

Who Gave You This Authority?

British author, G. K. Chesterton wrote, "There is nothing so weak, for working purposes, as this enormous importance attached to immediate victory. There is nothing that fails like success."

Last week we noticed that God loves to do important events on mountaintops. This is probably why, when someone has a very positive experience, we call it a "mountaintop experience." But have you noticed that after most of those mountaintop experiences in the Bible, there was trouble brewing down in the valley? When Moses came down from Mount Sinai, what did he find? Chaos! When Elijah came down from Mount Carmel, what happened? He had to run for his life! It's not true for God, but for people there's usually trouble after the mountaintop experience! For people, "There is nothing that fails like success."

And we see the same pattern after the fabulous experience Peter, James and John had with Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration. We pick up the story in Mark 9:14 where we see...

I. What Life Is Like Down in the Valley.

Mark describes it this way:

When they came to the other disciples, they saw a large crowd around them and the teachers of the law (technically, the Scribes) arguing with them. As soon as all the people saw Jesus, they were overwhelmed with wonder and ran to greet him.

"What are you arguing with them about?" he asked. (Mark 9:14-15)

What transpires next is that the father of a young boy says that he brought his demon-possessed son to the nine disciples who didn't go up the mountain with Jesus. The father wanted them to remove the demon. Now remember, back in *chapter 6* when Jesus sent the 12 disciples to go village to village, He specifically *"...gave them authority over evil spirits."* (Mark 6:7)

So, what were the disciples and the scribes arguing over? At least one commentator believes that they were arguing over the correct procedure for doing an exorcism. The scribes were the "keepers of the law" which means that they were lawyers. We'll say more about what they believed in a moment, but just here we need to notice that usually their disputes with Jesus and His disciples were over legal technicalities concerning whatever Jesus and the disciples might have been doing.

It would be like if you were trying to help a stranger change a flat tire in downtown Hartford and a group of guys gathers around not to help but say, "You know, you're doing that all wrong. You should take all the lug nuts and put 'em inside the hubcap so you don't lose 'em. And you should put a flare at least 50 feet behind the vehicle to alert the traffic. You're not doing that right at all!" What would you say to that group?

So, my guess is that this is what the Scribes were doing with the disciples, arguing over whether or not they were following “correct procedures” for removing the demon from the boy.

Whatever they were arguing about, the one thing that is clear is this: the disciples were NOT successful in helping the boy. They were busy, they were trying, but the demon was not coming out. The father confirmed it:

...I asked your disciples to drive out the spirit, but they could not. (v. 18)

Bible teacher, J. Vernon McGee, thinks this whole scene is a picture of the church today. He writes:

The Lord Jesus has already gone into the presence of the Father and is there in His glorified body... Moses and Elijah are there today. The Mount of Transfiguration pictures heaven...

But look at this poor earth and see the problem down here. This boy represents a mad earth today... He appears to be demon-possessed by the way he is acting and the things he is doing down here. The sad thing is that the man brought the boy to the disciples, but they couldn't do anything. And the tragic thing about this hour is that the church is helpless in the presence of the world's need.

Right now, the organized church in desperation is reaching out, protesting and marching and getting involved in all kinds of things, [we're very busy] and the world is actually criticizing the church because they feel it should get even more involved. But social matters are not our business! We ought to be able to help a poor demon-possessed boy today by presenting a Savior to him who will make him rational and who will bring him into a right relationship with God. Unfortunately, the same thing has to be said of the church [as was said of the disciples], “*They could not.*”ⁱ

When Jesus left this earth He said, “**...go and make disciples of all nations...**” He didn't say, “Go and make republicans of all nations.” Life in the valley of America is not going well because the church has turned to politics rather than disciplinemaking! So, secondly, we must ask this question...

II. What's the Real Problem?

First, we need to see *the Scribes' problem*. The Scribes' problem is that they had the wrong questions and therefore the wrong answers. If you don't have the right questions, you'll never get to the right answers. The question the scribes had is the same one as the chief priests and elders. We hear them ask it in chapter 11:

...while Jesus was walking in the temple courts, the chief priests, the teachers of the law (scribes) and the elders came to him. “By what authority are you doing these things?” they asked. “And who gave you authority to do this?” (Mark 11:27-28)

They aren't just asking about the miracles. This took place after Jesus had cleared the moneychangers out of the Temple. So, they're asking who gave Him the authority to do THAT! THEY were in charge of what happened and didn't happen in the Temple. THEY had given the moneychangers permission to do business there. Who did He think He was throwing them out of the courtyard?

But Jesus knows that the religious leaders aren't looking for an honest answer. They're looking for evidence to convict Him of blasphemy. They're not looking for truth. They're looking for entrapment.

So, Jesus asks a riddle question of His own. He asks them if John's baptism was from heaven or from men. They, of course, believe that it was from men, but they won't say that because they're afraid that the crowds will lynch them since the people fully believed John was a prophet from God. So, the Scribes and other Jewish religious leaders dodge Jesus' question and end up with no real answer.

The disciples, however, asked a truth question after Jesus healed the boy.

After Jesus had gone indoors, his disciples asked him privately, "Why couldn't we drive it out?" (Mark 9:28)

That's an honest question. They were looking for an honest answer. If the Scribes and priests had asked an honest question, it would sound like this:

Rabbi, by exerting your authority over the moneychangers, you were acting as if you have real, legitimate authority. Only the Messiah could have that kind of authority. Is that who you are?

That's what an honest question would have sounded like. And that's the kind of question the disciples asked. And Jesus gave them a straight answer.

He replied, "This kind can come out only by prayer." (Mark 9:29)

So, if the scribes' problem was a dishonest heart, what was the disciples' problem? Jesus had given them authority over evil spirits, so why couldn't they drive that demon out?

The answer is not that they had never removed a demon before. Back in chapter 6 it says that they drove out "many demons" and healed many people. So, what was the problem? It appears that the disciples had caught the common cold of Christian discipleship – low-faith-itis. Jesus gave this diagnosis when he said:

"O unbelieving generation... how long shall I stay with you?" (v. 19)

And when the boy's father said: (v. 22, 23)

"But if you can do anything, take pity on us and help us."

"If you can?" said Jesus. "Everything is possible for him who believes."

The disciples couldn't drive out the demon because they weren't operating with their faith in God but with their faith in their system. This is so easy to do! We start out well by fully trusting God, just as the disciples did. Jesus sent them out with nothing, remember? No bread, no bag, no money – no suitcase of clothes. They had no reservations at the Holiday Inn. They went village to village depending on the kindness of strangers. How do you suppose they prayed back then?

"Lord, HELP!! We have nothing!! Show us where to go, where to stay, what to do." (Then, they encounter a demon-possessed person.) "Oh Lord, what do we do with this? Jesus, Jesus, do something to this guy! Please!!?"

Their prayers weren't organized and manicured and neatly bundled; they were passionate, fervent, persistent, specific, repeated, focused. My guess is that prayer took up a major part of their day!

But, after a while, things began to settle down. They weren't scared all the time. Their lives started to fit into a routine. Everything wasn't an emergency anymore and life settled into a pattern. Soon the pattern became a system. Prayer,

for example, wasn't something they did all the time but they scheduled it – "We'll pray first thing in the morning and the last thing at night."

And so many people were coming for healing, it needed to be organized, so... "We decided to heal the lepers on Monday and the gout patients on Tuesday and the demon-possessed on Wednesday. Of course, some disciples were better at prayer than others, so we just had Thomas and Matthew do the praying for healing and Andrew and Bartholomew did the praying for the hungry. And listening to each person's request and then praying a custom-made prayer for each one was really time-consuming so we eventually just wrote out generic prayers for each type of need and read them with the person and sent them home with a copy of the prayer."

"But, um, I think it was Simon the Zealot who began to notice something. Things just weren't the same as when we first went out. Yeah, we weren't in a panic all the time but something was missing. There just wasn't the same power."

As Jesus looks down into our Valley, what does He see? How do we pray? James, the younger half-brother of Jesus, who didn't become a follower until he was an adult, talked about prayer in his letter in the New Testament. He wrote this:

Is any one of you in trouble? (He should get a good lawyer. NO!) He should pray.

...and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective. (James 5:13, 16)

How should we pray? Verse 16 in the Greek literally says, "...the strong, fervent, constant petitioning prayer of a righteous man will be effective." In Col. 4:12, the apostle Paul is talking about a prayer warrior named Epaphras, who's away from home, yet he prays for his hometown people:

...He is always wrestling in prayer for you, that you may stand firm in all the will of God, mature and fully assured. (Col. 4:12)

The Greek word translated, *wrestling* is *agownitzomenos* which is a description of a war-like battle, a hand-to-hand struggle using weapons. And it says he is "always fighting in prayer like this." Do you have anyone praying like that for you? Are you praying like that for anyone? Have you EVER prayed like that?

Luke 6 says that before Jesus chose the 12 apostles, He spent a whole night in prayer about it. When you have a big decision to make, how much time do you spend in prayer? Have you ever prayed for a solid hour? Have you EVER prayed all night?

When the disciples didn't know where to find Jesus, they always went to the Mount of Olives to look for Him. Do you know why? Because that's where He regularly prayed!!! If your kids can't find you, where do they look?

We're facing a tremendous challenge put before us by Jesus Christ. Just as He sent His disciples out to go village to village in a country about the size of New Jersey, He's sending us to Hartford and Litchfield counties to go village to village. Many of you have committed to pray, but HOW WILL YOU PRAY??? Will you pray fervently, passionately, desperately? Will you fight a WAR on your knees for 1.2 million people? When soldiers go to war they fight every day! Will you do that?

Idi Amin ruled the nation of Uganda from 1971 to 1979. During this period he murdered between three and five hundred thousand of his own people in an attempt to convert the nation to Islam by force. The economy was a shambles and

no life was safe. But in these desperate times God birthed a prayer movement in small pockets of that country. Christians gathered by twos and threes and tens, in secret places in the jungle, in caves, even in swamps to call out to God in all-night prayer meetings. They learned to pray fervently, passionately, desperately. God heard their prayers and ended Amin's reign of terror but He also did much more. HIV AIDS was at epidemic levels. But as Ugandans have continued to pray, God is performing miracles. There have been over 300 verified cases of people with full blown AIDS who have been healed miraculously since the revival began.

In 1999, on New Year's Eve, the President and First Lady joined a huge crowd in a soccer stadium in the capital of Kampala where a public proclamation was read in which they covenanted with God for the land of Uganda to be used for His purposes for the next 1,000 years.

There are still big problems in the north where a rebel Muslim army is kidnapping children by the thousands to become child soldiers. But even there, prayer is turning the tide. Advisors of the Army dictator, Joseph Kony, have recently been deserting because they have become followers of Jesus Christ.

One of the church leaders in Uganda today says that God has showed them not to pray for change in the government as problems come and go. Instead, they pray for the presence of God to come to their nation. As they pray that way, a spirit of revival has become an ongoing reality. ⁱⁱ

In our Scripture today, the scribes, priests and teachers of the law asked Jesus a dishonest question, "Who gave you authority to do this?" Jesus never answered their question and they left more trapped in their ignorance and hate than when they came.

But the disciples asked an honest question, "Why couldn't we drive the demon out?" Jesus gave them an honest and very motivating answer – they needed to come back to where they had begun. They needed to pray and live with a fervent, passionate, desperate faith in Him. Those disciples went on, all except Judas, to be used by God in phenomenal ways and they were truly "revived" as they saw the power of God flow back into their lives to fill them with real power again.

Do you want that kind of power? Which kind of question are you asking Jesus today? If you ask the right question, Jesus says:

Everything is possible for him who believes. (Mark 9:23)

Let's pray...

ⁱ Dr. J. Vernon McGee, *Thru The Bible with J. Vernon McGee, Vol. IV* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1983), p. 200

ⁱⁱ Jackson Senyonga: Uganda Revival, CBN.com and Uganda's Miracle, Kyalo Nguku: charismamedia.com