

RALLY DAY

September 12, 2021

St. Mark 9:14-29:

“A ‘Hello’ to Reality”

- I. Always Discrediting Jesus.
- II. Discredits Our Faith.
- III. The Greatest “Hello”.

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Dear Friends in Christ,

The Holy Spirit had Peter write, "Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour." (I Pt. 5:8) The Holy Spirit had Paul write, "...for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light." (II Cor. 11:14) I don't know the origin of the statement, but it has been said, "The devil is to be avoided as a lion, but he is most to be feared as an angel of light."

In 2009 Christian author and apologist Paul Copan wrote:

...In 2002, the Barna group found that 83 percent of American Teenagers said moral truth depends on circumstances (only 6 percent said objective moral values exist); 75 percent of adults (ages 18-35) claimed to embrace moral relativism.

That same year, the National Association of Scholars/Zogby International surveyed college students of which 97 percent said their schools were preparing them to behave ethically in their future work place. At first, this sounds fantastic - finally, a bit of good news, right? Keep reading: 73 percent of those said their professors taught that moral standards of right and wrong don't exist. Three out of four academicians believe that "what is right and what is wrong depends on differences of individual values and cultural diversity." No wonder Harvard University business school dropped its ethics course. It's hard to take business seriously when the sponsoring institution endorses philosophical relativism. (Paul Copan, "TRUE FOR YOU BUT NOT FOR ME," Bethany Publishing House, 2009)

Considering how fast and far we have deteriorated since 2002, 19 years ago, I would say the words are screaming at us: "The devil...is most to be feared as an angel of light." This is Rally Day, the day we rally in support of and participation in our up-coming Wednesdays and Sundays of studies and growth in the Word of God for children, teens and adults. We're bidding . . .

A "HELLO" TO REALITY

I. Always Discrediting Jesus.

And when they came to the disciples, they saw a great crowd around them, and scribes arguing with them. And immediately all the crowd, when they saw him, were greatly amazed and ran up to him and greeted him. (v. 14, 15)

So, it starts with, "when they came to the disciples..." "They" are Jesus, Peter, James and John. They had just returned from the Transfiguration of Jesus on the mountain - a journey from the glimpse of heaven to the reality of a sinful, troubled world and the activity of Satan to create confusion, conflict, and constant upheaval. It's this: "a great crowd around them and the scribes arguing with them." "Them" are the disciples arguing with the scribes while waiting for the return of Jesus, Peter, James and John.

And he asked them, "What are you arguing about with them?" And someone from the crowd answered, "Teacher, I brought my son to you, for he has a spirit that makes him mute. And whenever it seizes him, it throws him down, and he foams and grinds his teeth and becomes rigid. So I asked your disciples to cast it out, and they were not able." (vv. 16-18)

Commentator Harold Wicke says of our text:

The symptoms described here are so similar to what we know as epilepsy that many commentators, who in their hearts deny the possibility of demon

possession and even reject the existence of Satan and his evil angels, say this was actually a case of epilepsy. They claim that Mark...reflected the mood and beliefs of his time which, according to them, falsely ascribed many illnesses to demon possession. (Harold E. Wicke, Mark, The People's Bible, Northwestern Publishing House, Milwaukee, 1997, pp. 129-130)

You know, I listened to that kind thinking from several college professors over 55 years ago. Wicke accurately states, "such commentators are really saying that God doesn't know what he's saying or that he accommodated himself to the beliefs of that day." However, 2 Timothy 3:16 impresses upon us, "All Scripture is breathed out by God..." God knows exactly what He is saying! He is not a deceiver, as are humans!

But, you see, that's the way Satan works among all people - especially the young ones - generation after generation. The purpose of the argument found in our text was not so much to discredit the disciples, but the One they represented: Jesus - God in the flesh. It's always been that way. It started in the Garden: "Did God actually say...?" (Gen. 3:1b)

II. Discredits Our Faith.

That brings us to Jesus' supreme description of Satan: "He was a murderer from the beginning and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies." (Jn. 8:44,45) And so, there have always been those who spew forth Satan's lies and, with them, death! We have observed, over these many years, how quickly many of our confirmed children fade into the abyss of doubt and unbelief.

You see, Satan's work is to discredit and destroy faith. Our text goes on to report that after the demon saw Jesus "it convulsed the boy, and (the boy) fell on the ground and rolled about, foaming at the mouth. And Jesus asked the father, 'How long has this been happening to him?' And he said, 'From childhood...But if you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us.' And Jesus said to him, 'If you can!' All things are possible for one who believes." (vv. 20-23) With the words *All things are possible for one who believes*, and similar verses of Scripture, comes the dark theology of, "If you have enough faith God will do this and that and whatever." I want you to hear a foot-note from one of my Bibles from 49 years ago:

This statement of Jesus has been misconstrued by well-meaning believers who accept it as an unqualified promise. Believing faith must be based on evidence of the will of God. That which is asked for personal desires or passions...is asked amiss and therefore cannot be asked in faith (James 4:3 is cited: "You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions.")...For a believer to ask God to (for example) restore his youth when he is old hardly falls within the purview of this promise (and I would add neither are pleas for wealth and worldly happiness). Nor does it imply that deliverance from death is always God's will either, since other Scripture indicates that it is appointed for men to die once (Heb. 9:27). (Harper Study Bible, Revised Standard Version, Zondervan Publishing House, second edition, 1972, p. 1510)

III. The Greatest "Hello".

Finally, we come to this from our text:

Immediately the father of the child cried out and said, "I Believe; help my unbelief!" And when Jesus saw that a crowd came running together, he rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, "You mute and deaf spirit, I command you, come out of him and never enter him again." And after crying

out and convulsing him terribly, it came out, and the boy was like a corpse, so that most of them said, "He is dead." But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him, and he arose. (vv. 24-27)

This is a big **"Hello" To Reality**. Satan and the demons are for real. There really is demon possession. The forces of hell are furiously working to devour every child of God; working to drive the sin ridden, guilt burdened soul into the depths of despair and hell!

The direction is this: Our helplessness. I'm frequently drawn to those words of Job: "Man's days are determined; you have decreed the number of his months and set limits he cannot exceed." (Job 14:5) You can only go so far with technology and medicines. And then these words from Solomon: "In his heart a man plans his course, but the Lord determines his steps." (Prov. 16:9) You have your plans, God has His. Guess who controls what! And just in case we try to squeeze around the truth of that, there's this: "The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the Lord." (Prov. 16:33)

And so, we are brought to a greater - **The Greatest - "Hello"**; the one that brings us to our knees and joyfully cries its "hello" to the love of God in Christ. It lays before Him all our sin and guilt, our fears and regrets, and then receives these words: "For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day." (Jn. 16:40)

I know - Satan is still there to accuse: "I think I've gone too far. Will God still forgive me?" I could never see the words as over used: "Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death (this on-going battle with sin and guilt and then eternal death)? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! (Rom. 7:24-25a) And so, hello and praises to the everlasting love and life through Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior!

It's Rally Day. Time for serious study. Especially now!

Amen.

Pastor Bill Abbott