

Faith in his all-sufficiency

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[0 : 0 0] We'll now be reading from Matthew chapter 17, and we'll be starting at verse 14. 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.

[1 : 1 7] When they came to Capernaum, the collectors of the two drachma tax went up to Peter and said, Does your teacher not pay the tax? He said, Yes.

And when he came into the house, Jesus spoke to him first, saying, What do you think, Simon? From whom do kings of the earth take their toll, or tax? From their sons, or from others?

And when he said, From others, Jesus said to him, Then the sons are free. However, not to give offence to them, go to the sea and cast a hook, and take the first fish that comes up, and when you open its mouth, you will find a shekel.

Take that and give it to them, for me and for yourself. Well, my name's Dave. I'm one of the pastors here. A warm welcome to you if you're visiting this morning. Well, I would love to have a manual for parenting.

A recipe. I'm pretty hopeless at cooking. I need Emma to give me, like, a step-by-step instruction on what to do. Just a recipe for parenting would be wonderful.

[2 : 3 0] How and when to discipline. Oh, gee, that's tough to work out. Like, we're coming up with seeing, like, private schooling, public schooling, home schooling.

Like, that's just a confusing question. To know exactly what to do in every moment. How to respond. To ensure that my children will grow up as whole persons knowing the Lord.

I want a recipe. I'd love a recipe for lots of things. Like, what on earth am I meant to do as a pastor and say to people?

What am I meant to do? I'd love a recipe for this sermon, to be honest with you. I want a recipe. Just give me a step-by-step instructions to follow. There's a more obvious form of living the Christian life based on a recipe.

And I came across it again this week watching the recent SBS documentary, The Kingdom. I don't know if you've seen it yet. A guy named Dave is interviewed after being burnt by the church.

[3 : 41] And he says this. All the things that people promised would happen, a great life, happiness, great relationships, being quote-unquote blessed, owning a house, being in a great position, all happened after I left the church.

After years of devoting his time and his money, genuinely believing that life would work out, and it didn't, and the recipe failed him, and he was disillusioned.

So there's the obvious form of recipe theology. If you put in this, this, this, God will bless. I think there's a more subtle form of recipe theology.

Recipe faith. That while taking into account that life is hard and that the great reward is future primarily, there's still this lurking expectation that if only you follow the steps that Jesus commands, life and ministry will basically work.

Things will basically work out. What we've got in our passage today, I think, is a really strong contrast to what we saw last week.

[5 : 05] Last week, three of the disciples are up the mountain and they are blown away by the divinity of Jesus. His light shining through.

But down the mountain, presumably happening around the same time, the other nine disciples are confronted with failure.

Peter. And then Peter, he thinks he knows the recipe. He thinks he knows the law to follow, to pay the temple tax, which we'll come to, but Jesus blows that recipe thinking away.

So we've got this contrast. Having seen the all-sufficiency of Jesus up the mountain, we've seen in the gospel so far that Jesus is the glorious son of God and it's confirmed to us in the transfiguration.

Then we've got down the mountain, any superficial idea of faith that it's about following steps and it will work. That superficial idea of faith is not faith.

[6 : 17] We don't trust in a recipe. We trust in a person. So I want to ask the question, what does it mean to have faith in the all-sufficiency of Jesus as we've seen him on the mountain?

Well, first in our passage, we're going to be confronted with the biggest problem we've got and that's our unbelief. Then we're going to see three ways that we are to trust that he is all that we need.

In facing overwhelming obstacles, he is all we need. In dealing with our failure to trust him, he is all we need. And he is our obedience.

So let's get into the story. What does it mean to have faith in the all-sufficiency of Jesus? This story about the demon-oppressed child, it's confronting, isn't it?

I think it's confronting on a number of levels. It's confronting because it challenges our Western worldview of a materialistic, there's no such thing as a spiritual realm kind of culture we live in.

[7 : 30] It's confronting at that level. It's confronting because it's just a horrible situation. This child is suffering terribly.

But it's most confronting because of Jesus' response. He rebukes. Mark's account of this episode puts the focus on the father of the child.

It's quite a famous phrase, he says. I believe, help my unbelief. I think every Christian can resonate with that. I believe, but help my unbelief. But Matthew leaves that out, which suggests that his focus is on the disciples' failure, the nine disciples' failure.

To feel the shock of Jesus' response, put yourself in the shoes of this distraught father. Like, your child, your son is tormented.

This is beyond epilepsy, as hard and dangerous as epilepsy can be. This is something beyond that. Mark and Luke add the detail that he's mute.

[8 : 45] He can't communicate properly. When he does, he cries out. And it's trying to kill him. Every opportunity, fire or water, any opportunity. There is no peace in this family, no freedom, no hope.

And then when they hear about hope, that others have been healed of this very thing, he brings his son to the disciples and they fail. His hopes are dashed. How would we expect Jesus to respond?

I want him to respond with sympathy. I want him to respond with instantly removing the pain that this family is going through. But isn't his response shocking?

Oh, 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. Notice he is full of mercy. He does bring peace to this child and to the family.

[9 : 50] He does rebuke the spirit and restore this family. He does bring peace. He is full of mercy. And in chapter 18, he loves children. Make no mistake.

He wants all his people to have the attitude of a child. He is very protective of his children. He loves children. Let's not make any mistake there.

So why such a strong rebuke? Notice his answer revolves around himself. How long am I to bear with you?

His disciples' lack of faith, it's painful to him. He's got to endure it. How long am I to be with you? I think that's similar to the question when Philip asked in John 14, Jesus just show us the Father and his response, how long have I been with you?

Don't you know me yet? I think it's similar to that. How long am I to be revealing who I am to you? The problem, the offence to God is a willful neglect of the evidence of who Jesus is.

[11 : 09] It's not having faith in the evidence of who he is, who he's shown himself to be. It's twisted.

He uses the word twisted, which I think might be picking up Moses' words in Deuteronomy 32. After all the powerful signs that the first generation saw in being set free from Egypt, after all of that, after seeing God's glory on the mountain, after all he provided for them in the wilderness, he says they are no longer his children because they are blemished.

They are crooked and twisted generation. Someone greater than Moses is here, a greater revelation.

I think the twisted is saying the evidence is plain. The response of trust should be obvious. But there's a willful forgetting of who he has revealed himself to be.

There's a willful distortion of who he is and what he said. Our greatest problem is not seeing God for who he is as he has clearly shown himself to be in his son.

[12 : 34] So why such a strong rebuke?

Because the disciples' failure was not their incompetence. It wasn't incompetence. It was unbelief. It was a willful forgetting of who Jesus is, not putting their confidence in him that he is all they need.

Now, if like me, you can relate to the disciples' failure to have faith, you should want to know what true faith is.

And in the very next section, that's what we get. We get an explanation of true faith. The disciples ask him privately, why could we not cast it out?

In chapter 10, they've been given authority to cast out demons. They've done it plenty of times before. Why couldn't we do it? And his response, because of your little faith.

[13 : 40] And when you hear that, doesn't your stomach just drop? It's like, I knew it. It's because I don't produce enough faith. But it's not what we bring to the table.

It's not how much faith we have. If you have faith like a grain of mustard seed, the smallest seed known in that area.

He's picking an illustration here. The smallest thing you can think of, it's not about how much faith. It's about having any faith.

It's the smallest faith in me. You will say to this mountain, move from here to there, and it will move.

Nothing will be impossible for you. Any amount of faith is enough. Any. Because he is enough. It's not the amount of faith that we bring to Jesus.

[14 : 39] Any faith. That he is enough. He is enough. At a superficial level, the disciples did have a kind of faith, but something was superficial about it.

They expected to be able to cast out the demon, but they failed. So they expected it to work. Maybe they treated the power as somehow residing in themselves.

Maybe they were treating it as some kind of, if we say the right words, then the result will occur. We can't be sure. Something is going on where they have forgotten that Jesus is the source of their power.

To focus on what you can do, even to ask the question, how much faith I can bring, is to focus on self. The focus is on what he can do.

Even the smallest, and he will accept even the smallest faith. It's about our orientation. Is it on self or on him?

[15 : 57] A personal reliance and relationship to him is all we need. I think faith comes from seeing him.

So it's not looking at yourself, working out, do I have enough faith? It's looking at him. That's when faith comes. It's hearing his promises that produces the faith.

And moving mountains. Obviously, that's a figure of speech. It's used in the Old Testament.

I think at one level, it contrasts the smallness of the faith. Like you're facing a mountain. She's just mustard seed. That's what you need.

Because it's not about you and what you can bring to the mountain. It's about who you've got the faith in. It's his strength. Now this promise, we shouldn't start by asking, what do I want to happen in this situation?

[17 : 03] I'm facing this mountain. What do I want to happen? That's not where we start. This isn't a blank check. The promise, I'm going to use Don Carson's phrase, it's not limited by, it's limited by context, not by unbelief.

So we should believe this promise. This promise is for us. You will move mountains. But the context here is the disciples are given authority to serve in Jesus' kingdom.

They can confront anything that is getting in the way of serving Jesus. This promise doesn't let us decide how or when the obstacle will be removed.

Because the very next verse tells us that the Son of Man will achieve his mission not by strength but by loss. It's his powerlessness that he overcomes the greatest mountains.

So let's not reduce God's idea of success, God's power to our idea of success. We might have expectations of what moving mountains looks like but let's not limit God.

[18 : 23] It could feel like absolute failure for a long time but we could be if it's done in trust we can trust that Jesus is with us in confronting those obstacles.

I think this promise is exactly what we need to begin facing the obstacles for serving Jesus. Like even as I start even parenting it's confusing it's overwhelming and that's just the day-to-day stuff let alone the crisis.

How do I enter that with confidence? I enter it because not of what I can bring to the table but because Jesus is promising here look at me and I'm with you.

Step into it it's confronting but I'm with you. He's not giving us a formula to follow do this say this and it will work.

I don't think he's even giving a guarantee of quick success because Jesus lost everything before the success came. But he is promising that even the smallest focus on me that I am enough is what you need because I am with you.

[19 : 59] You are personally presently connected to me the one whose face shines like the sun I am with you. So he's all sufficient to serve him because he can face the obstacles not us.

But what if what if you do fail to trust him even as small as a mustard seed which I'm just going to assume that we all fail if you're like me we fail to regularly well we get assurance here as well that he's sufficient to deal with our unbelief as well we get another prediction of his mission 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 the new detail in this prediction is that he's going to be delivered into the hands of men now it's not quite clear who's doing the delivering but this is a passive verb he's being delivered like this is the guy up on the mountain whose face is shining like the sun is going to be delivered like who can do that what's going it's not clear who's doing this it's not even clear how strong that word is is it handing over or is it being betrayed it could mean that so is it the father handing the son over to men is it this faithless generation of Israel handing

Jesus over to the Romans to be killed is it Judas his close friend betraying him I'm not sure I don't think we can be sure perhaps all of them were in Jesus mind what we can be sure of is that he's choosing to be delivered he's telling his disciples ahead of time so that they understand so that we understand what his mission is about no one could given his glory as the son of God he must be choosing to be delivered over because it's in being delivered that he is removing the greatest mountains you and I could never face our unbelief the lies of Satan and the judgment of God that that deserves I can't bear my failure to trust him I can't bear that

I can't bear the consequences of that I can't bear the shame of that but he can and he chose to he can bear our failure to trust him I was talking to someone about the ashes going on at the moment the cricket I shouldn't have to explain which sport it is should I you should know what the ashes is now this was an Australian okay but they were just praising the English mindset recently because under this new coach they're not worried about whether they'll lose their batter when they're batting whether they'll get out they're just encouraged to go for it and he was just like his face was lighting up but they weren't it doesn't matter you won't get in trouble you won't get kicked off the team if you lose your wicket go for it

I think I think that's the freedom we get when we believe that Jesus can bear our failure yes our sin is serious and acknowledging it actually makes us worship him that he bore it but we can just go for it we are not going to be kicked off the team we don't have to worry about how much faith we're producing or when we don't have faith because he bears it we can just okay I failed again let's go let's go again he he's all we need to face every situation as we seek to live him and he's all we need for our failure to trust him he absorbs the offence himself and I think the final section helps us see that he is all we need for our obedience too he is our acceptance to the father we can't add to it so this tax verses 24 to the end this tax don't confuse it with the tax to the

[25 : 18] Romans this wasn't tax collectors betraying their own people to the Romans this isn't a tax made up by the traditions of men this is God's law this is in Exodus this tax is for the support of the temple and its services so when the collectors ask Peter does your teacher pay the tax they're saying does he support all that the temple stands for acceptance with God access to God through the priesthood the sacrifice for sin the place for which he rules by his law and so on and so on is he for it and Peter says yes but and you can understand why Peter says yes of course Jesus obeys the law of God but Jesus uses this as a teaching moment this passage is not saying anything about whether to pay taxes to civil authorities if you want an answer to that give to

Caesar what is Caesar's read Romans 13 the issue here is about the temple where the question about kings and their taxes is treat it as a parable from who do kings of the earth take toll and tax from their sons or from others and of course the obvious answer is it's from others and Jesus conclusion is then the sons are free he's making a he's making a statement about himself when the father collects his taxes for his temple I am a son Jesus is free from the tax and he might be playing on that word freedom Jesus is free from the obligation of the law of God to be in right covenant relationship because that law was created for sinful man to know God he is the eternal son who has never sinned he has a status with

God much higher much closer than the law can give incredibly he uses a plural sons the sons are free and when he does provide the coin it pays for him and Peter I think this is implicitly teaching Peter that his what his death and resurrection is about to achieve that Peter and all who belong to Jesus by faith will share in the status of son that Jesus has and all the privileges to go with it you don't need the temple to access the father Peter you want to worship bow down right here you want access to the father through me I I'm I'm your sacrifice I'm your dwelling place with God but how does Jesus use his high status now picture again this

Jesus up on the mountain face shining he does not need to pay this tax as the unique son of God but what does he do he chooses to lower himself and pay the tax why why does he do that to not give offense now Jesus is not afraid of confronting he confronts sin lovingly the gospel is offensive to people who want to love their sin it is offensive but he wants to remove any stumbling block to people coming to him for these Jews it would have been a huge stumbling block to not support the temple if that gets in the way of seeing who he is he will humble himself and do it and pay the tax and then he gives a private miracle to Peter to demonstrate just how free Jesus is how free all who belong to him is now

I think this miracle is just as glorious as calming the storm just think of the detail involved in this and I think it's really comforting because most of life is lived in minutia in the detail there had to be the right amount the value of the coin dropped in the sea at some point whether way long ago or while Jesus is speaking I don't know who knows it had to not get lost at the bottom of the sea but a fish had to grab it and then not swallow it but just hold it in its mouth and then it had to be swimming at the exact place where Peter would be and put his line in and take the hook and be the first to take the hook that's detail isn't it that's that's how much control this son has over the world like just imagine

[30 : 46] Peter holding that coin after catching that fish hopefully it sunk in he is the temple he's where I meet God hopefully it sunk in he's calling me a son as well not because of my obedience but his and yet he lowers himself to remove stumbling blocks for people to come to know him and then he provides exactly what is needed I wonder if do you know your freedom in Jesus that Jesus is all sufficient for your obedience acceptance with God you are free from obligation you are free from following a recipe from following rules for how the

Christian life should work what does that freedom look like well we see it in the apostle Paul one moment he's saying if you get circumcised to be right with God you have you have fallen away from Christ and then the next moment he gets Timothy circumcised because he wants to bring him on a missionary trip among Jews where's the rule where's the recipe where's the law Jesus is our obedience to God so there's a new question it's not what must I do it's how do I love Christ in this situation how do I help others see that Jesus is all that you need must you give money to the church shall we go there your sons and daughters in him you're free there's no rule what but there is a new passion a new question what will help others see the all sufficiency of

Jesus you might give way more than 10% or not I don't want to stray into rules here must you go to small group your sons and daughters you don't have to do it for obedience to God for your acceptance but a new question is in you what's going to help others see the all sufficiency of Jesus do you drink alcohol or not I could raise lots of questions there's just a new question now what will help others see the all sufficiency of Jesus there's no recipe there's no law so if you see faith in

Jesus as following a recipe he sets out to make life and ministry work that kind of view of faith makes you feel proud and entitled when you think you're following the recipe or it just paralyzes you and just brings you to despair when you think you're failing the steps that's not that's not following Jesus faith is being vitally personally presently connected to the one whose face shines like the sun knowing that he died for my lack of faith he is alive to share with me his status as son and he is with me facing whatever situation he has me in to help me live for him and to help show others that he is all that we need even the smallest focus on who he is the smallest focus on who he is what he has done what he's promised to do is all we need all we need to do now is ask the question well what's going to help others see that he is all we need let's pray

Father again and again I pray that you would lift our eyes away from ourselves even away from asking the question of whether we're trusting enough again and again help us lift our eyes to your son and who you've revealed him to be Lord I pray that whatever each of us is facing that we would move into it for your sake not just to make things smooth in life but seeking to serve you and your interest knowing that your power is at work Lord help us to know your forgiveness and restoration when we fail when we sin Lord help us rejoice that you are enough even in our failure and Lord help us to do everything with a new passion of wanting others to see

[36 : 40] Jesus through the choices we make Lord I pray this in Jesus name Amen