

Raise the Roof**Mark 9: 14 - 29**

Raise the Roof. This is the title of this morning's message.

I'm sure you've heard this phrase a time or two especially if you're any sort of sports fan. Raising the roof implies that something has happened on the field of play that has really amped up the home crowd and has completely changed the momentum or dynamics of the game.

Maybe a baseball player had a timely hit that drives in the go-ahead run late in the game - or in the 15th inning.

Maybe the defense of a football team sacks the opposing quarterback which forces a fumble, putting the home team in perfect scoring position.

Maybe this happens in October when almost every pitch thrown seems like it could tip the balance one way or the other.

Maybe it occurs in January when each offensive drive could determine if your favorite football team will advance to the next round of the playoffs in route to the Superbowl.

There are so many different scenarios that can play out on the court or on the field which can electrify the crowd and bring the spectators to their feet, making them howl like a bunch of ... well, fanatics. I'm embarrassed to say that I've been one of those fans on occasion. When this happens, it's often referred to as raising the roof.

But raising the roof can happen outside the sports arena too. Take for example the events that are recorded in Mark 9.

Remember, Jesus has just descended the mountain with Peter, James and John after his stunning transfiguration, and no sooner have they planted their feet on the level plain, a chaotic mob descends upon them.

Mark writes that the teachers of the law were arguing with the disciples while a large crowd looked on. And you can rest assured that they weren't silent onlookers, but people eager to shout out share their advice and comments with anyone who would listen.

Fortunately, Jesus' physical presence quickly brought some semblance of peace and order to the scene.

Chaos can be a very real and often detrimental thing in our lives. In little doses, chaos can seem fun and exciting, because it helps us escape the mundane and routine aspects of our lives, but in large doses, chaos drains us emotionally and physically and may even cause us to experience depression, anxiety, fear - perhaps even a loss of faith.

The only silver lining of chaos that I can think of is that it may evoke in us a desire to return to a simpler way of life that may be less exciting – true - but much more conducive to hearing and following God.

The sad truth, however, is that many people live for and seek out chaos because it gives them a false sense of power and influence, significance or meaning.

Just look at Chicago and Portland right now. I lived in the suburbs of Portland for 10 years in the late nineties and early 2000's and I enjoyed going down to the riverfront and visiting all the quaint shops. Portland was once called the most walkable city in America. Now I wouldn't take my fire – breathing pet dinosaur for a walk down there!

But some people think that if they're able to move the chaos meter just a bit higher, then they've done a good thing, but all they've done is fall victim to the father of chaos, causing harm to themselves and others.

As we read in Mark, the father of chaos and lies is busy making this boy and his father's life a living hell. And the father has no apprehension in telling Jesus his story:

"A spirit has robbed him of his speech. Whenever it seizes him, it throws him to the ground. He foams at the mouth, gnashes his teeth and becomes rigid. I asked your disciples to drive out the spirit, but they could not." He continues: "He has been this way since childhood. It has often thrown him into fire or water to kill him."

Mark doesn't give us the age of the boy, but I'm guessing he's about Calem's age, maybe 11 or 12. It doesn't really matter though, except to the dad who's had to endure not only watching his son go through such horrible and dangerous episodes but also carries the burden of trying to protect his son whenever this evil spirit acts up.

And because of these extremely traumatic experiences, he seems totally resigned to a life of trouble, has lost any hope of normalcy, and is desperate. We can hear it in his plea to Jesus: *"If you can do anything, take pity on us and help us."*

Most men I know have a lot of pride. So, asking for help from someone else is typically not their modus operandi. It's ill-advised in the men's manual for life, but this is his son he's talking about. So, he lays aside his pride for the sake of his son and begs Jesus for help.

Now, we know the rest of the story. Jesus does help. After quite a spirited exhibition, the spirit finally leaves. The boy appears to be dead, but Jesus helps the boy to his feet, and he regains his footing and his life.

And that's it. There are no other recorded comments from the boy or his father.

I suppose Mark wants it this way in order to keep the focus on the main character Jesus, as well it should be.

But here's the thing I want us to see - and the reason why I entitled my message ... Raise the Roof - Because once Jesus goes inside the house which I presume has a roof, Jesus answers the disciples' very pointed question: "*Why couldn't we drive it out?*" (referring to the evil spirit that had been possessing the boy)

Likewise, Jesus' answer was very concise and direct: "*This kind can come out only by prayer.*" End of discussion.

Notice that Jesus did not go into some lesson about the different levels or hierarchy of Satan's minions.

He didn't mention that they may have skipped a couple of steps in their Jewish exorcism manual - which probably is a real thing.

And He didn't even chastise them by reminding them that it wasn't that long ago that the disciples were sent out with Jesus' blessing which Mark tells us about back in chapter 6 that they *"drove out many demons and anointed many sick people with oil and healed them."*

He didn't say any of that stuff to them which we parents love to say to our children when they fall short or mess up ... "I told you so."

No, all Jesus says is ... *"This kind can come out only by prayer."*

Have you ever heard the phrase, "Less is more"? I think that Jesus' response is a perfect example of this saying. In saying one brief sentence, Jesus said a whole lot.

But you might be asking yourself ... well, exactly what did he say?

Perhaps this might help us gain some insight:

What do you think went through the disciples' minds after they had some time to reflect upon Jesus' response?

Here's what I think they may have thought:

"Wait a minute. I never heard Jesus pray before he cast out that evil spirit! If I recall, all he said was ... *"You deaf and mute spirit, I command you, come out of him and never enter him again."*

When did he pray? I never heard him pray.

And maybe - just maybe - it is at this this moment that the light bulb went on. It wasn't Jesus who prayed, it was the boy's father! It was **his** prayer that moved God's hand to heal the boy!

Do you recall the father's gut-wrenching, and heart - felt response to Jesus statement ... *"Everything is possible for him who believes"*?

I do. It's one, if not the most, emphatic, heart-felt, gut-wrenching desperate exclamations in the Bible outside of when Christ cried out to his Father heaven while breathing his last breath on the cross: *"My God, My God, why has thou forsaken me?"*

The father cried out ... *"I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!"*

You see, this is the prayer Jesus was talking about.

It wasn't the prayer from the unruly mob that had no vested interest in the boy's condition.

It wasn't the prayers of the teachers of the law who were too busy hoping Jesus would fail at his mission and so become an afterthought and no longer a threat to their power or privileged lifestyle.

It wasn't the prayers of the disciples who, in my estimation, were acting like deer in the headlights, paralyzed by the realization that what had worked before was not working now.

No, it was the prayer of a father to the Son of God who was desperately concerned about his son whom he loved and would have done anything if he could have for his healing. But he couldn't so he confessed this reality to Jesus and begged him to intervene in a situation where he found himself completely helpless, out of ideas and out of faith.

Have you been there?

Have you ever just told Jesus that you're empty, that you're completely helpless and out of faith, and that you want to believe, but that you're struggling to do just that?

Then congratulations. You've prayed the type of prayer that God expects his children to pray.

Maybe the key point of prayer is admitting our helplessness to God and asking Him to do what we know we can never do ourselves.

As members of a fallen human race, we need to pray confessing ours sins and admitting to God that without him we have no hope of escaping the consequences of our sin and we're doomed for destruction.

As people of faith who are continually surrounded by naysayers and those who think Christianity is only for the psychologically and mentally impaired, we need to pray to God and ask him for protection, confessing to him that without his strength and guidance we will succumb to the lies of the world and perhaps even become an enemy of God.

As children of God, we need to express to God our dependence upon him for everything. Our food, our shelter, our very existence, our ability to love others.

And as people who have been called by God to serve and love and obey him, we need to tell God that we are unable to this very thing that he asks because our faith is weak and our disposition is one that tends toward rebelliousness and faithlessness, so we need his Spirit and Life within us.

God wants us to have a sober judgment concerning ourselves and our situation, and he wants us to verbalize this to him with honesty and vulnerability so that He can do what he does best: raise the roof of our unbelief that threatens to hold us down and hinder our sight of Jesus.

And this roof of unbelief that I speak about isn't necessarily the culprit that keeps us physically sick or financially poor or living in fear or causing us to make bad decisions.

The roof of unbelief I'm talking about is probably best described as the one obstacle that keeps us from engaging in the act of prayer in the first place. It's our thought life that tends to believe more often than not that God isn't listening to my prayers, so why bother even saying them.

Perhaps this might be a good thing to keep in mind:

Maybe the goal of our prayers probably shouldn't be that we would somehow gain something from God – as much as we want this to happen. Maybe the goal should be that the roof will be removed and then we'll have a clear line of sight into God's majesty and glory, and then all the things that we thought were so desperately important now fade dimly to the background as we behold a new and greater reality of the Savior.

Sort of like the centurion at the foot of the cross who heard Jesus cry out and saw how he died. He could not help but exclaim, *"Surely this man was the Son of God."*

Amen.