

What Christ CAN do

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[0 : 0 0] Let's turn back together to Matthew 17. We can read again in verse 17. Matthew 17 and verse 17, 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. Now, admittedly, these words don't at first glance sound like very encouraging words.

They don't in some ways even sound like words we would expect to come from the lips of our Lord Jesus Christ, the one who came to heal the physician, the one who has welcomed and has blessed people in their grief and in their various needs.

He seems to be almost reluctant and almost resisting. And unwilling to comply with the desperate request of this father, where he prays, Lord, have mercy on my son.

But that is maybe the problem when we look at a part of the Bible and just look at it on the surface. We come to the wrong conclusion about what it's actually saying. And as we, I suppose, noticed in the morning, as any other time we look at any one of the four Gospels, we just take one account, there's going to be other parts of the narrative that we miss out.

[1 : 3 2] And by missing out the other parts of the narrative or the history, we're going to miss out the whole picture. And that, I think, is why they call Matthew, Mark, and Luke the synoptic Gospels, insofar as there is a seeing of the history of the earthly ministry of Christ together.

They see it together, but they see it from different angles. Suppose if we, three of us here tonight, were to look at and observe and witness whatever event it might be and give an account of that event, we'd see things from where we stood or sat, and we'd have an emphasis that the next person we'd maybe miss, and they'd emphasize something else, and so on.

And the reason for saying that is when we do think maybe that Matthew 17, 17 is bringing Jesus before us as almost angry with the father bringing his demon-possessed and epileptic son, it's only when we look at Mark's account of the Gospel that we realize there's an additional, and we'll come back to this, a very important additional element.

And that, which isn't referred to here in Matthew but is in Mark, is that the scribes were there. The foot of the Mount of Transfiguration, and the scribes were questioning the disciples who couldn't deliver this poor boy from the demon possessing him.

So they were jeering. You can just hear them sneering and mocking and goading and saying, all right, show us what you've got. You're the disciples of Jesus, are you? You've got this power over demons.

[3 : 0 2] Well, there you go. Show us. And they couldn't do it. You know what it's like. Whatever it is, whatever walk of life, you've got maybe a skill or a talent or maybe your work, and you're up against something that is bigger than you and out of your reach, and how you feel when you can't do it.

We'll see, though, in the spiritual realm that is always the case, that we are not able to do either for ourselves or others what is necessary for ourselves and for them.

But that is where the Lord comes into the situation, and the Lord does what his people can't. I want to try looking this evening, firstly, at what Satan can do. And reading the narrative here, verse 14 to 21, you might think, what on earth has this possibly got to do with us?

Here's a father who pleads for his epileptic and demon-possessed son. You think, well, what's that got to do with me? Well, of course, epilepsy is an illness you may have.

You may know some who have this. And bringing into that equation the presence and activity of demonic influence, you might think, well, what's that all about? We'll try noticing something along these lines in just a minute.

[4 : 21] What Satan can do, of course, it isn't just what he can do in this instance, but it's what he can do in every instance. And just in case you're thinking, right, even that just has no bearing on my life. We'll hope to see that we're wrong if that's what we're saying.

Because from the perspective of the Bible, there is not a single person, the face of the earth, who is not, to some degree or other, at some point in their life or other, under and afflicted by the activity of Satan.

Not demonic possession, but we'll see that, hopefully, as we go along. So what Satan can do? The second thing is, in light of what Satan can do, we see what the church cannot do.

Maybe sounds obvious again, but how quick we are to fall back on our own resources, to try and deal with spiritual problems for which we are certainly not equipped in and of ourselves.

What the church cannot do. And the last thing, what Christ, thankfully, can do. What Satan can do, the church cannot undo. But Christ can undo.

[5 : 25] Isn't that amazing? Where do you find yourself in life? It could be anywhere. You might find yourself in a complete mess tonight. No one else maybe knows about it. Series of choices.

Maybe just one choice. It may be in your state of mind. It may be in your state of body. It may be in your family, your circumstances. Maybe spiritually, you're feeling where you're at.

It's starting to get a hold of you and you're starting to think about things you never used to think about. Well, it's an awful place to be in a place where we think there's no way out, no way forward. And that is only ever the case where Christ isn't in the equation.

You keep him out of it as Satan will keep him out of your thinking. Keep him out of your hope and prospect. Keep Satan away and then there is, keep Christ away as Satan will. And there is no way out. But bring him into the equation and it changes absolutely everything.

Well, let's try looking at that. Noticing firstly the context. That is a very, very big, massive in fact, contrast. If we look at the account that Luke has of the transfiguration and then what happens here in, as it were, the valley below.

[6 : 32] Luke tells us that it took place the next day. Now, whether the next day is that they came down the next day or the next day after they came down. You may want to look at that and come to your own conclusion about it.

But certainly what's happening here by Luke's account, down with this epileptic boy and oppressed as he is with the demon, it takes place the day after the event of the transfiguration up there on the mountain.

You stand in Peter, James and John's shoes. They were taken aside for this massive privilege, given this incalculable immense honor of seeing that glorious disclosure of the inner identity of Jesus concealed from view as it was by his body.

They were given that glimpse. It was preparatory. They were going to be influential in the church in their own position and God's providence. It was preparatory for them, preparing them for what they'd have to go through later.

And you know that maybe in your Christian life. There's things that when they come your way at the time by way of blessing, maybe at the time they don't really, well, not that they don't mean much, but it's only later on when something happens maybe you go back and you can see that was preparatory for this.

[7 : 41] This was to help me now. And back then I maybe just took it in my stride as it were and here we are. That is how the Lord so often deals with us. Happened with his disciples, even with things he said to them.

John brings this up more than one occasion. That some of the things Jesus said, his disciples didn't get it at first, but it's later on. It's later on it made sense.

It came back to them. So here it is for them. Not just preparing them for maybe the further distant future where Peter has to be influential in the founding of the church or even later in his life where he has to die the martyr's death.

It's having that assurance about Jesus that he'll stand us in good stead when trials come. Or maybe the case also with James, John's brother, the first of the apostles to lose his life.

Or John in his own position. Not just for the far distant future, but also the very next day. See, you're brought into a situation of blessing. You enjoy the things of God.

[8 : 39] You may have great pleasure in the Bible and being among the Lord's people and fellowship like that. And then the next day before you know it, you're thrown into a trial. You're thrown into a situation for which you don't feel yourself prepared and for which your resources are far from adequate.

That's where they are. The Lord is in control of this. For them on the mountain, who would have? Peter says, you know what, Lord, we want to stay here forever. It's good that we're here. Let's have three tabernacles.

You, Elijah, Moses, and we'll just stay here the rest of our lives. That's how we feel sometimes. We never want some of these moments to end, but end they must. Because we're only passing through this life and our blessings are preparatory for what lies ahead and ultimately for what's coming when we leave this world.

So you may find yourself like that. I may find myself like that at times. Where there can be such sudden contrast in our experiences. Blessing to trial. Unanticipated.

Unwanted. Unwanted. And sometimes feeling it's just taken over us altogether. Peter, James, and John. Now they're down at the foot of the mountain. The glory of the Mount of Transfiguration may at this point just be a memory.

[9 : 50] And it's only happened the day before. Because they're face to face with Satan himself. Right in the middle of it. Well, what can Satan do?

Well, notice. This is where it has a bearing on you and I, all of us tonight. What Satan can do. He has a bearing in God's providence. Upon life where God allows it in the physical and also in the spiritual.

In terms of the physical, Satan is able to bind. Not just Satan as an individual. But all the demons who have chosen to rebel against God along with him. He can bind in terms of possession.

You know, taking possession of a personality. Where, as you find it in the Bible, you see that the use of the body is hijacked. The use of the vocal cords.

The thought process is hijacked. Taken over by this demon. So that when the person speaks, it's actually the demon at times speaking. Binding not just of the vocal cords, the thought process.

[10 : 51] But also of physical movements. You see the example here. The father comes to Jesus. He says, this is in verse 15. For often he falls into the fire and often into the water.

The demon is wanting this boy destroyed. So if he can't have him thrown in a fire, he'll have him thrown into the water. And either way, prevent him from surviving.

But interestingly as well, there's this reference to being an epileptic. Have mercy on my son, for he's an epileptic, suffers terribly. Then later on, we're told in verse 18, Jesus rebuked him and the demon came out.

It maybe isn't quite apparent in Matthew's account that the epilepsy and the convulsions and all that comes along are demonically caused. That isn't. Of course they say that epilepsy and convulsions and physical problems like that are always brought on like that.

Of course it isn't. And a look at the Gospels will show that even in close connection, you can have two instances of the same kind of illness. And some are, as it were, naturally caused.

[11 : 55] Others are caused or at least have the involvement of demons. And you know, there's some sections of the professing church around the world. And they'll blame every illness that comes your way on Satan or demons.

It's either your disobedience or your lack of faith. And if, when you become ill, you can't be healed or delivered. There's something wrong in your life. You've got to find the cause of. It's your lack of faith or X, Y, or Z, or whatever it is.

The reality is we don't sometimes know, do we? The book of Job tells us that very, very vividly. It's a very searching book on many levels.

The book of Job comes before the book of Psalms. The Old Testament, a man, God commends us being the most righteous, the most godly, the most upright, God-fearing on the face of the earth.

You think, well, if anyone's going to be spared hardship, it's him. What happens? He loses his children. He loses his livelihood. He loses his health.

[12 : 54] He loses the support of his wife. He loses the support of his friends. He loses all sight of God in his trial and in his confusion and in his perplexity.

And what is the reason behind all of this? Well, his friends are saying, Job, you must have done something terribly wrong for this to happen to you. Just like they could come along to this father and say, look, what have you done?

Just like the man born blind that Jesus healed. The disciples, the people are coming and saying, who sinned? This man, not his parents. You don't, you're just born blind without a reason.

God doesn't afflict people without a reason. And that reason has to be negative. Oh, well, Job had done nothing wrong. But Satan had come and said to the Lord, he follows and he honors and he fears you because you put a hedge around him.

You take away the good you've given him and he'll curse you to your face. The Lord says, there you go. So what does Satan do? Satan, notice, is the one who agitates, forces and agitates people groups to come and steal and take away what belongs to Job.

[14 : 02] But not only that, Satan is also the one. We have to understand it in these terms. Job chapter 1, that Satan is the one who within God's permissive decree and providence sends the whirlwind, the hurricane, the windstorm, whatever exactly you want to call it, that brings the house down on his children.

The weather. The weather. He can move people to do his bidding. He can be allowed within God's providence, activity and involvement in the weather, the elements of nature to a certain degree.

But also, as Job 2 goes on to explain, he can also afflict with illness. But he can only go as far as God allows. Now, if you're ill tonight, whenever it comes our way in God's providence, we mustn't worry that Satan is behind it.

We mustn't worry about that. And don't tie yourself in knots about that. I'm sure if it's one of these situations that the Lord would make that known, where that, you know, the time when our Lord was ministering on earth, there was a time when the kingdom was coming.

And as such, it was a time of phenomenal demonic activity. And Jesus' ministry in coming to establish the kingdom of God involved an expulsion of the kingdom of darkness.

[15 : 25] If I, he said to the Jews, by the spirit of God are casting out demons, by whom do your children cast them out? And along those lines in other places, he's explaining that the kingdom of God coming is involving the driving away, not absolutely and totally, but relative to how it was.

That's why we don't bump into this kind of phenomena all the time. Some people say you do. And there's one of these demonic explanations or the explanations of demonic activity in every illness, every one of these situations.

Well, I don't think the Bible allows us to do that. Anyway, it was the case with this boy. Anyway, he was suffering terribly with epilepsy.

He was demonically possessed. And he was in such a terrible state. He was bound physically, Satan's activity. But, you know, you think, right, right. If I can't in my life connect my illness with the presence of demons, how does this connect with me?

Well, because Satan's activity, while here it is in the realm of what is physical, in every other person's life who isn't a Christian, it's in terms of the spiritual.

[16 : 33] Whereas in terms of the physical Satan, when bind, in terms of the spiritual, he will blind. Are you a Christian tonight? If you're not a Christian, it's because you haven't believed in Christ, who is revealed to you and to me in the gospel.

You know, Paul had this kind of dilemma. It's almost a, you can anticipate the questioner when he's writing his second letter to the Corinthians. He's commending and describing in such glowing terms the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And you can almost anticipate someone saying, right, Paul, if your gospel is as glorious as you're saying, why do more people not believe it? If it's really this powerful, if it's really this charged with what is divine and supernatural, if its origin, if its means, if its end is all so heavenly and so from above, why are more people not believing it?

Why are they rejecting it? And what does he explain? You know the reference. If our gospel is veiled or hid, it is hid to those who are lost, in whom the God of this world has blinded the minds of those who believe not.

Lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ should shine unto them. What does that mean? Well, it means that every man or woman, every young person, we were all in this position once, who does not believe the gospel, does not believe the gospel because they haven't seen, they haven't received through not appreciating and not being able to embrace the light, the knowledge, the power, the glory, the magnificence that God reveals to us through his son.

[18 : 13] It's a closed book. It's got this massive veil over it. And we look at it and we think, there's nothing in that for me. For people who are old or people who have got something missing in their life, they need a crutch or whatever it is, they're sad, they're this, that, the next thing.

No, we don't need any of that. Might even say it's nonsense. Might even look at people's lives and say, ah, yeah, that's the measure of it. That's what it does to people. Well, we look at this gospel and if we see nothing in it and if we reject it and if we mock and if we ridicule, there's a double blindness because our own hearts are blind.

Romans 1 makes it very, very vivid. That God leaving people in the sense of withdrawing and just leaving you and I to stand by ourselves, unconverted men and women, our foolish hearts become darkened.

It's the concept of light and darkness. The gospel is light. It involves knowledge. It involves what is glorious and heavenly and divine. But you and I are by nature, we are dark.

We are darkness. We don't perceive, John brings that very vividly before us in chapter 1, that this is the condemnation, that light has come into the world and men love darkness rather than light.

[19 : 25] Why? Because their deeds were evil. These ideas of ignorance, failure to grasp and appreciate and a love for what is wrong and against God and against the gospel, what is the reason for that?

It's obvious that we do it. We were all like that. Every one of us. To one degree or another. Paul, writers of the letters of the Bible, Paul will explain, and you have a look if you're not familiar with it, all the letters that Paul has written in the New Testament and repeatedly he stresses time and again in different places the past that he had.

As a man before, he was religious, but he was a terrible, he was a wicked man by his own admission. Maybe he didn't do some of the things that some of us were involved in.

That doesn't mean anything. He can be as religious and as blind and ignorant as the most irreligious person on the face of the earth and still be lost and still be in darkness.

The reason we don't see the light is because we are blind, but there's that double blindness in the sense the Corinthians are told the God of this world blinds their minds. See, Satan doesn't want you to see this.

[20 : 33] If you don't see, if as in Isaiah 53, you look at Christ, you look at the gospel, and it's just like a closed book. You look at him and you think, no, there's nothing in there for me. Maybe one day it'll make sense.

If it doesn't make any sense, if he means nothing. You see, Isaiah's gone before you, and he's gone before me in saying this. When we see him, there's no beauty, there's no comeliness, there's no form, there's nothing in him.

You know what it's like when you meet someone and you love someone. You know what it's like when you have friends, you know that delight you have in the person and the love and all of the things that come along with that. You look at Jesus and you think, no, there's nothing.

The problem behind that isn't him. It's us. But it's also Satan. He will distort the message.

He will distort your thinking. He will point you to this or to that or to them or whatever else it is because he knows what this message and this Christ in the message will do to your life.

[21 : 37] He will do, Christ will do for you what is not possible to happen to Satan. There's no way out of the darkness for him. He's lost forever and he is going to be in that position and he knows it.

And he's wanting to bring as many with him as he possibly can. And he is desperate. You think in your life, can you follow this? He's desperate to keep you from seeing the light of the glorious gospel of Christ.

You look at the picture here of this boy and he's afflicted in his body. You see him convulsing, thrown here, thrown there, driven this way, driven that way. It's your own life as well in a spiritual sense.

My life as well as it was in a spiritual sense. Anything but the gospel. Fill your life. Fill your mind. Do what you want. Doesn't really matter. Isn't that the case? It's a frightening situation to be in.

We can't get ourselves out of it. You can clean your life up. You can kick habits. You can break addictions. Friends, in a manner of speaking, that's no problem. And some maybe here might be able to testify to that.

[22 : 40] You cannot save yourself, nor can I save myself. We can't save one another. The problem we have is while we can become religious, we can kind of stop doing this and start doing other things, stop the bad and begin trying to do the good.

But Christ is still on the outside. He isn't at the center. He isn't the one upon whom and around whom it all revolves. He isn't the one who's made the change. It's you and me. We start cleaning up our act. All of that kind of thing.

Satan will want you to do that as well. Just in case you think, all right, he wants you to stay living this life of rebellion, this life of darkness and ignorance, rejection. Go as far away as you can. Become the prodigal son.

Become this. Become that. No, you can become the most religious churchgoer. You can be the person who is the most outwardly moral and all the rest of it.

See, I'm not saying, oh, well, be as bad as you want by making these references to people who are religious and moral. Of course not. Because be ye religious, be you as irreligious or whatever it might be, without Christ we're as lost, wherever we stand in these two extremes.

[23 : 51] We're blind. We're lost. We're hopeless. Helpless victims. Willing victims. How can you be both?

How can you be helpless and willing at the same time? I don't think there's many things. You may want to think about this. How many things you can think of in life in which you're both helpless and racked with inability and at the same time willing to be part of it?

You want it and you don't want it at the same time. Maybe there's not many things that you can think of. Maybe you can think of one or two. But this is one of them like no other.

We love darkness rather than light. Because we love the darkness, we will resist the light. Satan is behind so much of this. You know when people make a joke, they have a good laugh and they think, well, you know what, this nonsense about Satan, this nonsense about angels and demons, if we see it on the telly, we'll see it on programs, and it adds that little edge to a narrative or to whatever it might be.

But we don't actually believe it. And people can love the whole concept of horror and they can watch all of these things and get the fright of their lives out of. But you know, people haven't a clue. None of us have a clue, naturally, of the horror of what's involved in being lost.

[25 : 10] It's only a Christian who understands it. Understands it about where they were. And you know, just in case you've got this idea, it's so sad when Christians get this.

In case you've got the idea that Christians are people who think they're better than you, we don't. And no Christian in here will say they're better than you. A Christian is someone who has discovered themselves to be what they really are in the sight of a holy God.

That isn't nice. And they look at you and they think, been there, maybe not done that, but been there. Whatever it was that defined us the way we were. No, we're not in a position where we judge you or look down and condemn you because we think we're better than you or because, well, we've got over whatever problems we had or whatever we used to do or be or say or even think.

No, it is Christ who's made the difference. But in making that difference, he's taken us to understand ourselves, to be lost, to be condemned, to be on the way to a lost, endless eternity and all that comes along with that.

He's brought us to a place where we see our need of him and we are able to embrace and rest in him. And then we see the horror of where people still are in our families, in our workplaces, in our churches.

[26 : 27] And it breaks our hearts. Satan can do a lot. See, this man is in distress.

Lord, have mercy on my son. The father is broken. What parent isn't? Absolutely in pieces. Not only when something goes wrong, but even when things are going well, doesn't your love for your children do that for you?

It breaks your heart. And it makes you thankful, doesn't it? That as a father pities his children, the Lord pities and loves those who fear him. He can love them in a way we can't.

He can care for them in a way we can't. Even if you could give every single thing your children would want, that would still not be everything that they would want. That would still not be adequate to what you feel in your heart.

Because what they really need and what they really need in their hearts and in their lives, we cannot give them. We can't protect. We can't provide. As we wish we could.

[27 : 33] And we feel like this father, don't we? All we can do is bring them. All we can do is bring our brokenness over them. And we feel so helpless and so desperate.

But notice verse 16. The second thing, what the church cannot do, what Satan can do, well, he can physically bind and spiritually blind. What the church cannot do is fix this problem.

Well, you see, that's kind of obvious. Verse 16, I brought him to your disciples and they could not heal him. Interesting. Didn't our Lord commission and empower these disciples with authority over demons?

Didn't he give them the wherewithal that they could command demons to come out of, those who were demonically possessed? Well, yes, he did. Put it another way, has the Lord not given his word, his gospel to his servants, to his people, Christians everywhere and to those he calls and sets apart to minister that word.

Has he not given them the word? Yes, of course he has. But you know, don't we have to learn and doesn't the Lord have to teach us that by ourselves, we cannot affect any of the objectives or the goals or the effects.

[28 : 52] By ourselves, we're unable to do any of that. See, the added grief in the situation here that Mark tells us is that the scribes are there. You can see them looking at each other, also proud in their religion and thinking, well, we are the people of God as far as you guys are concerned.

Well, you think you've got it. You can't even fix this poor boy's life, can you? Oh, come on. You know, you can almost hear it and see it and visualize and get the picture in your head of what these religious men were like, just loving it.

And the grief and the agony of these disciples that they couldn't do a single thing. What an awful situation. The church, the people of God couldn't do what they wanted to do.

So what do you do in that situation? This is maybe obvious. You think, right, this is too obvious. Of course we cannot save anyone by ourselves. Cannot save ourselves, never mind anyone else.

We're in complete, constant, total dependence on God's grace to bring sinners from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God. And I challenge you, friends, if you're not convinced about that, if you look through, particularly the New Testament, look through the writings of Paul, not only the writings of Paul, but particularly, you'll see the way he analyzes human fallenness and inability.

[30 : 15] The letters to the Corinthians, the way he explained in the opening chapters, that apart from a supernatural work of the Holy Spirit, it is impossible for anyone to be saved.

The second chapter, he makes it very clear. Oh yeah, there are ways we can manipulate it. We can play games. We can do things to kind of get you on board. No problem. You know, that's easy to do.

But this is the problem the church faces so often. People, confronted with the inability to deliver people from their sin and from their darkness and lostness, will resort to unspiritual secondary means that will just have an effect on people's lives that we do nothing but get them in so that they seem to be in a place where they're close, but they're not actually there.

The problem with that is that it is so destructive. So destructive to people we dupe, but it's destructive to the church as well.

It's very easy for us to resort to methods and means to just attain numbers and attain effect. It's very easy. You know, the men here could come up with any series of plans that would have a massive, massive effect.

[31 : 31] Not saving. You know, whether it's in the level of what is psychological, emotional, circumstantial. It's easy to do. It's easy to get crowds.

It's easy to do any of these things. Get the right people in the right places with the right gifts and the right circumstances and you've got it. But that isn't going to save anyone in and of itself.

It isn't. It's going to harm. It can prove destructive. So that, as Paul would say to the Corinthians, is when he came, when I came to you, he said, I didn't speak or preach with the excellency of speech or of man's wisdom.

Paul was an educated. Yes, he was a, by nationality, he was a Jew. By his citizenship, he was a Roman and by his education, he was a Greek. He had everything going for him.

He could quote the poets. He could recite. He could do all of these things. So he comes to Corinth, the Greek city and what does he do? He said, I don't resort to the excellency of speech or of man's wisdom declaring to you the gospel.

[32 : 31] But he says in what he comes and when he speaks, he speaks in terms that just speaking the words of God, commending himself to everyone's conscience in the sight of God so that their faith wouldn't rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.

The power of God. You see, it's possible to build empires. It's possible to generate effects. It's possible to generate results. It's possible for things to look really good on the outside.

It's possible for everyone to look and think, my, something really good is going on there. You strip it all back and it's built around a person or a group of people or a series of events. Strip all of these things away and the empire follows.

We've seen it. You'll have seen it or maybe afraid to admit it. when you look around and when I look around what we need to be sure about and what we need to have the humility and grace all of us individually whatever our situation and doesn't the Lord maybe bring us to the place where we have to admit, Lord, we're helpless.

We're hopeless and then we begin maybe singing Psalm 85 with a new sense of urgency where we start looking at what God did in the past. We start looking at what God is able to do in the present and we start looking at our empty hands and our empty hearts and we're saying, Lord, we need you.

[33 : 57] We need you desperately what the church cannot do. These disciples could not heal this boy. What a hard lesson but what a wonderful lesson.

What a blessed place to be where the Lord takes you or takes me to a place where we're at the end of our own resources because that will us here in the third place will show us what Christ can do, what Satan can do, what the church cannot do and what Christ can do.

There is no one here or anywhere that you may be or you may meet who is beyond the power or beyond the ability of Christ to heal or to fix.

We're broken people. Our lives are broken and in pieces. We look at this, poor father, you know, people, there'll be parents looking at their children, children looking maybe at their parents, at brothers or sisters or relatives or people around feeling the grief, feeling the agony, seeing the brokenness, unable to fix the things, unable to put people back on track, unable to maybe sort themselves out and then they come and they look in the gospels and they see Jesus, friend of tax collectors, friend of sinners, friend of every kind of person, of every walk of life.

You'll see them in sickness, you'll see them in grief, you'll see them in sin and lostness, whatever it might be. He comes into their lives, comes into their homes, comes into their hearts and you look at yourself and you maybe think what a state I'm in, what a mess I'm in or you look at those you love and you say what a mess in a state they're in, is there any hope, is there any prospect and of course there is.

[35 : 30] It's hard for us to believe it though because for you and for me we know he can but we don't know if he will. The struggle we've got is we bring those who we love to Jesus, we bring them on our knees, bring them in our hearts, we bring them in our prayers and we're saying Lord, if you will, you can make them clean.

If you will, you can save. If you will, you can heal. See the problem we have isn't with his power but it's with his will. Isn't it? That's our struggle so often.

But when we've tried everything and failed and just can't do it, we come to Jesus. But sometimes, have you ever found yourself in a position, let's say you're the father in this account and you bring your child to Jesus on your knees and you're begging him to help you and what do you hear the Lord say back?

Oh, faithless and twisted generation. How long am I to bear with you? How long am I to be with you? You faithless, twisted, perverse people. You're thinking, this isn't the Jesus I thought of.

This isn't the Jesus I heard of. You see, well, there is the sense, of course, where he has his own way of showing us. It's not like the genie in the bottle, you pardon the illustration, where we just, whatever our life situation is, just click our fingers and say, well, Lord, I'm here, I need your help.

[36 : 56] He's not like that. He wants your heart. He wants your life. He wants you. He wants me. And as his people, we may then be in that position better prepared to pray for others.

I remember we had a neighbor in the last place we were living in. This man was a nice neighbor. I can say these things because he wouldn't have a clue who he was. And he'd have a lot of issues with a lot of things, things that weren't issues.

And maybe even on one occasion, you'd get the odd kind of anonymous letter that was not very anonymous because you knew who wrote it. Because what was written in it, he'd complain about maybe down the line and think, oh, right, we know who it is.

His wife became very ill and he was really worried, really worried. And just in passing, he asked one day if we would pray for her.

We did, of course. She was a very, very ill woman at that point. But what we're trying to notice is this. The man felt, I can live however I want.

[38 : 02] I can be as miserable and as rejecting of the church and of the people of God as I want. But when I'm in trouble, I just click my fingers, ask them to help, and God will come and do what I want him to do.

I suppose it's in a sense where you can find people who would claim to be atheists, don't believe in the existence of God, never mind Christ. When they're in trouble, they'll pray, things like that. We were maybe like that.

Some of you maybe can identify with that. Well, no, the Lord is here in this position. You see him. He's no doubt got the scribes very much in the forefront of his mind. Where they're looking at him and saying, all right, your disciples couldn't do it.

Are you going to do it then? And your Lord didn't hold back in showing the righteous anger within his heart to the people who were blind, leaders of the blind, leading people to destruction with their religion, people who were so ignorant of the truth that as he stood in front of them, they didn't recognize him.

This is like ministers in the church proclaiming a message, standing in the name of Christ, and then as it were, Christ would stand beside and say, who are you?

[39 : 10] They're so ignorant. The people who are lost and blind and way off the path and off the track of where they should be, and he's angry with them. Faithless and twisted generation.

How long, he says to them, how long am I to be with you? You know, you can't use me, he's saying. There's a cutoff time coming where you'll be asking me and you'll be expecting from me and it won't come because I'm not going to be here all the time.

How long am I to bear with you? He was present and he was very patient, but he's saying, that's going to end. It's not going to last forever. Bring him here to me. Do you ever feel like that when you're praying for someone?

Maybe praying even for yourself. You feel he's just keeping you away and you start asking and agonizing. What does the Lord mean? Why is he not answering? Or why not only is he not answering what I'm asking for but seeming to send the opposite.

Instead of relieving, he's making it worse. Instead of delivering, they seem to be going further away. Well, he's stretching us, he's trying us, he's breaking us, putting us back together in the process of answering.

[40 : 23] Bring him here to me. What relief. Jesus, verse 18, rebuked him. Different form, but the same word, different form of it.

When Peter took Jesus aside and began to rebuke him. So you can see, the Lord rebukes the demon and bring in the parallel accounts. He commands the demon to come out of this boy.

The demon comes out with a fight. A real struggle. Convulses the boy. Throws him everywhere. The Lord rebukes. The demon comes out. Christ is able to do for you what the church can't.

Christ is able to bring into your life what Christians can't. What the church and Christians realize, and maybe don't at times, but have to come back to the place where they do, is that they cannot do for you what only Christ can do for you.

They cannot do for you what they couldn't even do for themselves. Yes, there do be channels and means of that blessing, but that blessing resides and rests in him alone and channels of it only.

[41 : 27] They will be as, when, and where he wills. But what a wonderful thing when that comes. We need to rest in him. We need to wait for him.

Bring him here to me. Jesus rebukes him. The demon comes out. The boy was healed instantly. You may, or others around you, may be in a mess. Are you seeing this? It's almost laborious, but maybe you're thinking, well, look at this.

Look for just a minute. In all the hopelessness of your situation or of someone else's situation, Jesus rebukes the demon. The demon comes out and the boy was healed instantly.

There will be people in here tonight who will be able to tell you, the Lord can do this for you as well because he did it for them. Yes, let's be honest.

It may even involve healing of mind, of body, instantly, with or even without means, as far as that can be understood by the individual concerned.

[42 : 27] The Lord can do great things. The Lord can heal you physically if he wills. He can do spiritually. And this is the emphasis in your relationship with him, in your lostness, and as it was through all of us at one point.

He can take you. He can put you back together. He can keep you and bring you into a place, as he said, the thief in John 10 comes. He's referring to Satan, no doubt, and false shepherds.

They come only to steal and to kill and destroy. I am come that they might have life. Or they might have it abundantly. He'll give that to you. Do you believe that? Are you without hope?

Are you looking and you're thinking, there's no hope for me anymore? Maybe even you're a Christian. Or maybe you feel you've burnt your bridges. We sometimes feel that way. It's too far this time. Satan's on your back. He's on your case.

And he's saying, you know what? You've done it this time. And yes, there is a sense where we may feel like and things can never be the same as they were. But there's always a way forward.

[43 : 27] When you and I have Christ in the situation, there is always a way forward. Look away from ourselves to him. He can do for us what we can do for ourselves, what the church can't do for us.

And we and the church may disappoint us in the process. Let's just accept that. And let's just get past that. We must rest in Christ alone. Asking him, praying to him, seeking him, that he would bring us to that place.

But you know, if we're Christians tonight, we just finished. We might find ourselves in that place. Right? What is the point if we can't do the things that only Christ can do?

See what the disciples say. They say privately in verse 19, why could we not cast it out? He said to them, because of your little faith. Hang on a minute.

Is this the kind of faith healing thing that if you just believe enough, it'll happen? No. Nevertheless, faith has a vital role in God's administration, as it was in some of the cities.

[44 : 28] He did know many mighty works there because of their unbelief. He isn't limited to our faith. Not at all. But he chooses to use our faith as a means of fulfilling his own purposes in answer to our prayer.

You think in 2 Peter 3, for example. Who on earth is going to think, how do you bring the second coming, the day of the Lord, closer? You can't. And none of us can. If he has appointed the day of his second coming, you'd think, why on earth would anyone even suggest, well, try and bring it closer?

But what does Peter say? 2 Peter 3, seeing then that all these things must come to pass, what kind of people should you be in all holy lifestyle conversation and godliness?

Looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God. How do you hasten the day that's already been fixed? How can you bring nearer something that's going to come when it's going to come?

Do what we will? Well, no doubt, it involves our participation in praying and acting in dependence on himself. Thy kingdom come.

[45 : 35] For we do what we must in praying and seeking to see his kingdom coming closer. See, we don't sit back, fold our arms and say, right, the Lord only can do this so we don't do anything.

See, that's the kind of, this is where we try and get out of this. And some applications of theology would lead us to that place, right? Some would say, we've got to do everything. And we generate all the things that are needed in order to get all the effects we need to see the church growing.

And we stand back and we say, well, look at this. Copy me. Take my methods on board and same thing will happen. Adapt it, tweak it to your locality and culture, all the rest of it. Well, we don't do that.

We don't believe in that. So the other side, you say, oh, right, so you don't do anything. You're going to criticize someone else's efforts and have none of your own? No. So what do you do? You pray. And you do God's work, God's way.

In prayerful dependence. How could we not do it, the Lord said, because of your little faith? For truly I say to you, if you have faith like a grain of mustard seed, you'll say to this mountain, move from here to there and it will move and nothing will be impossible for you.

[46 : 43] It isn't in the ESV text. It will be in maybe some of your translations. The Lord goes on to say this kind, goeth not out, but by prayer and fasting. Faith, prayer, fasting.

God will honor us if we seek to honor him. And we seek to honor him by using his means in his way. And then we stand back when he does his work and we recognize it has all come from the hand of God and all the glory goes to God, doesn't it?

How could we not do it? Imagine they had been able to do it. They'd have come back to him like they did on another occasion and they would say, Lord, we did this and we did that and the Lord says not to rejoice that the demons are subject to you because they were.

They were taking the glory. Rejoice rather that your names are written in heaven. God grant us help to see ourselves in our own position in relation to him, see our need to be saved, see our need of him to save us and see our need of him to bless us.

We see what Satan can do, what the church cannot do, but we thank God for what Christ can do. May we experience his power and grace in our lives. Let's pray together.