

Sermon, September 13, 2015

Thought, Attitude and Action

Mark 9:14–29



Dear Friends in Christ, grace and peace from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

One of the things we learn in life is how to stand strong, chin up and face our challenges. But, it is not easy to stand if there are things that counter force you. I have seen soldiers standing guard and after a while they faint and fall. Sports people try to be strong and although flexible once they face

obstacles tend to fall to the ground. Even when you think you can stand strong be careful because you might fall. One of the popular sports MMA and jujitsu, players want to defeat the opponent but once the opponent grips them in their arms or legs there is no escape, there is no advantage.

It is difficult to stand upright when there is pressure, obstacle or a force that dominates you.

In our Gospel reading we see three examples of people who could not stand upright and the forces that dominated them, even though they wanted too, and as they tried they were dealing with three things thought, attitude and action.

I. A demon possessed boy.

First a demon possessed boy who can hardly stand upright. Mark gives us a graphic description of the boy. His tongue and body are seized by a spirit that convulses him, causing him to roll around on the ground, even plunging him into fire and tossing him into water. With a body as rigid as a corpse, he is unable to stand. He cannot by the power of his own will think himself out of this life-threatening predicament. His limbs and life thrash and flop around in the dust as one for whom it would appear that death would be a relief and mercy. All by the work of a demon controlling him.

Friends, the reality of demon possession was a threat and a reality back then, as it is even today, and more for the devil works in many and various ways that keep many from standing upright.

Unfortunately because of our materialism today, sometimes we reject the notion that satan is very much active in our world today. We reject that our struggle is "...against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places." (Eph. 6:12) This we call the spiritual warfare.

One reason for a materialistic attitude is indifference. When your world is an easy place to live in, it's easy to forget that a spiritual war is going on. It's easy to forget that millions of souls in the world are in the grasp of Satan. And it's easy to forget that Satan always takes advantage of Christians who are lethargic, indolent, or spiritually stagnant. He loves it when Christians try to hole up in a sanctified environment instead of fighting the battle.

Another reason for our materialistic attitude of indifference is our worldliness. Too many Christians crave earthly, temporal pleasures instead of the rigors of warfare.

They seek a life of ease—a life of entertainment and activities, never realizing their role in the battle of the ages.

We can't let spiritual warfare rage around us without joining the fight. It's vital that we take spiritual inventory by asking, am I making a difference in the fight? Too many will settle for indifference and worldliness. Satan has a heyday with such Christians.

Therefore knowledge of the evil one is important, as is having the right thought, the right attitude as to how we are to deal with spiritual warfare and how to act, in how to get involved in this spiritual warfare. After all the Scripture says: "We know that we are from God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one." (1 John 5:19)

Satan is the god of this world (2 Cor. 4:4), and so he controls much of what occurs in the events of this world, through governments, societies, and even our choices and thoughts.

Christ has been Satan's primary target, but since Satan couldn't defeat Christ, what he now does is to oppose everything Christ does. Christ revealed the truth (John 1:17), but Satan conceals the truth. In John 8:44, we hear Jesus saying of the devil: "He was a murderer from the beginning, and has nothing to do with the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies."

Christ gives life, but Satan takes life. The one who trusts in Christ as Savior and Lord "has passed out of death into life" (5:24). However, Satan "was a murderer from the beginning" (8:44) Christ produces spiritual fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self—control (Gal. 5:22—23). But Satan loves the fresh fruit of "immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these" (Gal. 5:19—21).

Christ permits tests or trials in our lives to help us grow spiritually (James 1:3), but Satan lures us with temptation to destroy us (1 Peter 5:8). Christ sets believers free (John 8:31—32), but Satan enslaves the lost (2 Tim. 2:26). Christ defends believers (1 John 2:1), but Satan accuses them (Rev. 12:10).

Today Satan continues to oppose the work of Christ. He will fight against Christ when He returns and will finally be dealt with when he is cast eternally into the lake of fire.

But in the meantime he can oppress us so we can't stand upright. Can control our thoughts through temptations and through the falsehood of our flesh and desires. Therefore today we need to examine our thoughts, our attitudes and our actions. Are they led by Christ and His words, or are they led by Satan and his lies?

II. Second, let's see the father of the boy.

Another one who couldn't stand upright, is the poor father, who has watched his son since childhood endure this demonic agony. Helpless to alleviate the shame and pain of his son, the father cannot stand upright under the weight of this affliction. He brought his son to Jesus' disciples, but this demon was apparently too strong for them. The disciples disappoint. Jesus laments their lack of faith: "O faithless generation, how long am I to be with you? How long am I to bear with you?" (v 19).

At first he appears to have the right thought, attitude and actions. He brought his son to the disciples. But of not much help, but he didn't give up. Look at this attitude,

when the disciples couldn't do it, and Jesus points out their lack of faith: "if you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us." He said, "23 And Jesus said to him, "If you can! All things are possible for one who believes." 24 Immediately the father of the child cried out and said, "I believe; help my unbelief!" I believe, help my unbelief! All the right thought, all the right attitude, all the right action!

III. Third, the disciples

What about the disciples, they seem to have the right thought too, they thought that they could cast the evil one away. After all sometime earlier Jesus sent them out (Mark 6) into the mission field, there they were casting out demons and healing the sick. But now, they are unable to cast out this unclean spirit in the boy. Instead have cause a discussion with the leaders witnessing the act. They are unable to give answer for their powerlessness. They cannot stand upright.

Something was lacking, their attitude regarding the needs of the boy and of the father where right, their action was right, but something was lacking. Jesus explains later that they needed prayer. Jesus' "disciples asked him privately, "Why could we not cast it out?" 29 And he said to them, "This kind cannot be driven out by anything but prayer."

IV. We too can't stand upright.

What about us today? The reality dear friends, is that most of the time we can't stand upright either, even when we think we are. Even when we think we have the right thoughts and attitude and actions.

Have examined our thoughts lately? I mean truly and according to God's statutes and commandments? In the light of God's words?

Earlier I mentioned jujitsu, one of my sons practice jujitsu and has won some competitions in town and all through Alberta. But one of the maneuvers if you wish is to immobilize your opponent, the best way is by holding the opponent by the arm around the neck or the legs around the body. Doesn't take long until the opponent agrees with the force of the dominator and so does a simple move, the defeated opponent taps on the harm of the opponent to let him know that he can't hold any more, he is about to chock, he is about to faint. So he agrees with the dominant force and allows for the win.

Similarly in our Christian walk, our thoughts dominates our attitude and our actions. But those are usually dominated by our desires and by our sins. For example those who accept a free homosexual life style, and support it, do so not because there are valid reasons, but because there is something else in the life of the supporter that needs approval, a sin that needs to be converted in something acceptable and that holds God's word as something outdated, or trying to convince God to accept us as we are but without Christ, without repentance and forgiveness. Now that dear friends is satan's doing, his lies are active infiltrating our thoughts, directing our attitudes and our actions, and in the end will through us into the dust of our sin and condemnation.

Today we need to pray as the father of the boy did. Jesus invites us to come to him to believe and trust him and His word. "All things are possible for one who believes" (v 23), Jesus said. These words of Jesus open the man's lips for a prayer. It is a prayer that abandons everything in God's hands, it is a prayer that hand over our thoughts, our attitudes and our actions into his hands: "I believe; help my unbelief!" (v 24). That is the prayer not only of this desperate father but also of every Christian. It is your prayer, for we cannot stand upright.

When we pray the words of the Third Article's explanation in the catechism, "I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him," we are not merely making a statement about our conversion, our coming to faith. We are, in fact, confessing that it is only by the Spirit at work in the Gospel that we believe now, in the present tense. "I believe now! Help my continuing struggle against unbelief!"

But prayer and faith, is also nourished, strengthened and made right when we hear Jesus words. His words given to us in the Scriptures announced in this house of prayer and received through our daily habitual reading of God's word through Bible studies and through devotions.

Once again, we begin our Christian program this week, for children, youth, and adults, for all.

We do so have Christian Education program, so that we learn more about God, have more faith and increase in prayer, but also in action. For if we learn about God's word but not practice what we learn, we can't stand upright, we can't stand upright against the evil one, our flesh and the world.

And how we are not to study God's word when the precious Gospel with all its power come to us through the words of Jesus, our savior and our Lord. The one who has defeated evil, and the one who can make us stand upright, but his death on the cross of Calvary. He is the one who says "all things are possible"

In His name Amen.