



This week at Magdalen Road Church we continued our series in Mark's gospel in chapter 9v14-29. It's a significant change from our experience up on the mountain last week as Jesus was transfigured before Peter, James and John and then joined by Elijah and Moses! Now they are down the mountain and in the midst of a crowd arguing with the rest of the disciples.

In one sense this is quite a simple passage to understand, however foundationally gets at the heart of our self-centred pride and desire to do things in our own strength.

We noted 3 main aspects to the account

1. The real problem

The problem behind this encounter is a the reality of spiritual opposition to the work of God. We can too easily only believe in the things we can see, and so forget or even deny that we are in a spiritual battle. We noted from this passage and others that the bible simply takes it as a fact of life - from Gen 3 to Rev 20. Paul reminds the church of Ephesus of it in Eph 6v12 and Peter in 1 Peter 5v8-9. Perhaps the first step in digesting this passage needs to be asking God for a greater awareness of that reality.

2. The wrong answer

The reason there is an argument going on is that the disciples are unable to deal with an evil spirit that has plagued a boy for his whole life. The spirit is life-robbing and destructive. You can see that from the repetition of how it manifested itself in his life. The father of the boy claims that the disciples were unable to deal with it, as do the disciples at the end of the passage. Until you reach the final verse (v29) there's a bit of mystery as to why they could not deal with it. But it's then that we see the correct answer...

3. The right answer

v29 is the key to unlock the passage. At the end Jesus drops the bombshell that they had been seeking to help this boy, in the their own strength. They do not, in and of themselves, have spiritual power, but rather Jesus does - the need to look to him. They had been seeking to do something that only he can do. The application is clear then for us who seek to live for the Lord, but doing so without praying. Jesus describes them as an unbelieving generation (and that they/we are) - this is a passage to bring relief and faith.

Here are a few questions to help your group get to grips with the passage

A) how aware are you of the reality of the spiritual battle on a day to day basis? Why?

B) how does Mark describe the evil spirit? How does it affect the boy? What does this show us about the work of Satan?

C) how does the disciples' example parallel ours? How can we be more reliant on Jesus by praying more?