

Mark 9:23

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Jesus said unto him, If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth.

Analysis

Jesus responds to the desperate father's plea "if thou canst do any thing" by redirecting focus from divine ability to human faith. The Greek construction *ei dynē pisteusai* (εἰ δύνη πιστεῦσαι, "if you can believe") echoes the father's doubt but inverts it—the question isn't whether Jesus can heal, but whether the man can believe. The phrase *panta dynata* (πάντα δυνατά, "all things possible") employs the same word for "possible" used of God's omnipotence in Mark 10:27. Jesus declares that faith connects believers to divine omnipotence, making the impossible possible. This isn't faith in faith itself (a subjective psychological state) but faith in Christ—trust in His person, power, and promises. Reformed theology carefully distinguishes this from the prosperity gospel's notion that faith manipulates God; rather, genuine faith submits to God's sovereign will while confidently approaching Him with requests, knowing He can do all things though He may choose not to grant every petition.

Historical Context

This exchange occurred after Jesus' transfiguration (Mark 9:2-13), when He descended to find His disciples unable to cast out a demon from this man's son. The boy suffered severe symptoms—convulsions, muteness, self-harm. The disciples' failure despite previous successful exorcisms (Mark 6:13) revealed that spiritual power depends not on technique but on prayerful dependence on God (Mark 9:29). The father's wavering faith ("if thou canst") reflected natural doubt when facing demonic opposition and the disciples' failure. Yet Jesus didn't reject

him for weak faith but strengthened it through this rebuke and subsequent healing. The early church faced similar challenges—situations where prayers seemed unanswered and spiritual warfare seemed unwinnable—yet this promise sustained them: faith in Christ accesses divine omnipotence.

Related Passages

1 John 4:8 — God is love

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

Study Questions

1. When facing impossible circumstances, do you first question God's ability or your own faith, and why does Jesus redirect the focus to faith?
2. How does understanding that faith connects us to divine omnipotence change your prayer life and expectations?

Interlinear Text

ὁ	δὲ	Ἰησοῦς	εἶπεν	αὐτῷ	Τὸ	Εἰ	δύνασαι	πιστεύοντι
G3588	G1161	Jesus	said	to him	G3588	If	thou canst	believe
		G2424	G2036	G846		G1487	G1410	G4100
πάντα	δυνατὰ	τῷ	πιστεύοντι					
all things	are possible	G3588	believe					
G3956	G1415		G4100					

Additional Cross-References

John 11:40 (Faith): Jesus saith unto her, Said I not unto thee, that, if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God?

Hebrews 11:6 (Faith): But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.

Mark 11:23 (Faith): For verily I say unto you, That whosoever shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that those things which he saith shall come to pass; he shall have whatsoever he saith.

Matthew 17:20 (Faith): And Jesus said unto them, Because of your unbelief: for verily I say unto you, If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you.

2 Chronicles 20:20 (Faith): And they rose early in the morning, and went forth into the wilderness of Tekoa: and as they went forth, Jehoshaphat stood and said, Hear me, O Judah, and ye inhabitants of Jerusalem; Believe in the LORD your God, so shall ye be established; believe his prophets, so shall ye prosper.

Luke 17:6 (Faith): And the Lord said, If ye had faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye might say unto this sycamine tree, Be thou plucked up by the root, and be thou planted in the sea; and it should obey you.

Acts 14:9 (Faith): The same heard Paul speak: who stedfastly beholding him, and perceiving that he had faith to be healed,