

Matthew 17:14-23

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[0 : 0 0] 17, 14 to 23. And when they came to the crowd, a man came up to him and kneeling before him said, Lord, have mercy on my son, for he has seizures and he suffers terribly, for often he falls into the fire and often into the water. And I brought him to your disciples and they could not heal him.

And Jesus answered, O faithless and twisted generation, how long am I to be with you? How long am I to bear with you? Bring him here to me. And Jesus rebuked the demon and it came out of him and the boy was healed instantly. Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, why could we not cast it out? He said to them, because of your little faith. For truly I say to you, if you have faith like a grain of mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, move from here to there and it will move and nothing will be impossible for you. As they were gathering in Galilee, Jesus said to them, the son of man is about to be delivered into the hands of men and they will kill him and he will be raised on the third day. And they were greatly distressed.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. You may be seated. Well, good morning. Good morning and welcome to Christ Church Chicago. We are in the midst of a fall series titled Following Jesus as King. Lessons the disciples learned along the way. Interestingly, the first lesson in following Jesus is from the life of Peter, where Jesus says, get behind me, follow me, follow me, I'm going to the cross, and you take up your cross. Lesson number one, if you want to follow Jesus, get in line. You don't lead anymore. In fact, it was a lesson that centered on death, which is why I suppose the second lesson was a little encouraging. It was the transfiguration.

It wasn't centered on following Christ in death-like pursuit, but he was glorified. He was raised. He's transformed. And in Christ, you too will be transformed. So listen up. Listen to him.

Follow him. No matter where he'll lead you, listen to him because you know he's going to glorify you. And today, have faith in him. Have faith. Have you ever wondered why the church has such a hard time getting things done for God? I've been thinking about it this week. Why do followers of Jesus live lives that we must confess are rather ineffectual in accomplishing great things for Christ?

[3 : 0 3] Let me make it a little more personal. For those of you who are Christians, do you know the factors beneath your failure? Do you know what lies behind the impotence of a powerful resurrected life? Or if you're a non-Christian here today, there might be many fingers you can point at concerning the church's inability to be effective for Jesus. But do you know what the true reason is behind their inability?

I want to explore these questions by looking at the story that was just read to you today. It's a story that really centers on Jesus' first followers. In fact, it highlights their inability to get things done for God. Did you see that? Verse 16, I brought him to your disciples and they could not heal him. It's a story about those who are following Christ being incapable of getting good things done for Christ. And if their inability to get things done for God isn't bad enough, the tension raises in the text by the time you get to verse 19 because the church didn't even know why they were incapable of getting anything done for God. Did you see how that moved in the middle of the text? Verse 19, they come to him privately and say, why could we not cast it out? There's two movements already centering on following

Christ concerning those first followers. Their inability to get things done for God. By verse 16, their lack of understanding on why they couldn't get anything done for God. Verse 19, and then by the time you get to the very end, verse 23, wow, their lack of awareness on what it's going to take to change their life for God. They were greatly distressed that he was going to Jerusalem and to the cross.

Their lives have me thinking about our lives. What's holding us back? Christ Church Chicago.

Christian, what's keeping you? Christian, is an external factor for their failure and the second is an internal factor related to their failure there are things from the outside that kept them back and there are things going on on the inside that kept them from moving forward the first one on the outside is simply this our lives are more like the world than we care to admit i didn't get any amens out of that one let's run it again someone got to agree with me on that our lives are more like the world than we care to admit amen amen and that might be a reason why we are so ineffective how am i going to argue that from this text well let's look again verses 14 to 17 let me read it again in your hearing and when they came to the crowd a man came up to him kneeling before him saying lord have mercy on my son for he has seizures and he suffers terribly for often he calls falls into the fire and often into the water and i brought him to your disciples and they could not heal him and jesus answered oh faithless and twisted generation how long am i to be with you how long am i to bear with you he could not heal them faithless and twisted generation give me a moment on that jesus with those words is implying something about his generation's lack of faith but let's be clear he's making a point that spans all generations faithless and twisted is a direct quotation from the voice of moses in deuteronomy 32 in reference to ancient israel and their inability to get things done for god moses used those words first as a descriptor of his generation jesus now comes along and says my day is just like that day i live in a day says jesus that is faithless lacks faith and it's not just that it's a people that don't have faith that it's a twisted generation it's a crooked generation literally it's a perverse generation it takes that which is pure and has brought in putrefying elements it takes something that was once clear straight and has devised a way to go off on an angle that that's the generation of jesus day jesus says what was going on in moses day is going on in my day and what i want to say to you is what was going on in moses day and what was going on in jesus day is what's going on in my day and your day this is our day faithless and twisted that's why that's why we can't get much done because there's just not a lot of faith to go around fidelity to god is in short supply in the culture and in the church

[9 : 35] the lyrics of the aging musician sting come to mind maybe you don't know this some of you too young at any rate you could say i lost my faith in science and progress you could say i lost my belief in the holy church you could say i lost my sense of direction you could say all this and worse i never saw no miracle of science that didn't go from blessing to curse never saw a military solution that didn't end up something or worse but he says if i lose my faith in you there'll be nothing left for me to do nothing left for me to do he takes faith and basically says i don't have it anymore at an institutional level so please since i don't have faith in anything god science the church medicine it's not going to answer the ills of the day let me grab on to one individual that might get me through in other words faith in god is gone that marks us it seems to me there's an irony then for the non-christian who's listening to me this morning here's the irony as you point your many rightful fingers at the church for their ineffectual nature to do good in the world one of the things responsible one of the things that's holding the church back is the world in which we live which has no faith that god will get anything done at all it's true for them it's true for us as the church walks in a world that is faithless and twisted let's be clear we're more like the world than we care to admit we got a foot in two worlds i mean jesus is saying this to his followers he's not just pointing the finger outside but there's an internal reason that i want to move to why is it that you and i are less effective than we should be that is men and women and children here under my voice who are following jesus why is it that we're failing so often to see good things happen that would promote the kingdom not only because we're more like the world than we care to admit but our faith is more underdeveloped than we ever let on oh i like i like the way that sounds so let's just say it again our faith is more undeveloped than we care to let on when it comes to faith the christian barely outdoes the faithless generation i mean it's right there look at 19 and 20a after of course jesus healed them then the disciples came privately and said why could we not cast it out and he said to them because of your little faith you live in a faithless generation that's an external indicator out there that you're more like that you care to admit but there's also something going on in you oh you of little faith that's been a repeated theme in matthew can i just run it for you matthew chapter 6 verse 30 oh you a little faith do not be anxious saying what shall we eat or what shall we drink or what shall we wear for the gentiles are concerned about all these things jesus looked at his closest followers and he says what what actually is keeping you back what's holding you back are the daily concerns that are bringing

anxiety to your life that you're not actually releasing to me knowing that i am a good father and i will give you all things but isn't that just so true aren't the daily concerns of what you're even going to wear the things that can rob your soul what i'm going to eat what bills i'm going to pay those those factors that followers worry about and it keeps us jesus says it keeps us which is why he says seek the kingdom and righteousness get stop stop concerning yourself simply with all of your daily concerns think about what i'm trying to get done in the world and i'll take care of you it's fascinating to me the daily concerns that rise in our souls actually make us ineffective for the kingdom because it takes up all our time not only that matthew 8 26 remember the boys were in the boat with jesus and the storm comes in the middle of the night he's sleeping they're awake they're awake for good reason the waves are rolling over the side of the boat and they're bailing and they're not keeping up and this is going down and they find him and they say do you not care that we are perishing let's get the fear straight what kept them from being effective they were afraid of death and jesus comes to them and says oh you of little faith and he speaks a word and the sea is calm it's not only the daily concerns that fill our minds in ways that don't enable us to just think about what god will do but it's the big things in life right come on anybody been up now maybe you're too young anybody been up in the middle of the night afraid of death come on yes you live long enough it's coming yes perishing i have i'm fond of saying that we we need to stop living as though we're not dying because we're gonna die but that's one thing just to say it's another thing to sense it feel it to know it to encounter it to be frightened of it jesus as though you of little faith in fact this is the hope of the christian gospel if you're not a believer here today just get this straight he can actually like that i feel like it's a little big for my hand give you life yeah i think this one is though you encounter death yeah but believe me there's a lot in this world that we want to hang on to again all the reveals are not in the body we don't walk by faith we walk by sight we wonder is my body now going the way of the world oh you a little faith see this is a normal constituent part of the christian life we we have little faith we barely outdo the world when it comes to our daily concerns and we barely out

do the culture when it comes to our eternal condition we may think about heaven and living in the presence of god we may say to be absent from the bodies to be present with the lord we may trumpet from the pulpit that to die with christ is gain but get me at 2 30 in the morning and i'm bailing water going do you not care that we are perishing i'm marked by little faith and as a result not living with the purpose that can make a difference in the kingdom it's not only the daily concern or provision it's not only death or the fact that we're perishing that actually illustrates we're people of little faith do you remember also in matthew 12 not only in the boat that jesus was in the boat with him but when he got out of the boat and peter tried to go to him peter goes all right i'm good i'm stepping out of the boat i'm stepping out of faith i'm not going to church to sit down and hope that my needs are fulfilled nope i'm actually going to go to church i'm going to step out of the church i'm going to walk to wherever you're walking and he begins to walk and then he begins to sink why do you remember why he sinks he doubted jesus says to him oh you of little faith why do you doubt look i've just given you three hangers that keep you from being effective for christ your daily concerns are overwhelming you death itself seems to be flooding over you doubt comes upon you even when you step out in faith why are we not as effective as we ought to be because these things pervade our lives our faith is undeveloped and yet the whole purpose of this sermon is not just to give you all the reasons for which we're ineffective namely we're more like the world than we want to let on or we're we're actually underdeveloped in our muscle of faith and we don't want to reveal it but in actual fact do you know that even with a little faith you can accomplish great things for god do you know that that's what i'm moving toward you you know that this is what i've been preaching to get to even with a little faith you can accomplish great things for god that that's actually what this passage wants to instill in you in fact before we even get there though let me just show you that matthew's already been there because while while the church is often marked as individuals with little faith the book of matthew has been filled with characters who have surprising amounts of faith you remember the centurion he says oh look don't don't even don't even come to my house you can heal the person i'm a man under authority you can heal even though you don't show and he says jesus looks at him and goes i i have not seen such faith anywhere in israel it existed in a centurion if not one of the followers it existed in the friends of the paralytic it says that when jesus saw their faith he did his thing it existed with the woman the issue of blood for 12 years he looks at her and says according to your faith may it be done unto you it happens with the two blind men where they came to him asking for mercy and he says according to your faith may it be done to you and their eyes were open and it happened most recently to the seraphonician woman this total pagan of sorts about the crumbs on the table and he says oh woman what does he say how great is your faith be it done unto you this this book has been showing you followers of little faith and characters of surprising faith in other words you need faith you can have faith people do have faith the lyrics of sting do not need to lead our

day in fact in this text it doesn't even look like you needed to have faith it just says jesus healed the blind boy uh the demon possessed boy and i'm not really quite sure who had faith other than jesus doing his thing although his church couldn't get much done well let me sit on this for a moment for you for me for your daily needs for your consideration of death for the doubts that have you pulled back and retreat into seeing your own needs fulfilled rather than stepping out in faith for him in jesus you have one that will provide for you just as he provides for the sparrows walked out my back door just the other day those sparrows there are a lot of them walked out my back steps started to go down the stairs and all of a sudden out of the west 20 sparrows or so sitting on the fence post god's providing for them i've been in the middle of africa watching a herd of water buffalo go through some mile away and just scores of them and i'm wondering how is it that god provides for them of course i watched the lions off in the distance waiting for a stray one to go and i thought the lord even provides for them why are you worried about what you're going to wear where you're going to go what you're going to eat god can provide for you what about death you got one who will sit up with you in the night when everyone else is asleep what about your doubts what about your thoughts he can deliver you from doubt if you continue to walk in faith not by sight let's get it straight church by faith abraham set out by faith joshua took land by faith rahab risked her life and all the people that are known for faith are not sitting around in church pews waiting for their needs to be fulfilled they are stepping out in pursuit of righteous acts that will actually accomplish what he wants done if you want to grow your faith get on with the things you know god is doing what's he doing i read my bible he's building up an eternal multi-ethnic cross-cultural family that's what he's doing he's building up the name of christ through his proclamation throughout the end of the earth he's displaying his gospel not only by the land people are taking and the victories that are being made but also by the death people are dying and the way they go about it displaying the miraculous power of god and all their weakness he's doing these things and he calls you to have it as well and notice it isn't that you need a ton of faith you know that's what happens today if you only had more faith if you only had more faith if you only had more faith how does jesus answer answer the question he goes if you only had the smallest of faith like you only need less amount of a mustard seed now i'm no mustard seed mathematician but i looked it up and it's about 0.039 milliliters milliliters milliliters millicentimeters whatever they are those little guys real little guys there are smaller seeds the orchid seeds like a speck of dust so evidently disciples had at least a speck of dust faith but they needed mustard seed faith and that's where you and i live we live somewhere between a speck of dust and a mustard seed yeah we're not quite like the world without any faith but boy we're we're limited in exercising our faith the disciples had a promise that they would be able to accomplish great things for god can i just

read it to you i don't want to shy away from this verse verse 20 truly i say to you if you have faith like the grain of a mustard seed you'll say to this mountain from here to there and it will move and nothing will be impossible for you that's quite a promise i mean let's take it at face value for a moment that's quite a claim nothing will be impossible for you establishing a multi-ethnic cross-cultural congregation here nothing will be impossible for you i've had people tell me you can't do it won't be done nothing will be impossible for you i've had people give up on it go somewhere else move on down the line retreat into their own corners or find a place that will fulfill their needs nothing will be impossible for you i proclaiming the name of jesus to everyone everyone well everyone that i'm able to everyone that i meet my neighbors should hear the name of jesus we should be sending people cross-culturally to proclaim the name of jesus we should be lifting up missionaries from this place who are supported by us to go talk about jesus we should be getting the name of jesus everywhere to everyone nothing will be impossible for you you should be able to die well and display the glory of christ in a weakened body because nothing is impossible for you you should be able to accomplish something for god because nothing is impossible for you well let me notice the elephant in the room really does this verse promise that all things are possible people some have certainly pressed these words i have family members who have taken hold of these words and at times move them beyond their natural meaning or at times cut them off or drift from the moorings of what jesus has in mind just let me put it this way just as nothing is impossible just because nothing is impossible does not mean that all things are probable or will be possible let even in the even in the life of jesus it's just a few chapters from now jesus is going to make a prayer do you remember the prayer in the garden lord if it is at all any of you awake lord if it is at all possible let this thing pass from me god says that's not possible that's not possible in other words the possibilities of your faith are relegated in accordance with the mysterious will of god but in the will of god all things are possible that that doesn't necessarily mean that you're just going to name it and claim it call god for it and get it it doesn't mean any of that it all has to be in accordance with his will and it has to have an object that isn't your faith in you and your capacity and your ingenuity and if we can just turn this screw if we can just get this right if we can just move in this way then all this will happen no no no the object of our faith is in the death and resurrection of christ who makes all things acceptable before god and then he orchestrates his will in the world

[29 : 59] so just remember even jesus didn't get everything he asked for but that doesn't mean his prayers weren't answered the little children's song we pray he might say yes yes yes he might say no no no but he's going to answer but i can tell you what he's going to do he's going to accomplish his mysterious will in your life and in the life of the church in all her weakness if a miracle is to happen it will happen because it validates the message rather than the miracle becoming the message that's why all things are prayed for according to your will the key to growing your faith is to begin giving yourself to the things you already know to be god's will so start by seeking his kingdom first rather than your own wants live for his kingdom not your comfort you know the reasons why you're ineffective for christ you live in a faithless and twisted generation and you're more like that generation than you care to let on you know the reasons why your own soul is ineffective for christ because the daily concerns overwhelm you death continues to chase you doubt plagues you and jesus says it's time to move forward lesson number three after you get in line and start following him after you start listening to him have faith because without faith it's impossible to please him let me pray our heavenly father this word that even with a small amount of faith we can accomplish great things for you we pray that that would be true we pray that would be true lord we want to see great things happen for you we want to see you do what's impossible we want to see you bring men and women and children to christ through faith which is a gift that's impossible but you can do it we want to see men and women raised up from our midst who take the gospel all the way to the ends of the earth that's impossible but for you we can do it we want to enter into stages of life where even our own deaths are displaying the glory of the gospel in ways that would be impossible in our strength but are capable for you we want to be disciplined under the belief that you care for us that's possible through you and lord for the one who sits under the hearing of my voice today that has not yet even taken up faith in you may they know that the words of christ are true and will you grant them faith to believe in jesus name you