

“What Can We Do?” – Pr Jim Sprengle – Pentecost 17 September 15, 2024

- I. **Mark 9:22-24** – The boy’s father said, “But if You can do anything, have compassion on us and help us.” ²³And Jesus said to him, “If you can! All things are possible for one who believes.” ²⁴Immediately the father of the child cried out and said, “I believe; help my unbelief!”
- II. **Believing in God is about surrender.**
 - a. When we truly trust in Jesus as our Savior and Shepherd, we let go of our plans and designs... our strength and power... and our will... in order to let God do the heavy lifting.
 - b. I read a story about a man who used to carry his elderly mother up and down the stairs of their home in Chicago.
 - i. He said that she would grab onto the banister while he was carrying her on the stairs and hold on to it so tightly they couldn’t move.
 - ii. He’d say, “Mom, you have to let go of the banister or we can’t move,” and she would always say, “I’m afraid you’ll drop me.”
 - iii. After a little while of coaxing, she would let go, but then a few more steps and she would grab onto the railing again.¹
 - c. That story is a great example of our interaction with God.
 - i. We’re hanging on to the railings of life... hanging on to the things we think will make us feel secure.
 - ii. God knows where we are going, and He doesn’t need our help.
 - iii. We think we are helping sometimes, but all we do is grab the railing and hold up the process because we are afraid... or feel like we know what’s best... or maybe even think we can do it better.
 - d. All throughout the Bible, God’s people either surrender and trust in Him to lead and guide the way, or they go their own way and pay the consequences of setting God to the side.
 - i. We all have personal experience with the troubles that come from a life that’s run on pride and fear...
 - ii. Pride is the first sin that began the downfall of humanity – Adam and Eve wanted to know what God knows... and they ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.
 1. Pride leads to rebellion – and rebellion is any behavior against God... which ultimately hurts others.
 2. That first sin led to a sin sickness that is in everything... and still causes us all kinds of grief in our daily lives.
 - iii. Pride tells us that we are self-sufficient, and we don’t need any help from anyone – not even God.
 1. So, we don’t pray... we don’t read our Bibles to understand God’s will... we don’t turn to God for much of anything.
 2. We live our lives on our terms and charge ahead.

3. Until everything falls apart because of a major illness, a loss, poor choices that lead to problems... and we end up in crisis.
 4. At some point we are beat down to the point that we are willing to consider letting God take control... but usually it means we are at the bottom with nowhere else to turn.
- iv. Besides pride, fear is another consequence of sin.
1. I don't mean the kind of fear when you encounter a bear... that's totally normal... I mean the kind that keeps you from living for God and has you running away from life.
 2. Fear and anxiety often drive people into isolation, and it might have its roots in all kinds of trials and negative experiences.
 - a. Yet, fear also keeps us from trusting God fully.
 - b. We grab the rail over and over again as He calls on us to trust Him when He's taking us to where we need to be.
 - c. Fear keeps us from loving others... like we love ourselves ...and keeps us from loving God with our whole heart.
- e. Either way, pride or fear break down our relationship with God and others, and the answer is always letting go... surrendering to God.

III. **Our Gospel lesson is about surrendering to God.**

- a. Jesus comes down from the mountain after He shows Peter, James, and John that He is truly God and man by transfiguring and showing them His divine nature.
- b. As He approaches, the disciples are arguing with some religious leaders.
 - i. Everyone sees Jesus and feels relieved, because whatever has happened to this point seems to have stirred up a lot of trouble.
 - ii. A man emerges from the crowd saying his son suffers from a demon and the disciples were not able to cast it out.
 - iii. And Jesus' wonders where their faith is...
- c. You see, the disciples were being prideful to think that they were the ones to cast this demon out – even though Jesus gave them the authority to do that previously, this is not their time to do those things.
 - i. Jesus even alludes to this when they ask Him at the end of the reading – why couldn't we do it? And He says this type requires prayer... or looking to God for help!
 - ii. The disciples were prideful to think they could do it, but it seems they never sought God in the matter, nor prayed for His hand of deliverance for this poor young man.
- d. Secondly, we see the father who was afraid to trust in Jesus.
 - i. Yes, he came seeking a healing, but can you imagine the years of disappointment after all the things he tried didn't work out?
 - ii. This was one more time that someone couldn't help when the disciples, Jesus' own representatives were unable to cast it out.

- iii. So, rather than fully trust in the power of God, he says, “If You are able... help us.” (vs 22) and Jesus responds, “If you are able?! All things are possible [for God] for anyone who believes.” (vs 23)
 - 1. The man then makes a statement of faith – “I believe! Help my unbelief.” (vs 24)
 - 2. Even in the midst of fear and disappointment, the man cries out that God is the only one who can help... and the only one who can supply the faith he needs trust in Him fully.
 - 3. The miracle of deliverance is given to that man’s son, and the demon that was doing its best to kill him was cast out.
 - 4. God is able to do anything even with the weakest of faith.
- e. We surrender our pride... we surrender our fear... and we let God do His work in us and through us.

IV. **When pride and fear take control – what can we do?**

- a. It sounds counterintuitive, but we do nothing...give up, let God take control.
- b. We cry out, “I believe! Help my unbelief!” and then allow Him to lead the way and direct our lives.
 - i. Certainly, if we have let pride and fear direct our lives for long enough, we will have some really painful things to deal with – but once again, that is where God is able to do anything with us.
- c. If anyone had a reason for pride and fear, it was Jesus.
 - i. He was both God and man – and yet full of humility and had great courage in the face of evil.
 - ii. He could have decided that hanging out with humanity was beneath Him, but instead He became one of us.
 - iii. He could have allowed fear to keep Him from the cross, but He willingly chose torture and death to pay for our sins.
 - iv. We are saved today because Jesus overcame pride and fear to deliver us from a fate worse than death... separation from God forever.
- d. It seems more than reasonable that we would surrender our will and our lives to the care of a God who is as trustworthy as our Savior Jesus.

V. **What can we do?**

- a. I suppose it’s not as simple as lying back and doing nothing at all.
- b. Trusting God is an attitude and a mindset that will be strengthened over time as we see His ways are better than ours.
- c. We can pray for His will for us and the power to carry it out.
- d. We can humble ourselves in service and love toward others.
- e. We can give our time, talent, and treasure while trusting that He provides.
- f. We can regularly come to worship, receiving the grace and strength He wants us to have in the forgiveness of sins and His body and blood.
- g. Each day as we surrender ourselves to God, praying, “Thy will be done”, we are in the best possible place.

h. As you wake up tomorrow morning, get on your knees and ask God to guide you and lead the way... and then watch out... because anything is possible for God as we trust in Him. Amen.

¹ Source: John Powell, "Prayer as Surrender," *Preaching Today*, Tape No. 108.