

For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore, put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, you may be able to remain standing.

On August 26, 1346, the Genoese mercenaries employed by the French to fight the English and Welch in the 100 Year War were about to have a very, very, very bad day. Whether by land or by sea, the Genoese had always brought their crossbows to the battlefields and won convincingly. But this day was different. For it was the day that the English and Welch decided not to return crossbow fire with crossbow fire. They used cannonballs instead. Friend, you don't need to be a military historian to know that if you bring a crossbow to a cannon ball fight, you will lose. You don't need to be a 5-star General in the Army to know that if you go up against a Sherman Tank with a .22 caliber rifle, you will lose. And you don't need to be a preacher to know that if you fight spiritual battles against the principalities of this present darkness in the highest of places with the wrong weaponry, you will absolutely, certainly, and most assuredly lose that battle also. To win spiritual battles, you must use the right weaponry. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal. But we are mighty through prayer.

Peter, James, John, and Jesus had barely made it back from the Mt. of Transfiguration to base camp when they received some terrible news. The disciples who didn't go up the mountain decided to engage in a spiritual battle with the wrong weaponry while their Lord was away. They lost. And they lost for one reason: they fought a battle against the devil with the wrong weaponry. As a result, Jesus taught them a lesson that we need to learn today as much as they did then. It is this lesson: there are some battles against the principalities of this present darkness in the highest of places that can only be won by using the right weaponry. That weaponry is prayer. And many times, it's the only weapon in our arsenal. But it's plenty effective. So, today, the Lord has a message for you that is applicable to any spiritual battle you face right now. That message is this: you must engage in spiritual battles with the right weaponry. And that right weaponry is prayer. Without it, you have no shot to win the battle. But with it, you will prevail. For it is the cannon ball God desires we use to fight against the devil's crossbow. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal. For we are mighty through prayer. So today I want to tell you (1) Why we don't like to use the right weapon; (2) What happens when we don't use the right weapon; (3) What happens when we do use the right weapon; and (4) How we must use the right weapon. We see those in Mark 9:14-29.

¹⁴ When they came to the other disciples, they saw a large crowd around them and the teachers of the law arguing with them. ¹⁵ As soon as all the people saw Jesus, they were overwhelmed with wonder and ran to greet him. ¹⁶ "What are you arguing with them about?" he asked. ¹⁷ A man in the crowd answered, "Teacher, I brought you my son, who is possessed by a spirit that has robbed him of speech. ¹⁸ 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." ¹⁹ "You unbelieving generation," Jesus replied, "how long shall I stay with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring the boy to me." ²⁰ So they brought him. When the spirit saw Jesus, it immediately threw the boy into a convulsion. He fell to the ground and rolled around, foaming at the mouth. ²¹ Jesus asked the boy's father, "How long has he been like this?" "From childhood," he answered. ²² "It has often thrown him into fire or water to kill him. But if you can do anything, take pity on us, and help us." ²³ "If you can?" said Jesus. "Everything is possible for one who believes." ²⁴ Immediately the boy's father exclaimed, "I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!" ²⁵ When Jesus saw that a crowd was running to the scene, he rebuked the impure spirit. "You deaf and mute spirit," he said, "I command you, come out of him and never enter him again." ²⁶ The spirit shrieked, convulsed him violently and came out. The boy looked so much like a corpse that many said, "He's dead." ²⁷ But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him to his feet, and he stood up. ²⁸ After Jesus had gone indoors, his disciples asked him privately, "Why couldn't we drive it out?" ²⁹ He replied, "This kind can come out only by prayer."

1. Why We Don't Like to Use the Right Weapon: Unbelief (18-19, 29)

- **Soap and Water:** (1) If the economy goes into the tank, I'm getting into the stain remover business. Stain remover products take up 3/4s of the cleaning aisle. (2) If you have a stain on your clothes, you catch fetch yourself a Tide Stain Removal Pin. (3) If you have a carpet stain, for \$20 thousand dollars you can rent a Carpet Stain Remover Vacuum. (4) Well, here's a method that works: a little soap; a little water; a little scrub, scrub and you are good to go. (5) We often do the best method as a last resort because we don't believe it really works. It does.
- **Main Idea of the Point:** The reason we don't like to use the right weapon of prayer – or use it only after we have tried every other weapon in our arsenal – is because we have a problem with unbelief. We struggle with believing God and believing prayer is effective.
- **Main Textual Emphasis: The Disciples Not Believing What They Had Seen Jesus Model:** (1) The disciples had witnessed Jesus drive out a demon in Capernaum (1:21); (2) Then they witnessed him do the same thing in the region of the Gerasenes (5:1); (3) Just three chapters ago, Jesus sent out the 12 from village to village. Mark specifically tells us that Jesus sent them out "two by two and gave them authority over impure spirits" (6:7). He also tells us that the mission Jesus sent them on was successful because they "drove out many demons" (6:13). (4) Here, they have followed the same principles but found them unsuccessful. And the last verse tells us the reason "this kind came only come out by prayer" (v29)
- **App:** The disciples went through every spiritual exercise they could possibly go through. The one thing they didn't do was the one thing they needed to do: pray. If they really believed God, they would have fought the battle in that way first. But they didn't even fight that battle in that way at all. Why? They really had a hard time believing that the prayers of the righteous are powerful and effective.

2. What Happens When We Don't Use the Right Weapon: Demon Remains (20)

- **Changing a Light Bulb on a High, Vaulted Ceilings:** (1) I went into a home a couple of weeks ago with high vaulted ceilings and noticed a string of light bulbs burnt out. It looked like they had been burnt out for years. (2) When I went into the garage, I noticed the problem. This person had two ladders and plenty of light bulbs. But there was no light bulb changing extension pole with the little grabber on the end. (3) The old light bulbs remained in place because the homeowner didn't have the right tool.
- **Main Idea of the Point:** When we don't engage in spiritual battles with the right spiritual weapon, we can not only expect to lose the battle. We can also expect the demon to remain and grow stronger.
- **Main Textual Emphasis: What Happens When Demons Are Not Cast Out:** (1) Verse 20 describes the results from a spiritual perspective of the demon remaining. (2) The disciples could not cast it out even though they tried. At the root of their failure was unbelief. James tells us that is something demons don't have a problem with. The believe and they tremble. The disciples did neither. As a result, the actions in verse 20 tell us something about the strength of evil remaining: it caused the same problems and now those problems were greater because they were now being manifested publicly. The boy (a) went into a convulsion; (b) fell to the ground and rolled around; and was (b) foaming at the mouth. (3) In the Bible, evil grows stronger when allowed to remain. The land of Israel had no rest as long as the prophets of Baal ate at Jezebel's table. Laodicea's lamp almost went out because they allowed lukewarmness to remain. And the church in Corinth lost their influence because they were married to the world. (4) And all these things remain because God's people didn't use the right weapon: prayer.
- **App:** There are some evils you will go up against in life that can only be defeated by prayer. No other weapon will work. And the only weapon that is effective against it is prayer. If you don't use it, those evil realities will remain. And the only hope for defeating it is to play on the one string that you have: the string of prayer. It's always in tune in the Almighty's throne room.

3. What Happens When We Do Use the Right Weapon: Helps Overcome Unbelief (24, 29)

- **Miller and Yardwork:** (1) My son and I started some major yard projects about a year ago. Most of it involved removing big rocks in wheel barrels and some tree and stump maintenance. (2) I designed it for one reason: a better yard. (3) But I've noticed something with my son since he's been helping me: more upper body strength. (3) Prayer works like that. It accomplishes the purpose for which it's intended. But it also strengthens when needs to be strengthened: your unbelief.
- **Main Idea of the Point:** Prayer isn't just designed by God to fight spiritual battles. It's also designed by God to help you with unbelief. God helps you in your unbelief by answering your prayers and intervening in spiritual battles because of them.
- **Main Textual Emphasis: Lord, I Believe. Help My Unbelief:** (1) The boy makes a paradoxical statement. He believes; yet he doesn't. (2). The meaning of this becomes clearer considering the statement he made earlier, and the one Jesus makes after: "Lord, help if you can." There's not a lot of faith in that request. If there was, he wouldn't have doubted Jesus could help. Thus, the reason Jesus says: "anything is possible for him who believes. (3) So, what does "Lord, I believe. Help my unbelief" mean? It means: "Lord, I have faith but help me to have more of it than I do right now. What an honest request! (4) And God has designed something to help him with it. It's once again at the end of the verse: "this kind can only come out by prayer." (5) Praying when you don't think you have enough faith is how you get more of it!
- **App:** "He that cannot pray. Let him go to sea, and there he will learn. God never denied that soul anything that went as far as heaven to ask for it." -- John Trapp. The old sailor was right. Prayer strengths what we lack while accomplish the purposes for which it is intended.

4. How We Must Use the Right Weapon: In the Name of Jesus (25-26, 29)

- **Names in the Bible:** (1) From Genesis to Revelation, there are over 3000 names of people. (2) 250 of those names belong to the Lord Jesus Christ. Names like Alpha, Omega, Beginning, End, Author, and Perfector of our faith. (3) For His name is the name of above all names. And it carries far more infinite authority than any other name can express.
- **Main Idea of the Point:** We don't carry the same authority of Jesus. That's why the disciples couldn't drive the demons out. But we pray in the name of the One who has all authority: Jesus. And that's Who we appeal to directly and confidently when engaging in spiritual battles through prayer.
- **Main Textual Emphasis: The Lack of Authority of the Disciples vs Jesus' Authority:** (1) In the passage, there's a contrast of the disciple's lack of authority to drive the demon out with Jesus' authority to drive it out at his command. (2) The disciples did everything but pray and they couldn't drive it out. (3) Jesus, however, doesn't pray here. He just speaks and the demon responds. (4) That's interesting because he concludes with "this kind can only come out by prayer." (5) Jesus prays many times in the Gospel's before he performs miracles. Why not here? Because he is the authority the disciples are going to need to learn to pray to in the future. (6) He has all authority in and of himself. They had none in and of themselves. We don't either. So, we must do the same thing they did if we have any chance to repel evil: fight the battle with the right weaponry. And that is prayer.
- **App:** No other name but the name of Jesus. He's as close as the mention of his name. And when praying in the name of Jesus is the only weapon in your army, it is plenty sufficient in our battle, not against flesh and blood, but against the principalities of this present darkness in the highest of places. Amen. Praise the Lord. Glory to His Name.