

Mark 9: 28 and 29; "Nothing but Prayer and Fasting", Sermon # 75 in the series – "Astonished at His Teaching", Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on June 27th, 2010, in the Morning Worship Service.

We have been looking at the subject of faith, in relation to these verses. We have seen that while Jesus was coming down from the mountain where He had been transfigured, that a dispute was taking place between the rest of his apostles and some scribes. The disciples had been unable to cast out the demon from this epileptic boy. And so, because there was this inability, apparently the scribes were questioning the reliability of their Lord's power. The disciples were no doubt insisting that the Lord Jesus had given them this power to cast out demons; but they did not know why they could not successfully use it on this particular occasion. The scribes were attempting to portray them to the father of the boy, and to the multitude, as weak. Their Jesus was not as strong as they made Him out to be, they were probably saying. But Jesus' arrival at that very time had changed everything. He asked what they had been discussing, and when the boy's father had explained that the disciples could not cast out this demon, Jesus answered and said, "O faithless generation, how long shall I be with you?" "How long shall I bear with you?" It is this statement that we need to remember when we come to think about why Jesus' disciples could not cast out the demon. It was because everyone in this particular situation did not have the right kind of faith in exercise to see a miracle take place. These scribes did not have any faith at all. They were skeptical unbelievers. They did search the scriptures, but they did so with an eye to condemning the true Christ who was standing before them. The man who brought his son to Jesus had said that he believed, but he needed a stronger faith to believe that this miracle could take place, because the demon had been with his son so long, and because none of Christ's disciples could cast it out. And the Apostles, who did believe in both God and Christ and knew that this miracle could take place; but they had need for their faith to be instructed. This is what we want to look at here this morning. What more did the disciples need to do? What was further needed to complete the faith of these disciples who had been given power over demons? They obviously 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 in exercise needed to address this situation and to successfully cast the strong demon out.

I was trying to convince you, in my last sermon, that not all faith is alike. It is true that there is there is only one kind of true and saving faith. That is faith in the

work and power of our Lord Jesus Christ to save and to heal. But not all people have this true and saving faith. There is the faith of demons who believe in God and they tremble we are told in James. Then there is the faith by which people "profess to know God, but by their deeds they deny Him," we are told in Titus Chapter 1, verse 16. There is even the kind of faith which calls upon the Lord, saying, "Lord, Lord", and yet that person will not repent of their sins and begin learning to try to do the Lord's will. Listen to what our Lord Jesus says in Matthew 7, verse 21. "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven." "Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?" "And then I will declare unto them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness." The object of living the Christian life is not to impress others with your ability to cast out demons. The object of living the Christian life is to do the will of the Father in heaven. And in order to do His will it is imperative 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 find Him to be so, then we will be able to, by His grace, glorify God and enjoy Him forever. We will be truly interested in being instructed as to how our faith in Him can become stronger. We will want to do His will even if we do not see the earthly physical miracle that we are looking for in relation to the increased strength and health of the body which we are hoping for. Jesus is saying here that our faith will be strong enough to overcome the evil one if we understand 3 things about him. 1st – There are different kinds of demons that we have to deal with in the world today. 2nd- There is a need for us to pray more fervently against demonic activity and for our own obedience which will be a part of the advance of Christ's kingdom. And 3rd – we may also have to couple fasting with our prayers in order to gain the victory over them. We are facing a spiritual battle of immense proportions in relation to living our Christian life. Let us take careful heed to the things which I would bring to your attention here this morning.

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 and seeing the kingdom of Christ advance 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 weak Christians. A strong Christian will see where their battle lies. It lies with 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 strong. Many do not realize 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 and promote the truth and 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, and attempt to overcome him. They do not understand, and sometimes they do not want to understand.

Satan would like them 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 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 you and I are in, and 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 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 learn to overcome them.

Let's turn to 1 Peter Chapter 5, and verse 8 to begin to make sense of these things. 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 is at the head of the whole demonic forces of demons and evil spirits. It was his rebellion at the beginning of time and shortly after the creation of the world; his wanting to be like God and in the place of God; it was his pride that brought about his downfall and the fall of all the angels who sinned with him in rebelling against the authority and purpose of God. You find this 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 be higher than the angels in the final analysis of things. This he especially did not like, 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 beguiled the first woman Eve into thinking that if she just disobeyed God in the one commandment that He had given to them; not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, that somehow she would not die. Rather she would become wise like God. Satan was saying that somehow God was holding out on her and not willing to give her the supposedly best things which came through eating the fruit of this tree. She should rather think for herself and she would be really very wise. This, dear ladies, was the great challenge of Satan to Eve then, and it is the great challenge to you today. Will you think according to the wisdom of the Bible or will you be deceived by the demonic 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 him 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." She had also added something the word of God which God had not said; she said that God said that she should not touch it. 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 wisdom. You see, Satan's purpose is to use deceived people to fulfill his purposes just as it is God's purpose to use people enlightened by the word of God to the importance of faith in Christ and His word, so that His purposes would be fulfilled. 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 spiritually died. Dear ladies, you must ask yourself the question of whether you will seek to live according to the wisdom of God, or the wisdom of the Devil? Will you submit to live by His word, or will you make up your own mind? As a young woman will you live in submission to your parents and your father's authority and study to find Christ and grace to be pure in heart and mind and body, or will you go Satan's way that think that sensuality and sexuality outside of marriage are to be pursued? Will you think it wisdom to live with a boy outside of marriage or will you wait to give yourself to the man whom God has prepared for you at the right time. Will you follow his lead? Will you stay home and raise his children? 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 of you as women will have 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. 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 to stay in it. And how many young men today, young Christian men and young men thinking about being Christians are being turned aside from the greatness of the reward of serving and following Christ by the demonic activity of Satan who convinces them that the music that they should listen to, and the music that they play, should be the music of the world and this life, and that sometimes it is good to question God and His word which gives us the truth and gives us the right way to live our lives. I am not speaking against the young man who is trying to find himself or express himself in music. I am speaking against those who believe that it is good to question God's truth and word, and the need of light and life from Christ in order to find the meaning of life. Let him not question that real life is found in Christ. Do not be turned aside from the greatness of the reward of Christ. Dear young men, do you see where all this unbelieving questioning leads? It leads to separation from fellowship with God and His blessed wisdom, and the influences of His grace. Take a decided stand against the wisdom and music of the world. Let your music and your life be governed by the wisdom of God's word. This is something that you must learn to do when you are young, lest you have nothing to bring to God and nothing to give to God in your youth. Remember your Creator in the days of your youth. Ask yourself, young men, whether you are strong in Christ's grace. Ask Him what needs to be cast out of your life. Turn over to 1 John Chapter 2, and verse 3. "Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments." This is very simple, and very direct. Do you go about to keep the commandments of God? Now look down at verse 12. "I write to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for His name's sake." "I write to you fathers, because you have known Him who is from the beginning." "I write to you, young men, because you have overcome the wicked one." You see the young man who has overcome the evil one has come to the place where he will not allow the evil one to deceive him any more. How does he do that? Look at verse 14. "I have written to you, fathers, because you have known Him who is from the beginning." "I have written to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides

in you, and you have overcome the evil one." O those of you young men who are thinking of following Christ, but you are not decided about it; there is a way that Satan and all of his demonic hosts; by using all of their strategies, will try to steal your soul and take you down to hell, and make you miserable there. There are even ways that these demonic forces use to try to make a Christian young man ineffective in God's service. But all of these shall be defeated when the word of God abides in you. Is it abiding in you? If it is, you will overcome the evil one.

Now 2ndly – We need to understand that there is a need for us to pray more fervently against demonic activity and for our own obedience which will mean the advance of Christ's kingdom.

"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 us take prayer first. Turn with me 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 stand against him is by being strong in the Lord and move 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 of the power that had been granted to them in connection with Christ Himself. They were not as strong in Him 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 would have known it, 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 for such trials or they will 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 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 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 be patient toward them if they are needy people. But in each of these cases you will be fighting the spiritual battle against the schemes of the devil. It is not God's will that you 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 are trying to use them, and use you in relation to them, to dishonor God.

You are to pray for, 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 away from following Jesus, and which would compromise your belief in the word of truth, and which would compromise in any way, your obedience to the good commandments which are given you in that word. O dear Christian are you praying? Are you using all prayer when you pray? Are you using praise? Are you calling upon the name of the Lord fervently for greater wisdom, greater supplies of grace, greater love, and greater faith to do His will? Then you shall see sin cast out

and unbelief slain. You will remember the words of the Lord Jesus: "A disciple is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master." "It is enough for a disciple that he be like his teacher, and a servant like his master." "If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more will they call those of his household!" "Therefore do not fear them." "For there is nothing covered that will not be revealed, and hidden that will not be known." "Whatever I tell you in the dark, speak in the light; and what you hear in the ear, preach on the house-tops." "And do not fear those who can kill the body, but cannot kill the soul." "But rather fear Him who is able to destroy soul and body in hell." That is not the devil that Jesus is speaking of there; it is God Himself. If you fear God, you will pray to Him about the devil. You will say, "Lead me not into temptation." You will say, "Let me crush him under my feet." You will say, "Let me triumph over him, my enemy."

And then, 3^{rdly} and finally - We may also have to couple fasting with our prayers in order to gain the victory over them.

"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 conduct a fast, an abstaining from food, when they did not know this beforehand? I think it is because the kind of fasting that Jesus was talking about was secret or private fasting. That is, He was saying that in their living their life as Apostles and ministers unto Him and unto God, that there would be many times when they ought to be secretly abstaining from food. And those times, then, would be used to concentrate more upon prayer to God for the very strengthening of faith, and the very power that they would need, in ministering to people on any given day; especially the difficult cases like this one. If this were a life-style with them, then they would be ready and 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 done because they had simply 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 receive a commission and not have the power to carry it out. Here was an example of unbelief in relation to that commission. Faith must 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 do to see Satan's power weakened and finally broken over the lives of people whom we love and want to see saved. Nothing but prayer and fasting will do to 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 deliberately skipping certain meals that we know that we do not need to eat. And we replace them with feeding upon the Word of God and praying. We attempt to make this a life-style. And then, when we are in our greatest afflictions and oppressions of the devil, let us do as holy Job did. Job 23: 12 says, "I have not departed from the commandment of His lips; I have treasured the words of His mouth more than my necessary food." This is how this kind of devil shall come out.