

**Mark 9: 28 and 29; “Prayer and Fasting are Needed”, Sermon # 75 in the series –
“Astonished at His Teaching”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall
on May 3rd, 2015, in the Morning Worship Service.**

This man who had brought his son to Jesus had said that he believed, but he needed a stronger faith. He needed a stronger faith to believe that this miracle could take place, because the demon had been with his son so long. And he needed a stronger faith because he had not seen any of Christ’s disciples cast it out. The Apostles, who had been gifts to cast out demons, knew that this miracle could take place, but they needed instruction concerning their faith as well. The question that we need to ask ourselves is this: What was further needed to complete the faith of these disciples who had been given power over demons? They evidently did not have the right kind of faith in exercise, because Jesus says so over in Matthew 17: 20, in the parallel passage. He says to them; you cannot cast out this demon, “Because of your unbelief; for assuredly, I say to you, if you have faith as a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, move; and nothing will be impossible for you.” “However,” He says, “This kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting.” Jesus is saying that there are different kinds of demonic strength and power. He is also saying that there are different kinds and degrees of faith that believers need to have in exercise, in order to defeat the power and strategies of Satan.

The object of living the Christian life is not to impress others with your ability to cast out demons. The object of the Christian life is to do the will of the Father in heaven. And in order to do His will it is absolutely necessary that you and I will find the wisdom and the power of the Lord Jesus to be sufficient for every area of our life, and every situation in which we find ourselves. If we will prove Christ’s wisdom and strength to ourselves, then we will be able, by His grace, to deal with the greatest of problems that come to us. We will be truly interested in being instructed as to how our faith in Him can grow and become stronger. Jesus is teaching us here that our faith will be strong enough to overcome the evil one if we will understand what we need to fight him. 1st – There is need for you to understand that there are different kinds of demons in the world today. 2nd - There is a need for you to pray more fervently against demonic activity and focus on your own obedience to Christ. And 3rd – There is a need for you to couple fasting with your prayers in order to defeat your adversary in his schemes. Let each of us ask ourselves this morning: Am I ready for spiritual battle?

1st of all – There are different kinds of demons that we have to deal with in the world today.

We must fight the good fight of faith to overcome them. Jesus saying in verse 29, “This kind can come out by nothing but prayer and fasting.” Many Christians and even whole churches of people in our day do not seem to realize that they are involved in a spiritual battle in relation to their living the Christian life. Many do not seem to understand how the kingdom of Christ advances in this fallen world of sin. There are many demons in the spiritual realm and some are stronger than others; just as there are many good angels, and some are stronger than others. In relation to this battle, there are strong Christians and there are also weak Christians. A strong Christian will see where their battle really is. Their battle most often takes place in their heart and their mind, in relation to their faith and their obedience to God. Many Christians in our day do not seem to understand that Satan is opposed to their faith growing stronger. Many do not seem to grasp that Satan is a murderer of the souls and bodies of men. Many Christians therefore have what I would term a lackadaisical faith in regard to this spiritual battle. They are spiritual pacifists. Their faith is not a faith to do exploits, or promote the truth, or zealously live the life of holiness. Their faith is not strong enough to do battle with their arch-enemy Satan. They are well-content to believe that the Lord Jesus did battle with Satan on the cross and won that battle; but they mistakenly believe that since he overcame Satan there at the cross, that they

do not have to do battle with him themselves, or overcome him themselves, in their living their life unto God. So when Satan comes against them, their faith does not rise to resist him, nor do they see how critical it is to put forth efforts to overcome him. They do not understand, and sometimes they do not want to understand.

Satan would like Christians to be unbelieving so that he can overcome them in their times of temptation. He would like them to be unbelieving so that nothing can be accomplished against his own kingdom of darkness. He would especially like them to be unbelieving in terms of their doing the will of God. Whether it is having no other gods before the true and living God, or whether it is honoring your father and your mother, or whether it is living a pure life, a humble life, or a loving life, His purpose is to try and create fear and doubt in relation to your being able to overcome him. But you should know that the Lord Jesus Christ has died for this very purpose; that you might overcome Satan as he tries to tempt you to sin and to unbelief. This is the spiritual battle that our God and our Christ have placed us in; and so we have no right to think of ourselves as pacifists in relation to it. Both ministers and the people whom they preach to, have been called by the Lord Jesus to be soldiers in the battle for truth and righteousness. They may not have not been given the task of casting out demons as these Apostles were. But they have been given the task of preaching and sharing the gospel. They have been called to be holy even as God is holy. They have been given the task of doing battle with Satanic strategies and oppositions in their culture and sometimes even their own church and in their own family.

This dear father of our text had faith, but he had much unbelief alongside it. These Apostles had faith, but it was because of their unbelief that they could not cast this demon out. You and I who are Christians will at times have to face the Satanic strategies which come to us, and we must learn to overcome them. Turn with me over to 1 Peter Chapter 5, and verse 8, and you will find a practical application. Peter says, "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour." "Resist him steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world." "But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory in Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect establish, strengthen, and settle you." Satan, you should know, is at the head of the whole demonic forces of demons and evil spirits. His is a kingdom of darkness, while Christ's is a kingdom of light. It was Satan's rebellion at the beginning of time and shortly after the creation of the world that brought about his downfall. It was his pride and his wanting to be like God and in the place of God, that led him to rebel against God's good purposes. In doing so, he convinced many other angels to follow him in his rebellion. This brought about their fall from their original righteousness, a fall from which there is no retrieval.

You find Satan's fall spoken of in Isaiah Chapter 14, verse 12. "How you have fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning!" "How you are cut down to the ground, you who weakened the nations!" "For you have said in your heart; I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will also sit on the mount of the congregation on the farthest sides of the north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High." Satan knew that it was the purpose of God; that man, who was created a little lower than the angels would eventually through God's Son, be raised to a position of being higher than the angels, in the final analysis of things. This idea he especially hated. He did not like the thought of man's advancement over the angels, and so even though he was given the charge of "guarding the garden of God", one day he came into that garden disguised as a wise serpent and he beguiled the first woman Eve. He deceived her into thinking that if she just disobeyed God in this one commandment that He had given to them; not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, that she would not die. Rather she would become wise like God. Satan suggested that God was holding out on her; that He was not willing to give her the best things; the knowledge of good and evil which she could obtain through eating the fruit of this tree. She

looked, and she saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and that it was a tree desirable to make one wise; and so she took some and ate. She thought that she should think for herself, and she thought that she would become very wise.

This, dear ladies, was the great challenge of Satan to Eve then, and it is the great challenge to each of you here today. Will you think according to the wisdom of the Bible or will you be deceived by the demonic earthly wisdom of Satan? What is the demonic wisdom of Satan? It is to take the truth and to mix it with a lie. Was it true that Eve would become like God knowing the difference between good and evil if she ate the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil? Yes it was true. But Satan added a lie along with it. When Eve told Satan what Adam had told her, which was the word of God to them, "You shall not eat of it, lest you die; Satan immediately said, "You will not surely die." "For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil. Here is the root of deception. It is to add to the word of God yourself; those things that God has not expressly said or commanded. And it is to believe someone else, whether it is a fallen angel or a man, who tells you that somehow your disobedience to His commands will bring you wisdom. You see, Satan's purpose is to use deceived people to fulfill his own evil purposes, just as it is God's good purpose to use people enlightened by the word of God, to show forth the importance of faith in Christ and His word, so that many might be saved. There is where the battle is joined.

The terrible consequence of Eve's sin was that she really did believe that she was wise in what she had done; for a time. She had discovered a form of wisdom, but it was not God's wisdom. Her eyes were opened, but she had died spiritually. Dear ladies, you must ask yourself the question of whether you, by the grace of Christ, will seek to live according to the wisdom of God, or will you let yourself be deceived by the wisdom of the Devil? Will you submit to live by God's word, or will you make up your own mind? This decision will impact every area of your life for good, if you will seek to live according to the exhortations and commandments of the Bible. Eve's way, unfortunately, is the way that many of the women in this world live, sad to say. They live thinking that they are wise because they strive to be free of submission to the word of God. They strive to be free from male headship and authority. But the Bible states that it is such a very good thing when a young woman growing up lives in submission to her parents, and rests herself under the wing of her father's authority. It is such a very good thing when she learns to pray to God, that He would guide her into all of the truth; and that she asks her Lord for the grace to have a good attitude in learning to work and to wait for the best things in life. How blessed a thing it is when she studies to find Christ's grace to be pure in heart, and trusts God for her future, whether it is job, or family, or any aspect of future usefulness to Christ.

Satan will often test that commitment, and tempt young people to accept the wisdom and ways of the world. And he will often try to do the same with women who are married. Will you ladies, after you have married, want a career and independence in your thinking, from the husband of your youth? Will you think it wisdom to try to lead him in that holy relationship of marriage when God has made him the head of the household? Will you think it wisdom in the church to try to seek to become a public teacher, an elder, or a pastor when God's word has expressly said that it should not be so, because of Eve's sin in the beginning? These are very important decisions that each woman has to make. The way of the Lord, the way of truth, the way of true satisfaction, is all bound up in doing everything in the way that God has laid it out in the Bible. These verses are telling you that it is a battle which you can win by faith in the word of God.

Dear fathers; do you see the importance and significance of your having the strong faith to bring all the problems that you see in your children to the Lord Jesus; not saying, "If you can do anything, but rather, "Lord, if you are willing, you can do this great thing and take away the demonic influences from them." It is not enough for you to command and to teach them the

good and right way. They must be brought to see their need of Christ and His grace, in order to stay in it. And how many young men today are being turned aside from the greatness of the reward of serving and following Christ by the demonic activity of Satan? It is Satan who tries to convince a young man that there is something better and more interesting, in their pursuing earthly and worldly pleasures rather than the spiritual pleasures of knowing God. It is Satan who even tries to convince a young man that a better and deeper knowledge of the Bible is not needed in order to be a strong Christian. But remember, the pursuit of Biblical knowledge and doctrine is the basis of your becoming wise and holy and useful in Christ's service. Don't let Satan convince you that doctrinal or moral compromise is the better part of wisdom. It will only lead you to being a weak Christian; and if you have not yet been converted to Christ, it may lead to your losing your soul. What will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his soul?

2nd - There is a need for you to pray more fervently against demonic activity and focus on your own obedience to Christ.

“And when He had come into the house, His disciples asked Him privately, ‘Why could we not cast it out?’” “So He said to them, ‘This kind can come out by nothing but prayer and fasting.’” Let's think about the subject of prayer first. Turn with me over to Ephesians Chapter 6, verse 10. “Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might.” “Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.” The devil is a very wily, tricky, and scheming being. The only way that you, as a Christian will be able to stand against him is by being strong in the Lord. You will only be able to come up against him in the power of Christ's might. This is what I think happened to the disciples on that day when they could not cast out this strong demon from the epileptic boy. They did not think about the power that had been granted to them, as having been given to them, as a gift given them in relation to their faith. They were not as strong in Christ as they should have been. A person could rationalize this by saying, “Well, how was I to know that I would encounter a demon-possessed boy today?” “If I only would have known that this was going to happen today, I would have prayed about it.” Just so. But the truth is; that you never know what you are going to face in a day, either from the hand of God, or from Satan, and thus you must exercise your faith and prepare yourself for such trials, or they will indeed catch you by surprise, and you may be defeated in the spiritual battle.

This, I believe, is what happened to these disciples. Their faith was not strong enough because they had not risen up early that morning and girded themselves with the armor of God, and they had not prayed. The Master was not with them, but they could have been with Him in prayer. How often, we as Christians have been told to read our Bibles and pray and yet we find that there are many times when we do not do it. Satan is prowling about like a roaring lion, and we will not arise and read and pray. “Put on the whole armor of God that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil.” Then look at verse 12. “For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places.” How many times do we think that our greatest problems and enemies are flesh and blood? We think that we must wrestle with the people who we will have to deal with on any given day. They are the ones, we think, that are keeping us from peace and joy and blessing, because they are sinning against us, or they are hard to get along with, or they are bothering us and keeping us from fulfilling our desired purpose?

Let us ask ourselves a question. Does God ordain all things after the counsel of His will? Of course he does. He says so in Ephesians 1: 11. Then whatever you run in to, every day, in respect to ornery or sinful people is something that he has ordained for you. He has ordained them, and the situations you find yourself in with them, so that you might learn to obey Him in respect to

whatever they are doing, which might be wrong. You may have to run and flee from them if they are immoral. You may have to disassociate yourself from them if they are angry, proud, and violent people. You may have to stay and listen and counsel them if they are needy or misinformed people as regards the truth of the Bible. But in each of these cases where you encounter the weakness or sinfulness of another person's fleshly or sinful attitudes or actions, remember that it is possible that Satan is trying to take advantage of them in order to fight against the truth of Christ. Satan is striving against the gospel's saving them, or the Word of God's instructing them. What should you do? It is not God's will that you should compromise, cave in, or sin against Him in how you react to them. And so, it will go a long way, I think, when I tell you that you should remember the words of this text. Your fight is not against flesh and blood. Your fight is against the forces of evil which may be trying to use them to promote what is false or evil. And Satan's strategy is to try to ruin and take captive the souls of these people, and to use them to work against your being able to honor and obey God, and be useful in promoting Christ's kingdom and his glory. And therefore you should not fight with the people; your fight is with the Devil. You should rather pray for them, and speak to them about the truth of the Bible if you can.

Our Lord would have you to pray for those who are captives of the Evil one, and to witness to those who are in the kingdom of darkness. All those who are not of Christ's kingdom of light are in darkness. They are blind and deaf spiritually. They may be rabid opposers of God. They stumble over the stumbling stone of having to believe in Christ for eternal life. They may be very opposed to, and offended by your witness to them. They may oppose the absolute necessity of conversion to Christ, so that they might be saved from their sins; but they are not the ones whom you are to fight. Your fight is not with flesh and blood. It is with the devil standing behind them or working in them; he is the one whom you are to fight. You are to love your enemies and pray for those who spitefully use you. Jesus says in Luke 6, verse 27, "But I say to you who hear: Love your enemies and do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, and pray for those who spitefully use you." "To him who strikes you on the one cheek, offer the other also." But look down now, at Ephesians 6: 16, and you will see the power of prayer against the evil one – "Above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one." "And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God; praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints...."

This is how you become strong in the Lord and the strength of His might. This is how you stand against the wiles of the devil. You see your faith in Jesus Christ as a shield which He has given to you. He died to purchase this shield for your heart. You remember all that He did for you in His perfect obedience in His life. You remember all that He did for you in going to the cross to suffer, bleed, and die there for your sins. You make that your helmet. And you take out your Bible, the sword of the Spirit, and you begin to hack away at Satan's lies and schemes to take you, or others, away from following Jesus. You pray against the lies and the rationalizations which other people might give to you which would compromise your belief in the Word of truth; which would compromise in any way, your obedience to God's good commandments which are given you in that word.

And 3rd – You may also have to couple fasting with your prayers in order to defeat your adversary in his schemes.

"This kind can come out by nothing but prayer and fasting." Once again, let me remind you; the Apostles did not know that they were going to run into this case of the demon-possessed epileptic boy. How could they have conducted a fast, and abstained from food, when they did not know of this event beforehand? The answer is this: I think that the kind of fasting that Jesus was talking about was secret or private fasting. He was saying that in their living their life as

Apostles and ministers unto Him, that there would be many times when they ought to be secretly abstaining from food. Those times of fasting, then, would be used by them to concentrate more upon prayer to God for the very strengthening of their faith. This fasting and prayer, according to the Spirit's working, would bring to them the very power that they would need, in ministering to people on any given day; especially the difficult cases like this one. If fasting had been more of a habit with them, then they would have been ready; they would have had the power to have been able to cast out that demon that day. They had already been given the power to cast out demons before. But this one was stronger. To cast it out would not be something which they could do simply because they had been authorized to do so. It would require greater spiritual strength and authority than they had obtained when they received their commission before. It would take a greater power from the Lord Jesus.

A man may have a commission and not have the power to carry it out. Here was an example of unbelief in relation to that commission. Faith needed to be strengthened. Greater spiritual power was needed for this particularly desperate case. Fasting was necessary. Let me give you the example of our Lord Jesus. In John Chapter 4, after Jesus had spoken to the woman at the well, his disciples had come back from the city of Sychar where they had gone to buy food. In verse 31 it says, "In the meantime His disciples urged Him, saying, 'Rabbi, eat.'" "But He said to them, I have food to eat which you do not know." "Therefore, the disciples said to one another, 'Has anyone brought Him anything to eat?'" "Jesus said to them, 'My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work.'" In other words, He was fasting and being strengthened for greater ministry in this way that was not apparent to the disciples. And I believe that He was fasting because the spiritual things which He was praying for and thinking about were more important to Him than His necessary food at that time. The people who were being saved, or who needed to be saved, were more important to Him. His food was to do the will of Him who sent Him.

Now, I would suggest to you that this is the way that it should be with us if we would like to know the strength necessary to minister in Jesus' name. If nothing but prayer and fasting would cast the demon out of this boy, then nothing but prayer and fasting will avail for us. If we want to see Satan's power weakened and finally broken over the lives of people whom we love, then we must learn to fast. It will only be by prayer and fasting that we will see him defeated in his attempts to thwart the progress of Christ's kingdom in our hearts and minds, and in the church of which we are a part. Nothing else will do. Where do we begin, then? We begin by praying about this matter, and by asking ourselves whether we think that we can skip certain meals that we know that we will not need. And during that time of fasting we will replace our eating with feeding upon the Word of God and praying. We attempt to make this a more of a habit in our lives. And then, having done this, when we find ourselves in our greatest afflictions and being oppressed by the devil, let us do as holy Job did. In Job 23: 12 he says, "I have not departed from the commandment of His lips; I have treasured the words of His mouth more than my necessary food." That is how this kind of devil shall come out.