

# What only Jesus can do

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Preacher: Mark Dickson

[ 0 : 00 ] Now the title I've given to this message is What Only God Can Do, or perhaps better, What Only Jesus Can Do.

If you've closed your Bible, please why don't you open it again to Mark chapter 9, because I'll be referring two verses from it. Mark chapter 9, and of course from verse 14.

I want to begin by talking about our desire for power and control. It was interesting looking at Psalm 33 and the mentioning of the horse and people with their trust in horses.

Of course, if you're going out into a battle in an age where you need mobilization and it's horses or nothing, then wow, if you've got those horses, quite something.

Apparently the people who first started to use the stirrup, I've been told that in Europe, when the big clash came, when Tariq brought the armies across from Africa into Spain and was met head-on by Charles the Hammer.

[ 1 : 08 ] Charles the Hammer, he was able to hammer them back. I don't know if you're interested in ancient history. He was able to do that because he had, apparently, he had horses with stirrups, and that greatly helped.

So horses are an amazing thing, and an army needs mobilization. And here in Psalm 33, people are putting their trust in horses, and God is saying there, really, is that going to save you at the end of the day?

How many horses you've got and all that stuff. Well, I wanted to talk about our lives. It might not be horses that you put your trust in, but maybe it's your car or whatever else you have in your surround.

It's not the most natural thing for us to want to live comfortably. We want to have a good job. We want to have good education as best we can have, a nice place to stay as best we can.

As I mentioned, the car may just be the car that starts with winter coming up. You want a church, obviously. You want a school. You want, if possible, other places of learning and training.

[ 2 : 11 ] You want doctors to help you with the medical side of things. Television you want. Internet. Tax consultants. The list just goes on and on and on.

And so we get all these things, and we want all those things, and we control our lives that way. And if something goes wrong, we just get someone to kind of fix it. And so we control everything, and we've got almost like an app for everything.

And we end up having this situation where we've got our life, and God is sort of fitted into our life. He kind of gets fitted in there somewhere.

And we tend to think that if you're sick, we go to the doctor. If we need legal things, we go to the lawyer. And if you've got spiritual issues, we go to a pastor. And so there's something for everything, someone for everything, and my life is sorted.

And if my life doesn't work out as I'd like it to, then I feel that God is not treating me right. So there is a situation easy for us to be in and easy for us to drift into where we're controlling everything, and we've got the power, and we've got everything sorted out.

[ 3 : 26 ] And from God's perspective, that can be dangerous for us, because we feel that we're kind of managing everything.

And we might say on a Sunday with Psalm 33, we're not going to put our trust in horses. But if we had to come and do an audit, someone came and just had a look at your life to see what it is that you're putting your trust in, it might be a little different.

So on Sundays, we could say with Psalm 33, or in the week, if you're reading your Bible, you might be arrested by the words and say, yeah, that's what I believe. But in actual fact, too much trust has been putting in the things around you.

So people who have everything they need and who strive for that kind of life I've been describing often find that if they're honest, they don't really need God. Say we do, but we don't always live like that.

So that's the first thing I wanted to say. There is this issue, this problem that we have, and this tendency to want control. The second thing I want to say is that, and it starts to hone in on this text, is that God imposes limits on human power.

[ 4 : 36 ] Very strong limits, and in fact, limits on all powers. So just have a look at chapter 9, verse 18. You see it there. The Spirit, this Spirit, when it seizes him, it throws him to the ground.

The Father said, he foams at the mouth. I asked your disciples to drive out the Spirit, but they could not. And they probably felt they could, but they couldn't do it. Have a look at verse 28.

They're very perplexed. After Jesus had gone indoors, the disciples said to him, why couldn't we drive it out? So they were bumping up against a limit. This you're not going to be able to conquer.

This you can't do. So there's that limit. Mark chapter 9 begins on a mountain. Just cast your eye back. Mark chapter 9 begins with that transfiguration account.

It begins on a mountain, and then it goes down to the valley. On the mountain, they see Jesus in kingly glory. It's a foretaste. They see something of Jesus' glory that he'll have at the end of time, because he is, after all, the king of glory.

[ 5 : 40 ] He is the king of the kingdom. And his face shines, and it's just the most amazing event to behold. But down in the valley, it's not like that.

Down in the valley, demonic powers rage. Down in the valley, there's unbelief. There's a contrast between what's going on on the mountain and what's going on down here in the world.

So on the mountain, a foretaste of future glory and power. Down below in the world now, there's a world of pain and a world of little understanding, if any. On the mountain, there's power.

But in the valley, there's death. Down below. So what we need to bear in mind is that up on the mountain, as well down in the valley, the disciples don't seem to understand who Jesus is or what he's about.

So just have a quick look at that. Look at Mark 8, verse 31. Let's see how much the disciples understand. When he began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests, and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed, and after three days rise again.

[ 6 : 55 ] He spoke plainly about this. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. Now have a look at chapter 9, verse 6. Peter, up on the mountain, sees all that's happening.

And then we read there, he didn't know what to say. Okay, he was frightened, so there was a reason. There were a couple of reasons. But he didn't know what to say, because he didn't understand.

Chapter 9, verse 10. They kept the matter to themselves, discussing what rising from the dead meant. So they didn't understand. Verse 19.

Oh, unbelieving generation. Jesus is speaking to all of them, the disciples and all the people in the crowd. Chapter 9, verse 31. He was teaching his disciples, and he said to them, he's telling them again, the Son of Man is going to be betrayed.

They will kill him. And after three days he will rise again. And then verse 32. They didn't understand. So they don't understand. There's very little understanding. They hear Jesus teach about the cross.

[ 8 : 00 ] They have a foretaste at the top of the mountain about resurrection and glory, but they don't get it. Now, suppose the Father brought his Son to Jesus' disciples.

And suppose for a moment that they were successful. They had cast demons out before. And I'm assuming there's a real demon episode here. It's not epilepsy.

Suppose the disciples had been able to do that. The Father brings his Son. There's a huge agitation, huge crowd. And the disciples are able to deal with it. Imagine that were the case.

And imagine that the disciples kept doing that, but they don't have a clue about who Jesus really is and what he's come. They don't actually understand the cross. They kept doing that.

But if they'd been able just to sort out everything and God just says, look, I'm going to give you power. Never mind what you know. Never mind whether you know my Son who he is and what he's about. That would have been a massive, massive problem.

[ 9 : 01 ] The world would never have learned the truth that way. They would have thought if they'd been using Jesus' power without understanding who Jesus is, if they had done that, then when it comes to the issue of death, the forces of death, because that's what we're facing here.

This is a potent force. If they'd been able to just deal with it, then the people would have said, oh, the disciples and religion, that's got real power.

So, if you're looking at this section, then you think to yourself, well, that could have happened, but it wasn't.

The disciples were confronted by this man and his Son, and they couldn't drive it out, and they were perplexed. Just to say, this is a frightening account.

Demonic powers really exist. When Jesus talks about this, and later on with the disciples in private, he says, this kind can only come out by prayer.

[ 10 : 14 ] He's saying there's a real human limitation here. Here's a line that's been drawn. You cannot actually deal with it yourselves. You're powerless. Only God can do this.

There's a limit on human power, and there's a limit on demonic power, too. Have a look at chapter 9, verse 20. So, the demon wants to do what it wants to do, but have a look at verse 20.

What does it say there? The spirit shrieked, convulsed, and came out, and the boy looked like he died. When the spirit saw Jesus, what did it do?

It immediately threw the boy into a convulsion. So, there's a reaction from the spirit world, and you realize, okay, there's recognition of Jesus' ability and power, and the spirit can't just do what it wants to do.

So, you sense that there's a problem. And then in 25 and 26, the spirit shrieked and came out, and so Jesus had full control. So, the spirit sees Jesus, senses a problem.

[ 11 : 19 ] Jesus' command causes a huge reaction. But by the word of Jesus, the spirit world is rendered powerless. At first, it looks like the boy had died, but Jesus is in control.

So, how much power do human beings have in this situation? None. They put their trust in horses, to go back to Psalm 33.

It's a huge problem. Put your trust in doctors and medicine. There's a line that's been drawn. And the spirit world can do what it wants to do until you see this account.

Certainly when Jesus gets into the situation, there's obviously a limitation there. I find it fascinating that the father, you could say it like this, the father comes to the church for help.

He wants healing. And so, he brings his boy to the church, well, the disciples. And there's a lot of embarrassment because the disciples can't really do anything.

[ 12 : 23 ] And there's a huge commotion. Jesus arrives and says, what's going on? The disciples don't say anything. It's the father who pipes up. And he's almost accusing.

It's almost, he said, it's almost as if the father's saying, you know, I wanted real help. And I heard that your disciples had your power. They've been with you. And so, I come to you for help. And all I end up is a huge big argument about who has authority to do what.

Quite frankly, the father could have said, I expected more from your disciples who, after all, heal in your name. And so, Jesus gets a bit exasperated. Before we move on, how powerful is the church?

Are you a people of power? It's interesting, we can sing, ah, we're a people of power. I used to sing a song like that. And we are a people of power, depending on what you mean.

We don't actually have a lot of power in many ways. And sometimes we con ourselves into thinking that we have a lot more than we think.

[ 13 : 25 ] But in Christ we have huge power. Vast. But sometimes we kind of pull it into our own, we kind of make it our own. And in a funny kind of way, push God out.

There are churches in Cape Town this Sunday where everybody will be told in the congregation that they have huge power. And if you believe enough, you know how this goes.

You have enough faith, you're going to conquer your diseases. And if someone reads this text, what are they going to say from this text? You pray with enough faith, the dams will be full.

Or you pray with enough faith and you will, because you've got the power. Now, this passage is actually saying something very different. It's saying, there's a line drawn and you are powerless.

And only God, only Jesus can conquer this. What is going on in this passage? There's something else here. This isn't just ordinary demon possession.

[ 14 : 33 ] Something fascinating is happening here. People have bumped up against a limit. And an issue. And they're discovering they don't have the power that they thought they did.

Clearly, Jesus is center stage in this story. And it's from him that we learn that what is needed is not power in something in this world, but power from God.

We are to listen to Jesus then. On the mountain, earlier on in Mark, just those few verses earlier on in the Transfiguration, the voice from heaven said, this is my son, listen to him. So that's what we've got to do today.

When all is said and done, okay, Jesus, we want to listen to you. We want to hear what you're saying. We're interested in what you can do here that we can't do. This isn't a passage about how much I can pray.

This is a passage about what God can do. And what can Jesus do? The Father said, if you can. If I can, said the King of creation.

- [ 15 : 40 ] So the Father didn't know who he was talking to, did he? When Jesus comes down the mountain, you've got the King of glory. It's hidden. It's masked.
- It's veiled. But in their midst stands the King of creation. What can he do? And so, point number three, Jesus drives death out.
- That's what he can do. And that's something we can't. Chapter 9, verse 21. One, Jesus asked the boy's father, how long has he been like that?
- Well, from childhood. Often throws him into the fire. Wants to kill him. But if you can do anything. When we read the Bible, I don't know if you're like me, and I read it, I catch myself focusing on something that's just sort of like got my attention.
- And we can fall into the trap of thinking, oh, it's got my attention, therefore that must be the Spirit of God. That's what this is about. And that's not always the case.
- [ 16 : 52 ] Sometimes God does that. But it's not always the case. What catches our attention, strikes us, is important. Isn't always what the passage is really about. You're here at church today, and you're encouraged to have faith in God, which is good.
- This passage says, have faith in God, and to pray more, which is good. And to believe, and that's good. But this is not a story with a religious lesson.
- It's not a story about having more faith when you're in a crisis. It's not a story about praying more. And it isn't even about the demonic. The story isn't about what it's about.
- Which you might think, oh, that's why people go to college. But it is why you need to pay attention to the Bible. We read it, and if you're like me, you will start to, oh, Lord, I need to have more faith.
- And the passage is talking about that, but it says, yeah, go on, go on, go on. And we stop because we know it's easy to make people feel guilty because you don't have enough faith, do you?
- [ 18 : 03 ] And you don't pray enough. The passage isn't actually talking about that in the main. It's a story about Jesus and his power over death.
- That's what this is about. And how we're powerless to do anything about death on our own. That's what the story is. And that's why it is where it is.
- Because Mark chapter 9 is in the middle of Mark. Jesus is the king of glory, and he comes down the mountain. In this episode, it's not just about the imposition of people who have more faith. Look, they don't even understand.
- It's about the king who will now, on his way to Jerusalem, as you sang in the song, on your way to Calvary. He's now on the way to die. You've got to understand. Here's a picture lesson. Here's a visual lesson of what Jesus can do.
- Here you can see him facing the spirit of death, so to speak. And Jesus conquers that spirit. This account's brimful with heartache and emotion.
- [ 19 : 01 ] I can't just leave this aside. I have to talk about it. I'm a father of three grown-up kids, and I've got another little one from, well, I better qualify that.
- I've got Bethany's, my daughter's given birth to Raffi, so I've got a grandchild now. And he's just won my heart.
- He really has. And so when I read this account, I read it as a father, and I think, oh, if my child had this problem.
- I just sense the heartache. Don't you? Lots of emotion here. And I get the impression that you've got a father.
- I get the impression as I read this that there's a lot about you and me seeing an interchange between a dad and Jesus. And it makes it very real and very rich.

[ 20 : 02 ] Someone who's agitated. I mean, this child's been thrown into the fire and had all these problems for all this time. Horrible. And this conversation occurs primarily so the father can betray his lack of understanding who Jesus is.

And then those famous words, I do believe, help me overcome my unbelief. I believe, I don't believe enough, help me. And those words can fly right off the page and lodge in your heart today.

Along with the distressed father, we too are confronted by Jesus today. And the disciples listen to all of this. Just think for a moment. They're standing there.

Just rewind. They could have said to the father, they could have, when they couldn't cast out the demon, hang on, there's a problem here.

But Jesus, he's up on the mountain. He'll be back. Let's just hang around for a bit because when he comes, he can fix it. They never say that. The only thing they've got on their minds is?

[ 21 : 06 ] Because they ask him at the end. Why couldn't we do it? Why is it something that only you can do? And the answer is?

Because when it comes to death and conquering death, it's only something he can do. Only Jesus can. The point of this story is not about our power and our ability to deal with this stuff.

It's about Jesus' death on the cross. Notice how death permeates the story. First of all, will you notice that Jesus' death brackets the whole account? You know brackets? Put a bracket. I don't know if you like it to have a mathematical thing.

Bracket. Mathematical equation. Bracket. Or however you want to think about brackets with some words in between. There's a piece of story and then a bracket and a bracket. And what's inside is collected together by the brackets.

So first bracket. Will you do this with me? Chapter 9, verse 9. The first bracket. And what do we read there? As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus gave them orders not to tell anyone what they'd seen until the Son of Man had risen from the dead.

[ 22 : 21 ] Get that in verse 12. 2. Have a look at the end of the section. Chapter 9, verse 31. He was teaching his disciples. He said to them, The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men. They will kill him. And after three days he will rise.

So I'm saying that when you read the Bible, look for the brackets. Because that's actually telling you this whole section about the demon possession and all of that. It's got to do with Jesus' death. It helps you.

So that's the first thing. So there's that bracketing. Now notice how much time Mark spends on giving us detail. There's a whole lot of detail. Way more than you'd expect.

It's a whole long chunk. Why so much detail? Look at the other demon possessions and exorcisms in Mark's Gospel. They're short. Yeah, it's a long thing. Why?

To make you see that death and the issue is massive. Way more than human beings can deal with. Thirdly, the deafness and dumbness of the boy. He's like a kind of living dead.

[ 23 : 19 ] Notice that the spirit also is hell-bent on death. In verse 22, tries to kill the boy. The word that's translated convulse. Throws him or whatever.

It's an extremely violent word. It's like, whoa! It's a word that's used by people who write in the original language to convey blows that shatter bones.

So when the demonic force left, the boy seemed dead. The Gospel writer here uses two words for death.

In my inner view, he translates that he looked like a corpse. The word is necrotic in the original. And he looked dead.

The original word is thanatized. So it's using strong words for death. You could say it's a spirit of death. And this spirit, deathly spirit that's being looked at here.

[ 24 : 23 ] It's a real demon. And I'm not saying there is a demon for everything. There's a demon of gambling. And there's a demon of drunkenness. Now there's a demon of death. I'm not saying any of that.

And the text is not saying that. But it's a demonic occurrence that becomes helpful in Jesus demonstrating his power over death.

Only Jesus can defeat this. And so you get two words for the boy being healed. So the boy is brought to Jesus. And the words get interesting again.

What are the two words for death? Well, it's necrotic and thanatized. In verse 27, what does it say in your Bible, in your version? Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him to his feet and he stood up.

But that's not what's said if you read the original language. That's why you need to come to college and learn to read the original language. It's so interesting when you read the original language. Because the Spirit of God in helping author this, who was behind Mark, a guiding Mark.

[ 25 : 27 ] Mind was switched on, but still overruling him. So that he wrote what should be written. The words that he used are two resurrection words. The word lifted.

Lifted him up is a resurrection word. And stood up is a resurrection word. Anastasia means Anna again. Stasis again stand. Those are resurrection words.

Jesus uses those words of his own resurrection. This is a passage about death and resurrection. The English... You just go over it.

You don't even think to yourself there's anything in that verse. Because it's lifted him up. And you move on. No, no, no, no, no, no. Jesus raised him up. I'm going to Jerusalem to die and be raised.

Look at this. See your powerlessness. Don't trust the church. For power. Don't trust its human institutions.

[ 26 : 27 ] For power. Don't put your hope in horses. Put your hope in God. And in his son. Listen to him. If you say to Jesus today, I need to believe more.

Help me in my unbelief. He'll answer you. If your eyes especially are fixed on the work that he's done. Which he did at Easter. So that's the way you need to read the story.

To trust Jesus and see him as the one who's driven death out. He has overcome death. And won victory over all these powers. You might say to me, Mark, can't I look at this passage and getting some encouragement to ask God to help me, to deliver me from various afflictions?

I mean, if I'm sick, can't I read this and be encouraged? Yeah. By all means. That's fine. And any other afflictions? Yeah. Jesus' victory over sin and death.

Of course, that means you can approach him for all these other things. But this passage wasn't written about that. That's what you've got to get hold of. It includes those things.

[ 27 : 39 ] But just by way of ramification. So the point of the story is Jesus conquering death and the promise of resurrection. Jesus says some interesting words to the Father.

What does he say to him when he says, Help me in my unbelief? Well, just prior to that. If you can, said Jesus, what does he say next?

Everything is, Oh, I could have a field day with that verse. Everything's possible for him who believes. We could have a fantastic day. Today's service is about everything's possible for him who believes.

And I don't tell you all the other stuff I've just told you. We just focus on, Wow, you've got to really believe. And if you really believe, you can see how that's going to go, that sermon. Is it going to be right?

You're going to walk out all pumped up and motivated, because I'm going to believe, and I'm going to believe, and I want this in my life, and I want to do that. But what's the passage actually about?

[ 28 : 39 ] Him who believes in the Son of God, who conquers death, and opens up the way to a glorious future, which changes your perspective on this life, and everything changes your life forever.

That's what you've got to believe, and that's what that father had to understand, and hopefully he did. Are your sins forgiven? Because that's what Jesus acquired, did.

That was his great work on the cross, the wrath of God, we sang about it, turned away. Are your sins forgiven? Are you a forgiven man?

Are you a forgiven woman? Today? Or are you thinking to yourself, I'd love to know that, but I'm too sinful.

I'd love to know, if only God would say, you are forgiven. And I couldn't know that. You're frightened by death? If only I could know that God had dealt with it, and he has.

[ 29 : 51 ] He has. And it's a prayer way. Maybe you were walking with the Lord for a long time, but today you needed the encouragement. Don't put your trust in the horses.

Let's pray. Lord Jesus, we want to say thank you to you for coming down into this world and being beaten and spat on, mocked, and put on trial by sinful men, as we were saying earlier, and paying the price so we could be set free.

We are powerless. We face these big forces in the world. Sin, the law, death. We are powerless.

We can't do it, but sometimes we are deceived and we think we can. But today we realize we don't have that power. It's not being given to anybody. It's yours alone. And so we come and kneel before you and ask for your power to believe that you alone can deal with this and have dealt with it.

You died on the cross so that we could be set free and you rose again so we would have the hope of glory ourselves. Please give us insight into this passage and help us ponder it.

[ 31 : 09 ] We ask this in your name. Amen.