

# *Is Jesus Upset with Us?*

## **Breakthrough Praying:**

**Mark 9:14-29**

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Have you ever thought much about what is normal? I grew up in North and South Dakota where roads, shoulders and ditches were wide and extended forever. Traffic was so sparse that high-beam was the usual setting for headlamps. Imagine my anxiety when in Kentucky, I experienced traffic, no ditches, no shoulders and one-lane bridges! What was normal for Kentucky residents was not for me.

Although we can eventually adjust to road conditions, we can't adjust to some things: for example, the availability and standard of medical care. In Rochester it is far different than most the world. Years ago, a pastor's wife was sent home to die by medical staff from a large metropolitan medical complex in the south. Coaxed by her daughter to try the Mayo Clinic, she and her husband checked into a motel across from St. Mary's Hospital. She went into cardiac arrest. Before her husband hung up the phone, paramedics were at the door. Their protocol of electric shock and drugs revived the woman. Later, clinic doctors reversed the woman's terminal diagnosis with surgery. I discovered then that expectations and experience differ widely.

The Bible records differences in expectations and experiences both in the Old and New Testaments. For example, when Eli was priest and Samuel, a little boy, the Bible says:

*In those days the word of the LORD was rare; there were not many visions.* (1 Samuel 3:1, NIV)

People's spiritual lives were basically on "autopilot." They expected little and experienced little of God's presence and direction. Later however, in 1 Samuel, God moves with such profundity

that even a king bent on evil and his soldiers find themselves prophesying among a group of prophets (1 Samuel 19:19-24) . Which would you prefer to experience: a period of spiritual drought or a time when even enemies are overcome by the Spirit?

In the New Testament Paul writes the Galatians:

***As you know, it was because of an illness that I first preached the gospel to you. Even though my illness was a trial to you, you did not treat me with contempt or scorn. Instead, you welcomed me as if I were an angel of God, as if I were Christ Jesus himself.*** (Galatians 4:13-14, NIV)

Yet later when he worked in Ephesus, the Bible reports:

***God did extraordinary miracles through Paul, so that even handkerchiefs and aprons that had touched him were taken to the sick, and their illnesses were cured and the evil spirits left them.*** (Acts 19:11-12, NIV)

What accounts for the difference in Paul's experience? Why did he arrive sick in Galatia, but heal people effortlessly at one point in Ephesus? The Bible doesn't tell us. However, it offers glimpses and instruction about factors that make a difference.

When in Mark 9 the disciples failed to heal a mute and deaf boy with seizures, Jesus pointed to two factors: neither of them was God's will. Jesus did not say that the boy was not healed because of God's will. On the contrary, he believed God wanted the boy healed. Jesus expected his disciples not merely to pray for this boy. He expected them to heal him. He had commissioned the twelve disciples (in Matthew 10:1, 8 and Luke 9:1-2) and later 72 other followers (in Luke 10:1, 9) to heal the sick. They were not only given power and authority, Jesus said:

***Heal the sick who are there and tell them, "The kingdom of God is near you."*** (Luke 10:9, NIV)

They were commanded to heal. Their job was not done until the boy was healed. (Now, we may think our call is different, but the Bible doesn't teach that. Jesus told his followers to

make disciples by teaching them to obey the all the commands they themselves received from Jesus. They had received the command to heal. Thus, they were to teach others to obey that command. It was and continues to be an important aspect of discipleship.) When the disciples failed to heal the boy, Jesus was upset. His rebuke pointed to their faith:

***You faithless people! How long must I be with you until you believe?*** (Mark 9:19, NLT)

Jesus talked angrily with his disciples.

***How long must I put up with you? Bring the boy to me.*** (Mark 9:19, NLT)

Despite the rebuke about their faith, the disciples still wondered why they couldn't get the job done. They asked, and Jesus explained. In the parallel account from Matthew 17, we hear Jesus expand on his rebuke of unbelief:

***You didn't have enough faith. I assure you, even if you had faith as small as a mustard seed you could say to this mountain, "Move from here to there," and it would move. Nothing would be impossible.*** (Matthew 17:20, NLT)

I don't know about you, but that statement slides off me like wet soap. It squirts out of my hands. I can't grasp it. What does Jesus mean? What's enough faith?

We know several things about faith. We know that no one attempts anything without faith. Faith is the belief that helps people take risks. We also know faith is a critical posture for people's health. Study after study has shown the beneficial effects of a positive faith on the immune system and on the healing processes of the body. We know that many people must be healed in their attitude before their health can be sustained. Anger, resentment, guilt, fear, and loneliness are toxins that kill people (perhaps, not as quickly but) as surely as cyanide does. We know also that this is not merely a matter of positive thinking. A person, who's positive thinking is forced, who has no compelling rationale for positive thoughts, is dogged with health concerns. One cannot be positive just to be positive. That hollowness creates problems. People must have

good reason to be positive, and the ministry and promises of Christ give ample and excellent reason.

However, the faith Jesus was concerned about was not that of the boy who needed healing. He was concerned about the disciples' faith. He told them that if their faith was as small as a mustard seed, they would move a mountain. What kind of faith is that? Jesus didn't answer that, and that was not his point. He was not describing the kind of faith that brings healing. Instead, he was teaching that faith is the critical issue in ministering healing and that these disciples lacked it. The sick boy's father picked up on this and exclaimed:

***I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!*** (Mark 9:24, NIV)

How could the disciples and the father overcome their unbelief? Well, Jesus fingered a second factor. The earliest manuscripts of Matthew move on to a new incident, but most ancient manuscripts point to prayer and fasting:

***This kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting.*** (Matthew 17:20, NIV)

Mark records virtually the same thing. Some of the earliest manuscripts of Mark omit the word fasting; however, the early church understood that Jesus taught that prayer with fasting was critical to accomplishing this healing. Jesus wasn't teaching that you had to pray at the moment of ministry or that you had to fast at the moment of healing. In all three gospel accounts, Jesus is described neither as praying nor fasting when healing the boy. Jesus pointed to prayer and fasting that preceded this ministry. Indeed, Jesus attempted no ministry until he had prayed and fasted for forty days. It appears that Jesus' prayer life and specifically that period of fasting was paramount to a breakthrough for this boy. It was breakthrough praying.

If breakthrough praying was critical to healing this tormented boy, why then was Jesus so upset? Jesus was upset because he saw the trust necessary to heal the boy as natural and normal.

It was difficult for him to imagine that people would think that God would not want to heal. He did not see this as a difficult faith. A small faith would work if it believed what was important. And Jesus was not changing the subject when he talked of prayer that includes fasting. Such prayer powerfully impacts one's faith.

Jesus understood that the disciples had an inadequate faith to minister the power and authority that they had been given. They had been robbed of a natural and normal, powerful faith. They were blinded both to their gift and to reality. The evil one through their sins had crippled their vision and trust. Now, what do you do when you are adversely affected by sin and its judgment? The Hebrew people turned to God with mourning, weeping, fasting and prayer. And at God's direction they would offer a sacrifice that would remove the penalty or curse of their sin. Prayer and fasting, not as a technique, not as a formula, not as a badge of devotion or righteousness, but as an act of true dependence and contrition, opened their eyes and lives to the mercy of God. With their prayers they turned their minds to God. With their fasting they turned their hearts and entire selves. As a result, their guilt and the sin were removed as a lamb took their judgment. Then they began to see and believe what was important.

You and I are not commanded to pray for healing. We are commanded to heal. Those are Jesus' words. We can say we trust Jesus. We can say we love Jesus. We can worship Jesus with great emotion, and love by nature is emotional. However, true love values Jesus and his words. Jesus said, "***Whoever loves me keeps my commandments***" (John 14:21, 23). So how are you and I going to keep his command to heal? Are we affected by unbelief as much his first disciples were? Then we need breakthrough praying.

Until Christ returns, there will be a time to die; but how many will suffer needlessly or die prematurely because of our sin-related unbelief? Isn't Jesus upset with us? Let's pray!