

First Serve

Studies in the Gospel of Mark

Text

Mark 9:14-29

Topic

Jesus commands a deaf and dumb spirit
to come out of a young boy

Title

"Deaf & Dumber"

Introduction

The *Rocky* movie franchise is, to borrow lyrics from the theme song, "getting strong now, flying high now."

Do you realize that the first film was released all the way back in 1976? Fast forward to 2015, and you've got *Creed*, the story of Apollo Creed's illegitimate son convincing Rocky Balboa to train him.

Worldwide, the film has grossed \$175mil. A sequel is already being planned.

In the first film of the franchise, Apollo Creed knew for sure that he'd win his fight against Rocky Balboa. What's more, *Rocky knew that Apollo would win*. He tells his girlfriend, Adrian, that he knows he can't win. Then he says, "all I wanna do is go the distance. Nobody's ever gone the distance with Creed."

You know the story. Rocky is outmatched, but manages to knock-down the over-confident champ. A grueling, punishing fight ensues. Rocky goes the distance, but as predicted, Apollo Creed gets the victory.

As Christians, one of the first words we learn to love is **victory**. We are taught, correctly, that, on the Cross, Jesus *was* and *is* victorious over sin, death, and the devil. His victory means that we, too, are victorious.

Since that's true, why do we get knocked-down so much, and hit the mat so hard when we do?

Victory is hard-won, that's why. It is ours, but it doesn't come without a fight.

We know from reading the New Testament that the devil, although defeated, will go the distance:

- He'll be throwing punches right up until Jesus returns at His Second Coming, when the Lord orders him bound and incarcerated for one thousand years.
- He'll fight-on once released from his prison, only to be finally and utterly defeated when he and his followers are cast alive into the Lake of Fire that has been prepared for their everlasting conscious torment.

In our text, the nine disciples whom Jesus had not taken with Him up the Mount of Transfiguration have a bout with the devil. Victorious over him in the past, this time they hit the mat hard when they are unable to cast out a particularly nasty demon from a young boy.

It gave Jesus an opportunity to teach a lesson about victory - that it is both *hard-fought*, and *hard-sought*.

I'll organize my thoughts around those two points: #1 Your Spiritual Victory Is Hard-Fought As We Await The Return Of Jesus, and #2 Your Spiritual Victory Is Hard-Sought As We Await The Return Of Jesus.

#1 Your Spiritual Victory Is Hard-Fought As We Await The Return Of Jesus

(v14-27)

Listen to this quote regarding the end of World War II in the Pacific:

Naval superiority for the Allies was assured by victory over the Japanese fleet at Leyte Gulf, while giant B-29 bombers started pounding targets in Japan itself. [Nevertheless there was] bitter fighting from island to island and through the jungles of Burma... **against an enemy that refused to surrender** - until the horror of the atom bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

We were victorious over a defeated foe, but the enemy fought on until the final blow was delivered.

Likewise, as Christians, we are victorious over a defeated foe, the devil; but our enemy will fight on until the final blow is delivered.

The events in our text give us a rare opportunity to explore and explain the fight we find ourselves in, against defeated enemies who refuse to yield until they must.

Mar 9:14 And when He came to the disciples, He saw a great multitude around them, and scribes disputing with them.

Mar 9:15 Immediately, when they saw Him, all the people were greatly amazed, and running to Him, greeted Him.

Jesus was returning, with Peter, James, and John, from the mountain upon which He had appeared to them transfigured, along with Elijah and Moses. The nine disciples He had left in charge of the ministry were being harassed by a group of Scribes.

As soon as the "great multitude" saw Jesus, they "were greatly amazed." An alternate translation is that they "were surprised" to see Him. They weren't expecting Him to show up. Now that He was back, they welcomed Him gladly.

I don't want to drift into mysticism, but I think, sometimes, when we gather together, we're not really expecting Jesus to show up. We're almost surprised if He does.

He promised He'd be among His gathered church. He is here.

*He is here... He is here
And He wants to work a wonder;
He is here... He is here
As we've gathered in His Name.*

Mar 9:16 And He asked the scribes, "What are you discussing with them?"

I sense a hint of protection. Whatever they might be discussing, Jesus knew that the Scribes were nonbelievers and insincere. He knew that their only purpose in discussing anything with the disciples was to befuddle or belittle them.

We've all been there. Someone, or maybe even several someone's at once, are peppering you with questions, or complaints, about Jesus and the Gospel. They're not sincere questions; it's just an effort to make you look dumb.

Jesus is just as jealous over you, and I suggest that, if you refuse to get stumbled by their criticism, and remain humble, He will use you in their lives. Your example while being berated can be as powerful as your explanations.

It's not always about how much we know. The apostle Paul was a brilliant scholar with unassailable logic, as well as enjoying the anointing of God; but even he was ridiculed by the philosophers on Mars Hill.

Mar 9:17 Then one of the crowd answered and said, "Teacher, I brought You my son, who has a mute spirit.

Mar 9:18 And wherever it seizes him, it throws him down; he foams at the mouth, gnashes his teeth, and becomes rigid. So I spoke to Your disciples, that they should cast it out, but they could not."

So that was what they were disputing. The disciples were unable to deal with this demon. The Scribes seized upon their failure to undermine the Person and work of Jesus.

Even without the Scribes' criticism, I'm sure it troubled the disciples. Jesus had given them power to cast out demons. What happened?

Look away from the disciples, for a moment, to the boy. This is severe suffering. In a moment, the father will further describe his son's condition, and we'll gasp at how awful it was.

In Jesus' temporary absence, His disciples seemed helpless against the evil manifested in the world.

It's the same today. God seems absent, and His followers seem helpless in the face of mounting evil.

God is not absent; we are not helpless. Still, the problem of evil stumbles nonbelievers. It's a great obstacle for them - especially when the evil, or the pain, strikes close to home.

Mar 9:19 He answered him and said, "O faithless generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I bear with you? Bring him to Me."

Who was Jesus calling "faithless?" The Greek word is used elsewhere in the New Testament *only of nonbelievers*. It doesn't make sense, to me, that this would be the single use of the word to describe believers.

I think Jesus had the Scribes in mind. He wouldn't be with them much longer; He wouldn't need to bear with them. He was going to His death, then to Heaven.

On the other hand, He would be with His disciples always; and He bears with us through all of our many failures.

I'm not trying to ignore an important exhortation, but this one probably isn't for us.

It might be for **you** - if you are not a believer. How long do you have before it's too late to make a decision to repent, and to turn to God from your sin? You don't know.

What you do know is that you have an appointment with death, and after that there is no further opportunity to be saved.

Mar 9:20 Then they brought him to Him. And when he saw Him, immediately the spirit convulsed him, and he fell on the ground and wallowed, foaming at the mouth.

Put on your parent-hat for a moment. What if this were your boy? This is not a sterile, classroom discussion about evil in the world, or about why God allows suffering. This is a pain that you live with, every minute of every day.

The boy seems to get worse and worse before he is healed, and has the demon cast out. It becomes a picture, for us, of the age in which we live. This demon is typical of the will of the devil and his highly organized forces to fight-on even though defeated.

I mean, the demon knew his time of possessing this boy was up. He knew that Jesus would command him to come out of the boy. But he gave it his all, in defeat.

That is what we can expect, until we are with Jesus. The disciples were getting a glimpse of the church age, in which the devil would be going about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.

Mar 9:21 So He asked his father, "How long has this been happening to him?" And he said, "From childhood.

Jesus wasn't questioning the dad for the purposes of making a diagnosis, or for suggesting a course of treatment. No, His question, I think, is full of compassion.

It acknowledges the absolute horror of this boy's condition, and the pain his father must have endured watching his son.

God is no idle by-stander to our pain and suffering. He is touched by it, in all points as we are.

God the Father looked on as His only begotten Son was killed. If you think that knowing He was going to raise Jesus from the dead made the Cross an easy thing, you are wrong.

"From childhood," this young boy had been afflicted. The suffering of children really gets to us. It evokes more raw emotion than just about anything. What parent hasn't wanted to trade places with their child in their pain?

Mar 9:22 And often he has thrown him both into the fire and into the water to destroy him. But if You can do anything, have compassion on us and help us."

Among those who portray themselves as experts on demons and demonic possession, there is a belief that demons, in general, have a strong desire to inhabit human bodies. To put it in contemporary terms, they say that demons are Jonesin' to take on flesh.

That's just silly. This demon kept trying to kill the boy he possessed. He wanted to destroy him.

We've taken the position, the biblical position I might add, that the presence of Jesus on the earth was countered by the devil by a demonic invasion upon first century Israel, in a way we don't see today, now that Jesus has ascended into Heaven.

Don't get me wrong: Demonic possession is real; it's just not rampant.

Something else demon-hunters say; I've told you about this before. They believe that you must learn a demon's name before you could cast it out. In this case, since the demon made the boy mute, you could never learn his name.

We don't deal with demons based on formulas or superstitions. If we encounter them, we deal with them based on the delegated authority we have from Jesus.

The father of this boy sounds like he'd lost faith in Jesus' ability to cast out demons. It makes sense because His disciples had failed. After all, Jesus had previously conferred upon the twelve the power to cast out demons, and everywhere they went, the demons obeyed them.

Since they failed, and their power was from Jesus, maybe it was because Jesus had lost His mojo.

Mar 9:23 Jesus said to him, "If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes."

Need to be very, very careful here. Some read this as if Jesus was saying, "If you have enough faith, you can receive any miracle you ask for."

Faith is certainly required at all times, but Jesus didn't say "**anything** is possible." He said "**all things** are possible."

That's a lot of things, for sure; but most of them are spiritual, *not* physical. "All things," I think, refers to all the things that God has promised you, or provided for you. In Ephesians they are called "all spiritual blessings in Christ" (1:3).

So, in your suffering, you can (and should!) ask God to heal you. But He may tell you that "all" you really need from Him is sufficient grace to go on enduring your suffering.

"All things" are better than anything we might ask for. We would almost always settle for things that are merely physical, that are merely temporary, and miss those that are spiritual, and prepare us for eternity.

Mar 9:24 Immediately the father of the child cried out and said with tears, "Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!"

*I humbly suggest that this is **always** true of **each** of us. We certainly believe, and on that basis, are justified by God's grace. But the very fact that we must grow seems to indicate we have a certain amount of unbelief that needs to be overcome as we walk with Jesus through our lives.*

This father believed the Lord could heal his boy; that's why he had come in the first place. But his belief had been shaken by the failure of the disciples, and he admitted it.

If I'm being honest, throughout my entire Christian walk of some 37 years, I've had something that I was having a hard time believing God for. I have some things right now.

Whatever you are going through, unbelief can creep in. When it does, don't hesitate to admit it, and to pray this prayer, in your own words. The hard part is waiting for the Lord to work.

Mar 9:25 When Jesus saw that the people came running together, He rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, "Deaf and dumb spirit, I command you, come out of him and enter him no more!"

Mark writes this as though the crowd interrupted Jesus. Because they were approaching, He quickly cast out the demon. But Jesus might not have been done talking to the father.

Be sensitive to the Lord wanting to minister to people, especially when we are gathered together. It's one reason why we try to minimize distractions. A precious spiritual moment can be stolen away from someone by interruptions.

We learn that the boy was deaf as well as dumb. This just keeps getting worse and worse. It's an extreme case, for sure.

Not for Jesus. There is no extremity of suffering beyond His ability to deal with.

Mar 9:26 Then the spirit cried out, convulsed him greatly, and came out of him. And he became as one dead, so that many said, "He is dead."

This was quite a defiant demon. He fought hard, to the end.

I'm belaboring it, but that's one of the major points this episode is hammering home. We live in-between the first and second comings of Jesus. Our defeated foe is defiant, and fighting hard until the end.

Mar 9:27 But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up, and he arose.

Mark doesn't need to tell you that the boy was completely healed, inside and out. Do you doubt any of the following?

- He could hear, perfectly.
- He could talk, articulately.
- His burns, from having been thrown into fires, were healed, and his skin was like that of a baby.

What about psychologically? Do you think that he suffered from PTSD? Do you think that he was afraid of water, on account of the many attempts the demon had made to drown him?

I'd say, "No," to those and other questions like it. Jesus heals to the uttermost.

I'm not saying that, for you, everything is miraculously healed when you come to the Lord. I'm not here to heap burdens on you in your struggles.

I **am** saying that every healing you need comes from the Lord. He is your Great Physician.

I hate to say it, for fear of being misunderstood, but Jesus is your Great Psychologist, too. In Him is everything you need for life and for godliness.

There is evil in the world. What's more, it is organized, and powerful. It exists because Adam and Eve, representing us, sinned in the Garden of Eden.

Why does it endure? Because God's plan to overcome it takes time - because He is dealing with cosmic issues of atonement and redemption, along with the human heart, and the free will of men.

Before you object to the "it takes time" argument, consider this. God's plan is essentially a rescue mission. Some rescues take more time than others.

In 2010 the world was gripped by the Chilean mining accident, in which thirty-three men were trapped 2300 feet below the surface. With all the best efforts and equipment, it took sixty-nine days to rescue them.

God's rescue of the human race is like that. Only there is a further twist. Of the thirty-three Chilean miners, not one refused to be rescued. Not one determined to stay trapped and in the dark.

Yet that is exactly the decision of multiplied millions of people everyday. God has saved them, by the Cross of Jesus Christ. But rather than be rescued, they prefer to stay in the darkness, trapped by sin.

God is longsuffering with them - not willing that any should perish, but that they would come to know Him.

Yes, it's true, the devil and his demons refuse to surrender. But the bigger problem is that nonbelievers refuse to surrender - to Jesus.

Our part is to draw from "all things" that are promised us, and provided for us, to further the Gospel message.

#2 Your Spiritual Victory Is Hard-Sought As We Await The Return Of Jesus

(v28-29)

We have the same burning question that the disciples had. It is asked, and answered, in the remaining two verses.

Mar 9:28 And when He had come into the house, His disciples asked Him privately, "Why could we not cast it out?"

Mar 9:29 So He said to them, "This kind can come out by nothing but prayer and fasting."

I think that what Jesus establishes here is so simple that we miss its impact.

First let's talk about what He was not saying. He was not saying that, if you encounter an especially bad demon, go off for a time of prayer and fasting, then return to the fight.

No, the example Jesus left us was that He was always ready to fight.

The Lord was talking about a lifestyle that included prayer and fasting regardless any specific trials or tragedies.

I'm not saying that it's wrong to call for a fast, with prayer, for certain things. We see this, occasionally, in the Scriptures.

But by far the most important thing to take-away from Jesus' comments are that we be spiritually disciplined - with prayer and fasting on that list.

Let's be brutally honest. If we were to take a survey and ask, "Do you pray and fast often?," most of us would answer "No."

The conclusion we draw from our lack of prayer and fasting is that we are not as ready as we need to be to fight. It's at least one of the reasons we get knocked down, and hit the mat so hard.

It's the Apollo Creed syndrome of knowing we're going to win, so we don't train as hard anymore.

It would seem, from Jesus' comments, that, even though He had conferred upon the twelve the ability to cast out demons, they needed to remain disciplined.

Think of it this way. The ability to cast out demons wasn't theirs; it was Jesus'. Anything, and everything, they did, they did through Him. It wasn't theirs to do with as they wished.

Prayer and fasting communicates that we understand our dependance upon Jesus. Whatever He has given us, or tasked us with, we remain totally dependent upon Him to empower us.

We can go through the motions of a Christian walk - especially here in the relative safety of our great nation - without having any anointing from the Lord.

We love grace so much that we think it is incompatible with spiritual disciplines. It is not.

We need to get back to the basic disciplines of the Christian life: Prayer, reading the Word, especially devotionally; gathering together; sharing our faith; giving; and fasting.

Consider that a check-list, of six activities, and accept the challenge of exercising yourself spiritually in *any* and *all* in which you are deficient.

In baseball, they talk about a 5-tool player. The ideal position player excels at hitting for average, hitting for power, baserunning skills and speed, throwing ability, and fielding abilities.

Think Willie Mays.

We're to work on being 6-tool Christians, not settling for one or two or even four or five disciplines.

"This kind can come out," Jesus said. That's a big statement and I think we can apply it beyond the casting out of demons.

What Jesus was saying, in general, is that "You can prevail, spiritually, against whatever you encounter."

All you need to do is follow hard after Jesus. Victory is assured, but it is to be hard-sought.

In the end, your closeness with Jesus - well, that is your victory at all times.