (like "epilepsy")? I trust the science to point me to Jesus.

### Science in Context of Creation and Dominion

Do you remember Genesis 1:28?

**Genesis 1:28 ESV** *And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth."*

This verse records the blessing God bestowed in Adam and Eve at their creation. See that all important phrase, "have dominion"? Science is the God-blessed human activity and effort to understand and interpret creation so that we can rightly and appropriately exercise dominion over it as bearers of the divine image.

God made humanity in His own image. God then set us over the rest of physical creation in a relationship similar to the relationship He has with us. He expresses His character, His "image", in His sovereign relationship with us. He has dominion over us and we understand Him through the way He rules in our lives. We demonstrate His character, His "image", to the world on another level through our relationship, our dominion, over the world God created. That's God's plan and science is a tool we use to implement God's plan.

### Science and Faith

Science is the human effort and activity for understanding and responding to the world we live in. **Faith is not unrelated.** Faith is the divine provision for understanding and responding to the One Who created the world we live in, the One Who holds us accountable for our dominion over it.

Science and faith ultimately walk hand in hand. Science provides details. Faith provides context for understanding the details. Both work together to lead us to throne of God the Creator in reverence, wonder, and humble, trusting surrender.

## How Do We Handle The Story at Hand

This account in the life of Jesus should not be read as a medical school textbook, nor should it be rejected because it isn't a science textbook. The gospel is not trying to be something it is not. The gospel is, however, exactly what it purports to be: an authoritative, inspired, infallible, inerrant recounting of the life of Jesus that demonstrates conclusively that He is the Christ, the Son of God.

This account in the life of Jesus should be understood as a revealing proof of Jesus' supernatural superiority over the effects of sin and life in a fallen world. Jesus is THE living example of how a faith-filled, God-loved, God-chosen, God-sent man subdues the earth and has dominion over it. **Jesus is the fulfilment of what God intended when He instructed Adam and Eve to subdue creation and have dominion over it.**

Paul, in the first letter to the Corinthians, refers to Jesus as the second Adam. Jesus is the Adam who gets it right, who fulfils God's creation plan for humanity. Here is another reason Paul can use that label. Jesus, the man, accurately expresses the image of God in His dominion over creation, as a result of a sinless relationship with God. This text is not about the physical effects of demon possession. It focuses on the power of the Spirit-filled Christ, Jesus, over ALL creation.

## FINAL WORDS

### The Point of the Passage for Next Time

The point of this passage is that every human being who truly believes in Christ is empowered with the same Spirit Who empowers Jesus. Every human being who truly believes in Christ is in position once again to do the God-empowered work of Jesus in the world. The root of spiritual capacity is faith. The root of spiritual impotence is unbelief.

We're going to take up that point next time when we ask why the disciples of Jesus, who had been able to drive out demons just a short time before, were not able to drive out this demon. In the meantime, I think we have enough to ponder and enact with the two ideas we've just seen.

### The Two Ideas

First, **you have a choice to disciple your children or surrender them to spiritual destruction.** God has put them in your life and provided every spiritual resource the task requires. Make the most of them. Start early and stay at it.

Second, when encountering science in the Bible, you don't have to choose between science and faith. **Let science and faith lead you to Jesus.** That's their job. Let them do it.