**The Valley of Ministry**

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**Mark 9:14-29**

Open to the gospel according to Mark chapter 9 as we continue our series. Thomas Aquinas was a thirteen-century Roman Catholic theologian/scholar, born in 1225 and died in 1274 AD. Supposedly, he was invited into the presence of the pope when the pope looked around and said, "Thomas, no more can the church say silver and gold have we none." Supposedly, with Thomas's wit, he said instantly in reply to the pope, "And neither, sir, can we say, what I have I know give you, in the name of Jesus Christ, rise up and walk." Wow. Can you imagine Acts chapter 3 where Peter and the apostles are in the temple, it's the hour of prayer, and they meet a man who is lame? He cries out as a beggar for alms. Peter says to him, "Sir, silver or gold have we none, but what we do have, we give to you. In the name of Jesus Christ, rise up and walk." The man immediately arose and walked. Amazing!

This morning, as we open to Mark chapter 9, we're not going to see the church with power. After the death, burial, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit being anointed on the church, I remind you again as we study Mark's gospel, we're seeing the church, not fully born and anointed with power on the day of Pentecost, but in the church in embryonic form. Conceived and being trained, we're going to see the opposite side, the church when they failed a man. We're going to read a passage of Scripture that just breaks my heart. I've got to be honest with you. This is 4th of July weekend, this is celebration weekend, this is the celebration of freedom, this is supposed to be an upbeat Sunday, and it's going to be a downer because we can't skip this; we're a verse by verse church. We're going to look at verses 14-29, and we are going to talk about the valley of ministry. The context is we're going from the mount of transfiguration, what we called mountain majesty, and we're at the foot of that mountain this morning, just a little bit later. After Jesus transfigures Himself to the three, He comes down and finds the nine surrounded by a crowd of people. Listen to how Mark writes this story. Remember, he's got a purpose. He's not just writing a diary of Jesus' life. He's writing to a Gentile audience that comprises a church that’s suffering during the days of the Roman Empire, and he's presenting the disciples in a negative light so that as they see the church in a negative light, they understand that is not how we live. We live opposite because the church is on the other side of the resurrection of Christ.

**Scripture**

***"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. And he asked them, “What are you arguing about with them?” And someone from the crowd answered him, “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.” And he answered them, “O faithless generation, how long am I to be with you? How long am I to bear with you? Bring him to me.”And they brought the boy to him. And when the spirit saw him, immediately it convulsed the boy, and he fell on the ground and rolled about, foaming at the mouth. And Jesus asked his father, “How long has this been happening to him?” And he said, “From childhood. And it has often cast him into fire and into water, to destroy him. 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.”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 up, and he arose. And when he had entered the house, his disciples asked him privately, “Why could we not cast it out?”And he said to them, “This kind cannot be driven out by anything but prayer."***

(Prayer)

Father, what a story, a story that has a happy ending because Jesus showed up, but a story that just breaks your heart. For a man to bring his son to the disciples, who represents the embryonic church, and they could not do what they had been commanded to do. Father, I'm so thankful the man didn’t leave hurt, discouraged, and go somewhere else, but he hung around long enough for Jesus to show up. He had the courage to identify himself and his son. Thank You, Father, for healing that man's son through Jesus. Father, as I stand before my people as a pastor, I believe there are people in our area who are under the bondage of sin and Satan, and its influence. There are family members who desperately cry out for help. Father, I pray that you raise up Your church, especially the church here at Hardin to be able to help those who are struggling under the influence of sin. Father, help us this morning understand the important role we play in this community, and not just this community, but in the world. Father, we ask for that anointing that only You can give. We sincerely ask it because, Father, if you don’t give it, nothing is going to happen. This is just going to be a fleshly exercise, and I'm not real good at that Father. There is just something special when Your anointing takes over, and You anoint us to speak and anoint us to hear, and You empower us to live this out. That’s what makes Hardin, Hardin. Father, we desperately ask You for that anointing this morning. It's in Your Son's name we pray, amen.

I know you already see this in your mind, but I ask you to see it afresh with me. Mark 9 opens with Jesus taking James, Peter, and John up on Mount Hermon and He transfigures before them. They see His inner being, His deity shining through His earthly humanity so that His clothes become white in a way that they’ve not seen every before, and all of a sudden, they behold the majesty of the Son of God. As that event ends and they come down off the mountain, (which I call mountain majesty) they go from the mountain of majesty where they have seen Jesus Christ in His glory, and they are coming back down to a valley. It's a different scene, a different result, and it's amazing. I'm going to call this the valley of ministry. So, we're going from the mountain of majesty to the valley of ministry. The theme of the message is **ministry has been designed by God to let others see what we see on the mountain, and that’s the majesty of God.** If you're a believer this morning and I were to ask you, there is not a one of us in here who probably could not describe a mountaintop experience with God that was just glorious, that strengthened your faith, and that kept you going. Many times, we want to live there, but that’s not where God wants us to live our life. Ministry doesn’t take place on mountaintops; ministry usually takes place in the valleys of life because it is in the valleys of life where people suffer, where people hurt. That is where real ministry takes place.

Get this picture. You are Peter, James, and John. You’ve just been with Jesus on the mountain. You’ve just seen who He is. Now, you come down with Him off of that mountain and the other nine are at the bottom of the mountain. When they come down off that mountain and get in the valley, so to speak, there is a debate going on, an argument taking place. Jesus comes to His disciples and immediately, Mark says, everybody recognizes Jesus is there so they all flock to Him. Now there is a great crowd of people around Jesus, and He asks what they are arguing about with them. This is crucial; it flavors this passage a little bit different. You’ve got to ask yourself this question. Is Jesus addressing the disciples with a crowd around Him when He says, "What are you arguing about with them?" Is He talking to the disciples, and is 'them' the crowd? Or, is He with the disciples and there is a crowd around Him, and He is saying what are you guys arguing about with them, meaning My disciples? If I can be totally honest with you as a pastor, as a teacher of God's Word, here is where I wish Mark hadn’t used pronouns and would have just said 'the crowd is arguing with My disciples,' or 'My disciples are arguing with the crowd.' It's hard to know which one He's addressing. All of a sudden, when He's addressing whoever He is addressing, somebody from the crowd steps forward and says, I brought my son to You, for he has a mute spirit, and when this spirit comes on him, he convulses, he foams at the mouth, he becomes rigid; it's horrible, so I asked your disciples to heal him, cast out this spirit, and they were not able. Would you let that sink in just for a moment? Just imagine you are bringing one of your daughters to Jesus, and Jesus isn’t there. You know His disciples can do the same thing Jesus can do, but the disciples can't heal your daughter. You're going to be disappointed. How many of you are going to be disappointed.

I want you to see what Mark is doing. Please, you’ve got to trust me; you don’t read the gospels as an historical diary. I know you're tired of me saying that, but that’s how most people read the gospels. Mark has a purpose. He's writing to a Gentile church who is struggling. He's letting them see the church in embryonic form before the resurrection. Mark is trying to say you can't really know who Jesus is until you see Him die that death on the cross, be buried, and then rise again. He's writing to the church that is on the other side of the resurrection that is suffering, struggling. So when they see the disciples and how they're reacting to life, the church he's writing to knows that's not the proper response of being a follower of Christ. Here is what Mark is painting. This man comes to Jesus. You are going to say hold it; Jesus isn’t there. He's on the mountain. I understand that, but Mark is telling us when this man comes to Jesus and Jesus is on the mountain and He interacts with His disciples, it's the same as him bringing someone to Jesus. Mark is presenting that the nine people down in the valley, who are the apostles, the embryonic church, represents Christ.

Here's the message. You and I, as the church, represent Christ. Would you let that sink in? I just want to make this clear. If you're going to hang out with us here at Hardin, you’ve got to understand that you help us represent Christ. You may not have been coming long, but here's what you don’t understand. While you are checking us out, your friends, family, and neighbors know you're checking us out. The more you keep coming, the more they're going to believe you are us. Pretty soon, they're going to start judging us by you, and they're going to judge Christ by you. This is why the Bible is going to present the church as the body of Christ, Christ as the head, and we are the hands and feet, the body. This is why the Bible is going to develop the analogy that we, the church, are the bride of Christ. This is why the Bible is going to draw the analogy that we are the building of God, the temple of the Holy Spirit.

I don't know about you, but this is sad for someone to come for the disciples, for someone to come to the church with a need because they’ve got a son who is being destroyed by a demon, and the church can't help. The church is not able. Before you think I'm being too hard on the church, please remember this. In Mark chapter 3 when Jesus called the twelve to be apostles, He sent them out to preach and have authority to cast out demons. A few chapters earlier, we have Jesus sending them out again, and when they cast out demons, they came back and said, 'Jesus, you're not going to believe what we did! We've been casting out demons!' So while Jesus is up on the mountains with the three, He fully expects His church to continue to do what they're supposed to do, and that’s minister to people where they are in a hurting and falling world. Does everybody agree with that?

I want to make sure you get this. Just imagine I drive down Hwy 641 this week, come into Murray, and on the left side of the road there is a place called Pockets. I pull my truck in with my gas cans for my Mule and my lawnmower but when I go to get gas, they don’t have any. None of the pumps has gas. Can I be honest? When I pull out, I'm going to be disappointed. I'm probably going to call the owner and ask what's going on because I know the owner. Get this picture. Another day I'm driving down 641 and I pull into the convenience store, just right on this side of Murray. They put it there on the side of the road for guys like us. It's called Dollar General. Imagine I go in to get what is convenient for me and they don’t have what I need. I'm going to be disappointed! Have you seen that new camper place right beside the Dollar General Store? Imagine me stopping there wanting to buy a camper and they tell me they have no campers for sale. I'm going to be disappointed! You would too, right. I don’t want to throw anybody under the bus here, but this actually happened to me. Please don’t take this as a negative; it's just the truth. I used to go every Sunday night to Cracker Barrel because I love Sunday night chicken at the Cracker Barrel. About five Sunday nights in a row, by the time I got there and ordered, the waitress would say, "I'm sorry. We don’t have Sunday night chicken anymore." Can I just ask this question? If you're going to a place for Sunday night chicken and they don’t have Sunday night chicken, are you going to keep going? No. Imagine me driving to Culver's on turtle Tuesday (I held the worst until the end!), and they don’t have turtle!

Do you guys understand the responsibility we have before God? We are His presence in this community. People who have family members, neighbors, and friends whose lives are wrecked by sin, oppressed by sin, it would just be sad if they came to us and we could not help them. We represent Christ. When many people turn away from the church, they don’t just turn away from the church; they turn away from Christ because they view us as Christ. Pretty soon, His identity and our identity are meshed together. We're one. I had someone talking to me the other day and asked me to talk to Celisa. I said, "About what?" He said, "The rumor is at Hardin that we can't spray Roundup on the property because of Mrs. Celisa." I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "Well, I just signed up on the yard maintenance team and they make us weed eat every one of those fence post up and down that road because Mrs. Celisa don’t want Roundup on the property." I said, "Well, it's probably not Mrs. Celisa. It's Bro. Ricky." I do not allow fence posts to be sprayed with Roundup; you weed eat them. What is my point? The point is someone associated that with Celisa because she was probably just saying what I really believe because there is no one who knows me better than she. She's not going to give somebody permission to do something that she knows I wouldn’t like. If somebody is going to ask someone about Christ, who better to ask than His bride? Do you understand when somebody engages us they're engaging the bride of Christ? They're engaging the body of Christ. They're engaging the temple of the Holy Spirit. So when people come to us, they feel like they're coming to God! I think most of us would feel really good about someone coming to see us on Sunday morning or Wednesday night, but that’s not how it usually works. They approach you in your place of business, in your place of employment, between an inning at a ballgame, at halftime, at the bank, and on your day off. When they approach you, you represent Christ to them. Can I ask you this question? How are we doing as the bride of Christ, as the body of Christ, as the temple of the Holy Spirit? Please tell me you sense this. You can't read over this.

Next, Jesus said to the man, "Bring him to me." Before that, He turned to whoever He was talking to and said, “O faithless generation, how long am I to be with you? How long am I to bear with you? Bring him to me." Here is what's important. If you think He is addressing the crowd, He is saying oh faithless 'crowd,' how long am I going to be with you, how long am I going to bear with you? But if He is not talking to the crowd and He is talking to His church, His apostles, He is saying oh faithless generation. What started happened in Mark chapter 8, He is now taking us to Jerusalem to go to a cross, and He is telling His disciples we are getting ready for Me to leave you, and they're not getting it. Now, this is one of the accounts in the gospels where Mark is twice as long as Matthew and Luke. As a matter of fact, he tells a conversation between the Father and Jesus that Matthew and Luke do not record. Why? Because Mark is wanting us to understand as followers of Christ how important it is for us to be people of faith, for us to believe and not be self-reliant, but rely on God. Jesus says 'How long are you not going to believe Me? We're running out of time here; how long am I going to have to bear this? Ok, bring him here.'

So they bring him to Jesus and as soon as he comes into the presence of Jesus that spirit takes over and convulses him. He starts foaming at the mouth and becomes rigid. Jesus tells the father, "How long has this been happening to him?" the father said, "From childhood. And it has often cast him into fire and into water, to destroy him." Please get this picture of what Mark is trying to say here. In this demonic boy, Mark is trying to picture what sin really does to a person. It destroys them. This is why we're here, to come alongside people whose lives are being destroyed by sin. The father cries out, if You can, have mercy on us and help us! Notice he didn’t say help him or have compassion on him. Sin hardly ever just affects the family member; it affects the whole family. Catch what he says, "If You can." This man's interaction with the disciples has now caused him to doubt if Jesus can really do what Jesus has been doing, and that is 'if you can.' Can you imagine being Jesus and someone say to you, 'if you can?' *Excuse me? Do you know who you're talking to? You're talking to the Son of God! You're talking about the person who when God spoke everything into existence, I was the one who brought it all into existence! That’s Me!* No, He just turned this back around and said hey, the question is not if I can; they question is can you, if you can. Then He says, "All things are possible to him who believes." Immediately, the father recognized that the problem was a 'him' problem. He had come to the church, come to Jesus with no thought of belief, just that Jesus as a miracle worker. What is Mark trying to do? He is trying to show the dynamic relationship between Jesus and His followers. What is that key element? What changes everything? Faith; whether you really rely upon yourself or on Him, whether you're holding back or totally trusting Him. So when Jesus says, "If you can, all things are possible for him who believes," the man immediately says I believe. But when he said it, he knew he didn’t believe fully, so he said, "Help my unbelief." He's got faith, though he's still doubting, but the moment he says that, Jesus heals his son. Wow! See, you don’t have to have a perfect faith when you come to Jesus, but there has to be that confidence, there has to be that trust that you understand who He is and you come to Him in faith. When the man came to Jesus in faith, Jesus healed his son.

Watch this. When He healed his son, his son went dead like a corpse. Whoa! Things just got worse! He went from being alive to now it looks like he's dead. What is Mark doing? What is Jesus doing? In that son, we have a picture of what salvation truly is, and that is a rising from the dead, a rising up. Jesus reaches down, takes him by the hand, lifts him up, and he arose. How many of you were that person at one time? When Jesus took you by the hand and the only explanation that will fit you is being 'raised from the dead' because the life you live now looks nothing like the life you used to live. Get this picture, (Mark has Jesus doing this all the time) Jesus goes into the house. As soon as He goes into the house, His disciples follow Him into the house. What do the disciples talk about? They talk about what just happened. They asked Jesus why they couldn't do it. "Why could we not cast it out?" Jesus said, “This kind cannot be driven out by anything but prayer.” Whoa…did you hear that? Make sure you get this. I know this isn’t glamourous, but I want to make sure you understand this. I don’t want to read too much into this, but here's what I believe to be true. There are some things we can do as Christians that we just naturally do without any thought. We just do the right thing. But then there are things that you don’t dare try to do naturally, you can only do it supernaturally. Before you do it, you had better make sure you're anointed with that Holy Spirit power that only comes from God, and you better make sure you brought yourself before the Lord in prayer because in prayer you declare your dependency on God. I'm not talking about lipping something; I'm talking about coming to the place in ministry where you know someone's life is on the line, eternity rests in the balance. This person's life is being destroyed by sin, by Satan, the enemy. Before you ever start, the moment you see it coming, you prostrate yourself before God because you know who you represent. You know someone is not asking your opinion, they're asking you because you represent God to them.

How many of us live that way, honestly live that way? What Mark is trying to drive home here is our life is not about us; our life is about others. We don’t want to be a church, a Christian, who doesn’t have resurrection power. It's one thing to sing about it; it's another thing to go out here in our community, not on the mountaintop of a Sunday morning with other people who believe what we believe, but maybe be the only person and you live a life with resurrection power. This is why the writers are going to teach us to pray in the name of Jesus, to pray believing, to pray according to His will, to pray knowing the answer to our prayer depends on Him abiding in us and us in Him because so much hangs in the balance.

I don't know how many of you know this, but thirty-six years ago a little church in a little town, had maybe eight or nine people in the first Wednesday night service, made an agreement that every Wednesday night they were going to pray for God's anointing power to be in the church's life. They began to pray for the people who would come to church on Sunday morning. They would pray for the row of chairs they sat on. They didn’t have enough people to sit on all of the rows, so after they prayed for the row they were sitting on, they would put one hand on the pew in front of them and another on the pew behind them, so they would pray for all those pews. The next thing you know, lives began to be changed. That little church in a little community went from one service, to two services, to three services. Then they had to move locations, started with two services, and quickly moved to three services. They still pray every Wednesday night because that little church still believes that you can only do those radical things, those tough things, those big things without fully relying upon God. That’s this church. You represent us. We represent Christ. If you are going to hang with us, we can't water it down. You're the bride of Christ. Here's what Jesus is comfortable with. Somebody is going to slander you for what you believe, and Jesus is going to say, 'it's ok; they just believe that because that’s what I believe.' Do you believe what He believes? Let's live that out, not just in Dexter and Hardin, not just in Marshall and Calloway counties, live this out before a world. It's all because of His amazing grace. Our chains are gone; we've been set free. God has others He wants to set free.