

Maybe you've seen programmes recently on telly about life in the wild open areas of Africa – not just the documentaries about the **wildlife**, but also about different people on **safari** in Kenya, or visiting isolated **tribes** in the middle of nowhere. And you'll have seen the beauty of nature and the scenery, and the majesty of different animals. God's creation like you **don't** see it in the middle of Brighton on a Friday night!

But what happens when **darkness** falls? No street lamps **there**. No police force patrolling the streets. No **streets!** You see people gathering around a **fire**, don't you? The fire gives **warmth**, it gives **light**, a place to **meet** and talk. The fire gives a feeling of **safety** and security, because the wild animals won't knowingly stray into places where hostile men may **harm** them. It could be different if there's no fire. So when darkness comes, the place of warmth, light, security is the **fire**; that's what people are **drawn** to when darkness falls.

In the passage we're going to look at, we're going to see something **like** that happening: we're going to see how **Jesus** is like that fire in a dark place – we'll see how the action **revolves** around Jesus as people are drawn to **him**. In darkness, Jesus is **light**, Jesus is that fire that gives **warmth** and **security** to those who'll sit at his feet, who'll hear and obey his teaching.

So let's read from Mark's gospel, chapter 9, from verse 14, where we're told very helpfully that this is the account of 'The healing of a boy with an evil spirit.' [Read]

-

The action **revolves** around **Jesus**. This story is all about **Jesus**. Mark's **gospel** is all about Jesus. The New **Testament** is all about Jesus. The **Old** Testament is all about Jesus. The whole **Bible** is about Jesus. Because **he** is God's way of salvation. **He's** the way we can have a relationship with God. Because by **him** all things were created, by him and **for** him; fully **man**, yet fully **God**; through Jesus, God reconciles all things to himself; Jesus died, was buried, but rose again to make us right with God, through the forgiveness of our sins; to give the **right** to all who believe in him to become children of God. It's all about **Jesus**, because without **him** there would be no **creation**, without his **death** there would be no forgiveness for sins, without his **resurrection** there would be no new **life**, no reconciliation with God. It's **all** about Jesus.

Let's look at this story about Jesus through the different characters mentioned here.

Firstly **the crowd** around him. Because Mark tells us in verse 15 that *'As soon as the people saw Jesus, they were overwhelmed with **wonder** and ran to greet him.'* The people were **overwhelmed** with wonder. There's nothing in the text to **explain** this, but we just need to look at the verses just **before** this passage, and I think we find the reason why.

Jesus had gone up a mountain with Peter, James and John and something **amazing** had happened: Jesus had been transfigured – verse 3, *'His clothes became dazzling white, whiter than anyone in the world could bleach them.'* This was a foretaste of Jesus' **glory**. I'm sure that when Jesus came down from that experience on the mountain, something, maybe just a glimmer, of his glory remained in his appearance. The people were **overwhelmed** with wonder. They **ran** to the light, the warmth, the security. They liked what they saw. But unfortunately what they **saw** didn't change their lives. Jesus was a good man. Good teaching. But they didn't realise that he demanded a **response** from them.

And I'm sure we **all** know people like **that**, don't we? People who think that Jesus was a good teacher, but they don't want anything to do with him if it means commitment.

-

In verse 14 we find **the teachers of the law**, the religious leaders, arguing with the disciples, those **closest** to Jesus while he was on earth.

If you want to get an argument going, just mention the name of **Jesus**. Just mention the name Jesus. Just say the word **Christian**, or Christianity, and you're **guaranteed** to have plenty of people just oh so willing to **argue** with you! Noticed that? **Lots** of people ready to tear your faith to pieces, to destroy your opinions, if you're talking about Jesus, his teaching or trying to put Christian viewpoints. Experienced that?

John writes in 1 John 3:13, *'Do not be surprised, my brothers, if the world **hates** you.'* And Jesus himself said, *'If the world **hates** you, keep in mind that it hated **me** first.'* John 15:18. Don't be **surprised**. 'Hate' in the Bible is a very strong word. The world **hated** Jesus and everything he stood for. The world **still** hates Jesus and everything he stands for.

The teachers of the law didn't hold back whenever they thought they could catch Jesus out. Time and time again they tried to trip him up? But however hard they tried, Jesus **always** won the argument.

Here's their chance while Jesus is away up a mountain. They take the opportunity to make **fun** of the disciples because they weren't able to **heal** the boy. They plough in, making fun of the disciples, causing them to **doubt** who Jesus was, casting **doubt** on Jesus' **power**, arguing against all that Jesus **stood** for. I'm sure they'd have been calling the disciples **foolish** for believing Jesus' words.

They did the same, you'll remember, right up to Jesus' death on the cross. We find them **there** don't we? Mark 15:31: '*.. the chief priest and the teachers of the law **mocked** him [Jesus] among themselves. "He saved **others**," they said, "but he can't save **himself!**"*' They were there, making **fun** of Jesus and his claims.

The world mocks Jesus and his claims. Even the empty **tomb** isn't enough proof for them. The world doesn't **want** to know a God who created them. They don't **want** to know a God who **saved** them. They don't want to know a God who **loved** them and **still** loves them. Why **not**? Because it would mean that they're no longer in control of their lives, **God** is. They can't **deal** with that thought. It's easier for them to argue **against** God, than to accept that they're created to worship and **enjoy** him forever. How **sad!**

There'll **always** be 'teachers of the law' - quick to make fun of those who believe that Jesus is the Son of God who loved us and gave himself for us. Don't be surprised; the world **rejects** the light. John 1:4,5 says, '*In [Jesus] was **life**, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it.*' Still true **today**.

-

The crowd **ran** to Jesus, the teachers of the law **argued** with the disciples. What about **them**, **the disciples**? How are **they** feeling towards Jesus now?

Well, I reckon they're feeling pretty **rotten!** They couldn't heal this boy. They're probably feeling **confused**, and perhaps they feel they've let Jesus **down**, because in chapter 6:13 we read that '*They drove out **many demons** and anointed many sick people with oil and **healed** them.*' And on top of **that**, the teachers of the law are really having a **go** at them. They're probably a bit fed **up** when Jesus comes back.

What's going **on**? Why couldn't they drive out the **demon**? Whatever they had **before**, have they **lost** it? Why?

Jesus tells hem plainly it's their lack of **faith** that's at fault: verse 19, '*O unbelieving generation, how **long** shall I stay with you? How **long** shall I put up with you?*'

After Jesus has died, risen from the dead, ascended into heaven and sent his Holy Spirit to come upon his people, **then**, in Acts 3, we see the disciples with power to heal in the name of Jesus Christ. But they've a **long** way to go yet. They're still **learning**. And learning the **hard** way. Lessons learned going through hard experiences are remembered **most**, aren't they? We soon forget things learnt too **easily**, don't you think? The disciples are slow to learn and are learning the hard way, and I'm sure at times, they **did** test Jesus' patience! How **long**? Are **we** any different? I suggest we **aren't**.

When the disciples ask Jesus later why they couldn't **heal** the boy, Jesus replies, verse 29, '*This kind can only come out by prayer.*' The lesson they're learning here is that if they go into battle without the right **preparation**, without the presence of **Jesus**, they're **always** going to fail. Because to do **God's** work, you need God's **power**. Didn't Jesus himself say, '*... apart from me you can do **nothing**.*'? John 15:5. They didn't see yet that it was Jesus' power that enabled them to perform miraculous things. On **this** occasion they depended upon their **own** strength, they didn't show their reliance upon **him** by coming to him in prayer. **That** was their mistake.

And so often **we** make the same mistake, don't we? We don't come to Jesus **first**, do we? Are we surprised we aren't achieving **more** for Jesus? Could it be because we're not showing faith in him by **calling** to him in prayer and depending fully on **him**? Paul says in Philippians 4:13, '*I can do **everything** through **him** [Christ] who gives me strength.*' But it has to be through **him**. There's no point even **trying**, if we don't go in **Jesus'** strength. To do great things for God, we have to remember that it's Christ **within** us that gives us the power. More time and effort in **prayer** will lead to a closer walk with him and more effective **service**.

The devil's **strong**. Never underestimate him. God **is** stronger, Jesus **is** stronger. But that doesn't mean the devil's **weak**. He **isn't** – as this story shows. Don't be like Manchester United against MK Dons in the FA Cup, fielding their second team because it'll be an easy victory.

Don't **underestimate** the opposition. That's why Paul talks about the full armour of God in Ephesians 6, we **need** it to overcome the devil. That's what the disciples learnt **here**. **We** need to learn it too.

The disciples come to **Jesus** to learn and to gain power. Their dependence on Jesus needs to be **total**. Jesus has all we **need**, knowledge **and** resources.

-
Look again at verse 17: '*A man in the crowd answered "Teacher, I brought you my son who is possessed by a spirit ..."*' Before we come on to talk about the **father**, let's look at **the boy who was brought** to Jesus.

Think about it: Jesus has just been enjoying a foretaste of his glory on the mountain, and then he comes back, he's brought back down to earth with a mighty bump. Straight back into the horrible effects of sin and the devil on the lives of **many**, represented by this **boy**. This poor boy's **possessed** by an evil spirit, an agent of the devil. Verse 17 tells us the boy has lost the power to **talk**, and when the spirit seizes him, verse 18, '*it throws him to the ground. He foams at the mouth, gnashes his teeth and becomes rigid.*' Verse 21 says '*it has often thrown him into fire or water to kill him.*' What **evil** the devil's capable of, what **harm** and damage. He won't **rest** until he's achieved the destruction of this boy.

Jesus says, '*Bring the boy to me.*' '*Bring the boy to me.*' Jesus **delights** in children coming or being brought to him. Because **he** knows that from birth, children will be attacked by the **devil**. His only aim is to **destroy** them, to keep them from God, to lead them **away** from the God who wants to care for them, nurture them and give them eternal life in heaven. John 8:44 says the devil '*was a murderer from the beginning.*'

The effects on this boy may be **extremes** of the devil's work, but make no mistake, he still has his wicked way with young people today. Look **around** – where **are** the young people? Where **are** they? Perhaps we don't see the **physical** effects so much today, but the devil uses the temptations of **today** to lure young people to their destruction. In our city **especially** we're so acutely aware, aren't we, of the damage and hurt caused by different kinds of addiction – drugs, alcohol, sex, but **also** addictions to pleasure, work, material possessions, power. Young people want it **all**, and they want it **now**. And unfortunately the world's only too ready to **give** them what they want. The devil's having a **field** day with young people today. How do we **stop** him?

Jesus says, *'Bring the boy to me.'* There's nowhere else to take our children – only to the arms of Jesus. They can go into rehab, but it's only **Jesus** who can give **complete** healing, **perfect** healing. Only **Jesus**. Only Jesus can rescue us from the devil's clutches. *'Bring the boy to me.'*

However the devil has got his claws into you, only **Jesus** has come *'to preach good news to the poor.'* Only **Jesus** has come *'to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release the prisoners.'* That's why throughout the time Jesus was on earth, the crippled, the blind and the lame **all** came to him and were healed. That's why this man brought his son to Jesus, only **Jesus** could help – not even the **disciples** could help. Only Jesus. And *'Jesus took him by the hand,'* [verse 27] *'and lifted him to his feet, and he stood up.'* Jesus spoke a word to the evil spirit, and it **left** the boy – just like **that**. Only **Jesus** could do that. And the boy was healed. **Completely. Fully. Perfectly.**

Jesus has complete control and ultimate authority over everybody and everything, whether in this **physical** world, or in the **spiritual** world. Because he's **God**. He's Creator. He's Lord. He's King. Come to **him**. Bring your **loved** ones to him. Bring your children to him. Bring your **family** to him. Because *'Salvation' deliverance, healing, 'is found in no-one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.'* Acts 4:12. Only in **Jesus** is there perfect healing.

-

It's all about **Jesus**. The crowd were overwhelmed in **wonder** at him; the teachers of the law made it their mission to make **fun** of him and reject his claims; the disciples learnt that they needed to **rely** more on him; the boy has to be brought to Jesus **himself** to be healed.

-

So we come to **the boy's father**. He must've been **devastated** when the disciples couldn't heal his son. He's heard about Jesus and the many people that've been healed by him, so he **comes**, believing that his son can **finally** be rid of this spirit. But now he's starting to doubt his boy will **ever** be restored, because he's been afflicted since he was young, he tells Jesus in verse 21.

Doubt creeps in. He says at the end of verse 22, *'But if you can do anything, take pity on us and help us.'* He's doubting whether it's within Jesus' **power** to heal his son. The boy's father has a nagging doubt that Jesus **can** actually heal the boy. [Read vv. 23,24]

This man is honest about his doubt, his unbelief and asks for the **grace** to **overcome** his unbelief: *'I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!'*

He knows that in his heart there **is** belief, he **does** have faith in the power of Jesus, but there's **doubt** there too. And if we're honest with ourselves, we have to recognise that **alongside** faith, there's also doubt within our hearts, isn't there? While we're in these bodies, faith and doubt will continue to **co-exist**, **nothing's** perfect, God's **begun** a work of reconstruction in us, and he will **complete** that work, but we know we've got a way to go yet. I know **I** have anyway.

And every day we have to do what this man does here: use the faith we **have**, and pray that Jesus will **deliver** us from our unbelief. We say, 'I **do** believe, and so I'll walk in your ways **according** to my belief, although it may be **weak**; Lord make my faith in you **stronger** as I follow you.' There's room for this man's faith to grow as he sees Jesus at work. **This** attitude gives us room for our faith to **grow** as we put our trust in him, using the amount of faith we have **now**. Thomas Watson said, 'A little faith is faith, as a spark of fire is fire.'

Jesus says in verse 23, *'Everything is possible for him who believes.'* Jesus doesn't turn round to him and say, 'Well, no, I **can't** help your son because you **doubt** whether I can heal him.' This is great news for **him**, and it's great news for **us**. Because our requests aren't answered based on the amount of faith we have – remember Jesus says in Matthew 17:20, *'I tell you the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, "Move from here to there" and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you.'* Our requests are answered because of who we're placing our trust and faith **in**: Jesus. Not on the strength of our **faith**, but on the power of the **Lord**.

Isn't that encouraging? Because I'm sure we can **all** echo the father's words – *'I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!'* We don't have to achieve great heights of faith, we just have to have faith in Jesus' **power**. Doubt still remains, but let's take the advice of the 19th century American clergyman, Charles Deems, who said, 'Believe your **beliefs** and doubt your **doubts**; don't make the mistake of doubting your **beliefs** and believing your **doubts**.'

-

Jesus **does** heal the boy and restores him, and the father takes his next step on his road to greater faith in Jesus, the Son of God who came to heal the sick.

-

Everybody in this story is drawn to Jesus, but in different ways:

Everyone has to face the truth about Jesus, and we all have to decide whether to ignore it, reject it, hate it or accept it and love it.

Are you like the **crowd**, drawn to him because you're amazed at his **presence** and good **teaching**? Or like the teachers, drawn to the light but only because you don't **like** it and want to put it **out**? Or are you like the **disciples**, drawn by Jesus to learn how to rely upon **him** when you serve him? Have you seen like the **boy** the need to come to Jesus because only **he** can set you free? Or are you like the father, coming to Jesus with your little faith, so that your faith can grow? Which group do you belong to?

-

This story's **all** about the Lord Jesus. We **all** have to have some contact with the Light, because he has the words of eternal life, he is Jesus Christ the Lord, the Son of God. We're **drawn** to him, we come to him in **faith**, we **trust** in him, we **see** him do great things. Yes even for **us**. Even for **you**, even for me. This story shows us that the devil's at work in this world, and he **will** cause us to doubt. But Jesus is **greater**, Jesus is **stronger**, and through him and his power, his people **will** overcome unbelief and be saved.