

Faith Mixed with Doubt

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Date: 27 October 2019

[0 : 00] You'll recall that throughout this year we have been preaching from the book of Mark. All of this year we've been going through the book of Mark.

And you'll also recall that the book of Mark was written by John Mark. And the main source of what he wrote was the apostle Peter.

Peter was an eyewitness to the ministry of Christ. And John Mark wrote this book principally to non-Jews.

And he sought to demonstrate that Jesus Christ was special, was different. He was and is the Messiah. And he came to make disciples.

That's what John Mark, the author of this book, sought to reveal to us. And last week we encountered Jesus and three of his disciples, Peter, James, and John, as they were on a mount.

[1 : 17] And Mark tells us that Jesus was transfigured in their presence. Mark went on to demonstrate to us that Jesus was unique as he heard a voice from heaven declaring that he was in fact the Son of God.

And it was during this time that the verses that we come to now were occurring. So Jesus was not present.

Jesus was absent from the remaining nine disciples. And we find, we pick up in Mark chapter 9, verse 14, which I'm going to ask you to turn to now, where the disciples encountered a large group of scribes that included the scribes and a man whose son had special needs.

So please turn in your Bible to Mark chapter 9, verse 14, and we will read through verse 29.

This account that we will read is recorded in two other Gospels as well, Matthew 17 and Luke 9, but not in the same detail.

[2 : 56] Mark chapter 9, beginning at verse 14. Mark writes, And when they came to the disciples, and here Mark is referring to Jesus, Peter, James, and John, when they came from the mount to the disciples, to the other nine disciples, they saw a great crowd around them and scribes arguing with them.

And immediately all the crowd, when they saw him, were greatly amazed and ran up to him and greeted him.

And he asked them, What are you arguing about with them? And someone from the crowd answered him, Teacher, I brought my son to you, for he has a spirit that makes him mute.

And whenever it seizes him, it throws him down, and he foams and grinds his teeth and becomes rigid. So I asked your disciples to cast it out, and they were not able.

And he answered them, Oh, faithless generation, how long am I to be with you? How long am I to bear with you? Bring him to me.

[4 : 25] And they brought the boy to him. And when the spirit saw him, immediately it convulsed the boy, and he fell on the ground and rolled about, foaming at the mouth.

And Jesus asked his father, How long has this been happening to him? And he said, From childhood.

And it has often cast him into fire and into water to destroy him. But if you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us.

And Jesus said to him, If you can, all things are possible for one who believes. Immediately the father of the child cried out and said, I believe.

Help my unbelief. And when Jesus saw that a crowd came running together, he rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, You mute and deaf spirit.

[5 : 33] I command you, come out of him and never enter him again. And after crying out and convulsing him terribly, it came out. And the boy was like a cusp.

So that most of them said, He is dead. But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up, and he arose.

And when he had entered the house, his disciples asked him privately, Why could we not cast it out? And he said to them, This kind cannot be driven out by anything but prayer.

This account of a desperate father, who having unsuccessfully sought healing for his son, from Jesus' disciples, and now turns to Jesus for help, makes these truths clear to us.

I believe that this account of this desperate father, who sought help from these nine disciples, unsuccessfully, and who then goes to Jesus, I believe that this account makes three things very clear to us.

[7 : 05] The first is that Jesus matters. The first thing this account makes clear to us is that Jesus matters. The second is that faith matters.

And the third is that prayer matters. This account makes clear to us that Jesus matters, that faith matters, and prayer matters.

By examining this account under those heads, I don't mean to suggest that they are distinct from each other, that they are mutually exclusive.

I'm not suggesting that at all. No, we cannot have Jesus without faith. You know that. Hebrews 11, 6 tells us that without faith, it is impossible to please God.

And you and I know well that prayer without faith in Jesus is useless. Jesus' faith and prayer are not mutually exclusive.

[8 : 17] They are interwoven. However, the separation we make today allows us to amplify certain points and it makes our journey a little bit clearer.

So let's consider the first point. Jesus matters. As we examine verses 14 through 18.

Let's take a look at it again. Mark writes, And when they came to the disciples, they saw a great crowd around them and scribes arguing with them.

And immediately all the crowd, when they saw him, were greatly amazed and ran up to him and greeted him. And he asked them, What are you arguing about with them?

And someone from the crowd answered him, Teacher, I brought my son to you for he has a spirit that makes him mute. And whenever it seizes him, it throws him down and he forms and grinds his teeth and becomes rigid.

[9 : 30] So I asked your disciples to cast it out and they were not able. Jesus matters. I believe that the point of this section that Mark is helping us to see that Jesus makes a difference.

That the presence of Jesus makes a difference. Mark is helping us to see in this section of the gospel that Jesus is greater than the disciples.

That he is greater than our circumstances. That he matters. That when Jesus' present, things change. Notice that Jesus was not present when the man, this man who came to see him, Jesus was not present when he got there initially.

The man brought his child to Jesus. But Jesus, as Jesus was not there, he asked the disciples for their help.

But they could not help. Now following this, the failure of the disciples, and I want you to imagine this saying for a moment, as Mark lays it out for us.

[10 : 48] But following the failure of the disciples, an argument ensued between Jesus' detractors, the scribes, and the disciples.

So here it is. They brought this man to the disciples, to Jesus. He was not there. The disciples tried to heal him. But they failed.

And an argument ensued. The Mark doesn't tell us what the argument was about. But I believe we can use our imagination.

Remember, the scribes, they were Jesus' detractors. They did not like what Jesus was doing, what he was about. And what an opportunity they had now to point fingers at him, to accuse him of being a fraud on the basis that his disciples were a fraud.

his disciples could not perform this act. So that pointed to Jesus. They were arguing with him. And you know, it's interesting because you and I know that the world has not changed in that regard.

[12 : 17] The validity and the truthfulness of the gospel is often measured by the work and the faithfulness of those who call themselves disciples of Christ.

I want to say that again. The world measures the validity and the truthfulness of the gospel by the work and the faithfulness of those who call themselves disciples.

So the world judges Jesus Christ based on the actions of those who call themselves disciples.

And so if you and I were to be honest, if you and I were to do the same thing, if we were to judge Jesus based on those who say that they are his disciples, it's likely that none of us would serve him. Think about it for a moment. If we judged Jesus based on those who say they are his disciples, it's likely none of us would serve Jesus.

[13 : 43] It is beyond reason dispute that to a significant degree those who claim to be Jesus' disciples often represent him poorly.

Represent him poorly. And in this moment the disciples did not represent him well. but even while bearing that reality in mind, while bearing the reality that Jesus is often poorly represented by those who call themselves his disciples in mind, there are at least two things that you and I might consider, two important things that you and I might consider.

You see, first the broader point we get, but what about this narrow point? And the narrow point is this, how do you represent him? You see, the broader point is about all those who call themselves disciples.

But what about you as a disciple? Make it personal. How do you represent him? Do you give ammunition to Jesus' detractors as it were?

And then the second point is this, and it's a marvelous point. You and I can marvel even more. Our affection for Jesus can grow even more because the Bible tells us, Hebrews 2 verse 11, that despite our own unrighteousness, Jesus still calls us brothers.

[15 : 30] isn't that amazing today? Despite the fact that we bring him shame, he is not ashamed to call his brothers.

He is not ashamed to call the disciples his disciples. disciples. So the disciples are engaged in an argument and Jesus shows up and he takes over.

Jesus matters. Jesus makes all the difference in the world. But I want you to notice what happens here. It's important to point this out to you.

Notice that when the crowd sees Jesus, Mark tells us a few things about what happened immediately after.

The first thing Mark says is that they recognized him. You see that? Mark says when Jesus showed up, they recognized him. And then the next thing Mark says is that they were greatly amazed.

[16 : 41] And then thirdly, Mark says they ran to him and greeted him. what's the message there for us?

What might you and I draw from that? I believe that the church has failed often to reveal to the world Jesus Christ and him crucified.

Instead, some have substituted successful living for Christ. Others have substituted emotionalism for Christ. Still others have substituted tradition for Christ.

And so the question is if Jesus walked into the door of some places of worship, would he be recognized or even welcomed?

What about you? would you recognize him today? Would you accept his word in your current circumstances?

[17 : 57] Jesus demonstrates in this account that he matters, that he makes a difference.

Jesus changed the focus from the disciples to himself. Next, we see that faith matters.

upon learning that the disciples were unsuccessful in their attempt to cast out the demon, look at what Jesus said in verse 19.

Take a look at it. Mark writes that he answered them. This is after the man explained to Jesus the condition of his son.

Jesus says to them, O faithless generation, how long am I to be with you? How long am I to bear with you?

[19 : 05] Bring him to me. Some have wondered whether Jesus spoke these words to the scribes or to the crowd or perhaps only to his disciples or perhaps a combination of two or all of them.

Well, I don't know to whom Jesus spoke these words directly. I don't really think it matters. Perhaps Jesus was speaking to the scribes who still did not believe.

Perhaps Jesus said to them, O you are faithless and unbelieving having seen all that I did.

how long I bear with you. Perhaps he directed those words to the disciples because they failed in their attempt to exorcise the demon.

But I believe that Jesus' use of the word generation suggests that he met all three. In any event, if one is to receive something from Jesus, as we will see in a moment, it does not matter who one is.

[20 : 30] Faith is what matters. Yes, faith matters. To see this more fully, let's consider this powerful exchange between this man and Jesus found in verses 21 through 23.

And as we do, I want us to bear two things in mind. That this man had initially brought his son to the disciples and they failed to heal him. The disciples tried and they failed.

He initially brought his son to Jesus and not the disciples. That's the first point. He had initially brought his son to Jesus and not the disciples.

The second point is the disciples tried and they failed. Take a look at verses 21 through 23 for a moment. It says, And Jesus asked his father, how long has this been happening to him?

And he said from childhood. him. And verse 22, And it has often cast him into fire and into water to destroy him.

[21 : 47] But if you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us. And Jesus said to him, If you can, all things are possible for one who believes.

Jesus' exchange with this man is indeed striking. The man says to Jesus, But if you can do, if you can do anything, have compassion on us.

I want us to see something here. This man not only appeals to Jesus on behalf of his son, but he appealed to Jesus on his own behalf as well.

And that's not unreasonable because those of you who have children, you know what it is to have a child perhaps who has who's unwell.

Having a child that is unwell is more painful to a parent than the parent being unwell him or herself. There is a sense of hopelessness.

[23 : 10] There's a sense of wonder. Wonder what's happening. This father whose child was experiencing agony and pain all of these years says, Lord, have compassion not on my son, but have compassion on us and help us.

But this father's statement indicates uncertainty with respect to whether he felt Jesus could help. Take a look at it.

He says, but if you can do anything, if you can do anything, perhaps this father was convinced that Jesus could help before interacting with the disciples.

Maybe he did think that he brought the child to Jesus initially. And maybe prior to his interacting with the disciples, he felt that Jesus could heal this child.

But after the disciples failed, maybe he arrived at the conclusion that perhaps Jesus could not help. His use of the phrase if you can suggests that he does not know who Jesus is.

[24 : 38] Or perhaps he thought the demon might be more powerful if you can. If you can is not the way one approaches an omnipotent God.

surely if there is something he cannot do. He is not God. If you can he says.

If you can do if you can do anything. Imagine if there is something that God couldn't do.

this father he goes on and he says have compassion on us and help us.

He not only asks Jesus for compassion but he also says to him I want you to help us because how many of you know that sometimes we can have compassion but we perhaps often times don't have the capacity to help.

[25 : 57] So he says Jesus I want you to have compassion and I also want you to help us if you can. And Jesus responds to this man in a way that I think ought to help all of us.

Jesus says to him if you can if you can all things are possible for one who believes.

In other words Jesus was saying to the man faith matters his faith Jesus was saying to the man his faith matters his faith in Jesus matters if you can not me if you can believe is what Jesus was saying to him if you can trust if you can rely on me if you can put your confidence in me if you can if you can not if I can but if you can if you can if you can believe if you can trust if you can endure if you can hold on to hope if you cannot be moved by your circumstances if you can grab a hold of his word if you can if you can believe

Jesus said all things all things are possible for one who believes notice that Jesus didn't say to him that some things are possible rather Jesus says to him all things are possible for one who believes now can I help us a little bit with this just a little bit now Jesus doesn't say here that all things will happen for one who believes he doesn't say that he does not say that all things will happen for one who believes he says that all things are possible for one who believes just because something is possible it doesn't mean that it's going to happen you get that you see the point Jesus wasn't saying that it's possible and that means it's going to!

Jesus says when you come to me the sovereign Lord of the universe come believing that all things are possible all things are possible nothing that is impossible with God doesn't mean that you got to get everything that you want it doesn't mean that you can declare I think it used to be name and declare and claim and say what they used to say name it and claim it that's not what it is to say that's not what it's saying Jesus says all things are possible it means that nothing is impossible that's all it means nothing is impossible nothing is impossible for one who believes but that you got to get everything that you want this man's response this unnamed man's response was quick [30 : 04] John Mav tells us he says I believe help my unbelief this man was not being super spiritual like some people who deny things they see and feel you know people like that do you know anybody like that they they've got pain in their head and let me well I better not use that word because I'm used to that one they got pain in their arm and you ask them how they feeling and they say you know I've never been better and you know they can't move their hand you know can't move their hand but they've never been better you know how's your finances oh my goodness any better than this

I'll be jumping over the moon but they can't pay the bill and they say that's faith they say that it's faith that's not what we see here with this man that's not what what we see here with this man it's humility and transparency and honesty this man says Lord I believe but I don't believe fully he says help my unbelief he says Lord I really I believe that you can I believe that you can but there is some doubt he was not trying to impress anyone as if he was so holy while he said that he believed he also acknowledged that he had some doubt perhaps his doubt arose from the experience he had with the disciples maybe he came fully persuaded you know maybe maybe this man came fully persuaded that

Jesus could heal his son but having listened to the scribes having listened to the scribes to those detractors having listened to those people who were not like minded started to doubt or perhaps this man perhaps he had gone to the synagogue maybe he had prayed or even seen the leaders of the synagogue time and time again and nothing happened so he had doubts maybe he had his hopes dashed before over and over again and he was just not ready to lay it all out there for this carpenter Joseph's son not this time notice however that even in making it plain that he had unbelief notice what he did want you to see what he did that is so amazing here this man said to Jesus Lord I believe but I have this unbelief and I want you to help me with this unbelief he takes his unbelief to Jesus he had faith in Jesus that he had faith in Jesus that Jesus would help bridge the gap that the faith that he did not have to him that Jesus would take that unbelief and fix it yet faith enough for that and Jesus didn't hold it against him Jesus didn't hold his imperfect faith against him Jesus was going to say man you better go sit down you come to me and you telling me to my face that you don't have absolute faith in me and you want me to do something for you you better come back tomorrow Jesus could have said that to him

Jesus could have said to him you're not ready for this you're not ready to receive anything from me Jesus could have said to him go back and get your words right get your words speak it properly speak it and speak it thoroughly and often say to yourself that this child is healed say it ten times every time you wake up in the morning and before you go to bed at night this child is healed this child is healed Jesus could have said that to him but Jesus did not respond to him in that way Jesus had mercy on this man Jesus extended grace to this man how many of you I wonder have been right where this man was you believe perhaps you're there now you believe but you have to acknowledge that your faith is not perfect you've got to acknowledge it you believe that the [35 : 53] Lord's going to help you sometimes there's doubt you believe that he's going to take care of that bill next week the end of the month he's going to help you do it but you're not sure there's a bit of doubt you believe that that pain that has been afflicting your body that he's going to remove it someday had it for a long time there is doubt and you wonder whether it is that doubt that is causing you not to receive from the Lord as you would expect because he says all things are possible so could it be that this doubt that rises up in me sometimes because of what I see others going through or because of what my own experience is could it be that it is this doubt that is causing me to not receive from the

Lord I believe the word the clear word of the Lord to you today is that's not the case that's not the case can I tell you a little bit about doubt I believe that we are by nature doubters I believe we are by nature doubters and I believe that we actually cultivate or we retain a bit of doubt to minimize the sting that failure could bring in other words we we just want to we want to believe boy but you know

if it doesn't happen I don't want I don't want to be completely overwhelmed
I don't want to be completely disappointed so I think we have a little bit of doubt because of that but
can I tell you this man's experience and what we are saying is not an encouragement for us to
doubt I'm not encouraging us to doubt at all absolutely not it's a recognition of the reality of our
fallenness the time you did not feel well when you were waiting on the doctor's report you prayed to
the Lord you had faith believed that the Lord would cause the report to come back negative but you
got to admit there was a bit of doubt there you were down on yourself the time when you when the
midst of a relational issue someone that you love and you you prayed and you asked the
Lord Lord please cause this to walk and you doubt it for a moment then you blame yourself perhaps
for it not working perhaps sometimes you even doubt your faith perhaps sometimes you even
wonder whether there is going to be a resurrection whether Jesus is the son of God Jesus is
helping us to see John Mark helps us to see grace overwhelms our doubt the story is told of a child
who received the gift of salvation at a very early age she fell in love and she got married and she
had a child a little girl but a short time after she got married she and her husband were enjoying a
picnic on a beach when they heard a young boy scream because he was about to drown of course
the husband he jumped in when he jumped in the boy pulled him under and they both drowned and
shortly after her husband's death

Louisa M.R. Sneed wrote these words that we are familiar with tis so sweet to trust in Jesus just to
take him at his word just to rest upon his promise just to know thus saith the Lord then she wrote
Jesus Jesus how I trust him how I proved him over and over Jesus Jesus precious Jesus oh for
grace to trust him more in the midst of her difficulty in the midst of her pain she acknowledged how
sweet it is to trust in Jesus but she also acknowledged that her trust was not perfect and she asked
in the words of the song oh God grant me grace to trust you more those of us here on this earth in
this fallen place this should be the prayer of our hearts every day

[42 : 43] God grant me grace to trust you more every day Lord grant me grace to trust you more in
the midst of this trial that I've been dealing with all these years or all these months or all these days
grant me grace Lord to trust you more Miss Needs faith did not end in the Lord when a husband
died indeed it was the source of joy for her she desired grace to trust him more you and I we need
not have perfect faith we are not called to whip up our faith Jesus said to his disciples in another
place if your faith is like a mustard seed mustard seed you will say to this mountain move from here
to there and it will move and nothing will be impossible for you you see the amount the size of your
faith does not matter it is the direction of your faith that matters your faith is the faith in the

Lord that is what matters Jesus did not criticize or penalize this man for his unbelief he did not
withhold healing from his son for his unbelief scripture tells us Jesus invited the child to him Jesus
healed the boy but it came as no surprise that after all of this the disciples would ask him why in
verse 28 why could we not cast it out and Jesus says to them this kind cannot be driven out by
anything but prayer prayer matters when asked why they were unable to cast out the demon and
heal the boy

Jesus said to his disciples this kind cannot be driven out by anything but prayer prayer matters
notice that Jesus did not say the style of the words matter he said prayer matters he didn't say that
the location or the day of your prayer matter he simply said the prayer matters he didn't say how
you pray matters he just simply said prayer matters he didn't even say that it had to be leadership in
the church that prayed for you just said prayer matters this kind cannot be driven out by anything
but prayer prayer matters prayer makes the difference is what

Jesus was saying with respect to this particular situation prayer! you and I pray it's we demonstrate
through our prayer that we are dependent on God that's what prayer is about prayer is an
acknowledgement!

that we can't work it out that we need God and what Jesus was saying to them is that you gotta
demonstrate to a greater degree your dependence on God I want you to hear what Mark L.

[47 : 21] Strauss writes about this section in his commentary on Mark he writes Jesus calls them
that is the disciples to more prayer that is greater dependence on God who alone has authority over
the forces of evil God alone has authority over the forces of evil he continues the disciples authority
to cast out demons was always mediated authority they are Jesus representatives acting in his
power doing great things for God means seeking guidance being led by his spirit and allowing his
power to walk through us!

to God is helping us to see that the power is not in us rather the power is in God and how many times you and I fail to recognize this we believe that faith is in faith or faith is in us it's something that we cultivate something that we do but Jesus is saying no it is in God it is he who has the power it's Jesus who has the power and the authority over the forces of evil and anything that we that he uses us to do is exactly that he uses us mediated authority with

Jesus representatives acting on his behalf Jesus matters faith matters prayer matters if you believe it today as we conclude the account that we read today should give you comfort in all areas of your life all areas of your life whatever it is you are confronted with today you've seen from the words that we read that Jesus is compassionate not only is he compassionate but he is able you know it's one thing to have someone who has a compassionate heart but who can't get the job done and there ain't nothing wrong with that if you're compassionate you can't get the job done you say

Lord help me to be able to get the job done Jesus showed that he not only was compassionate he had the power and the authority to get the job done nothing is impossible with him that nothing must extend to the circumstances in your life and in my life whatever they might be compassionate and able and then we see something that brings comfort to our hearts that we need not have perfect faith we need not have perfect faith we need not beat ourselves up then doubt creeps in Lord grant us grace to trust you more that we should gain comfort knowing that we can draw closer to God in prayer what if you're an unbeliever today if you're here today and you're an unbeliever there's one thing that I know that is true and it's this that things are so much harder for you than they are for those of us who believe why because while you and I might experience similar things the believer can look to Jesus who gives freely for help the believer can look to Jesus but you can't do that you don't have the privilege of doing that more importantly

[53 : 02] Jesus has taken care of the believer's greatest need need to be in right standing with God if you're an unbeliever today Jesus does not call you to a perfect life he gives you grace to grow in holiness he does not give you everything that you want he gives you grace to trust him more he does not call you to perfect faith he gives you grace to trust him more Jesus the son of God came to earth and died for the sins of the elect so that we might be in right standing with him and it is our prayer that he will give you grace right now to believe him and we ask the praise team to come with our closing song as we pray oh lord oh lord what a delight it is to feast at your table what a delight it is as we travel this road of life to know lord that we can plug into to you through through

Jesus Christ father we pray lord that as this man this man who brought his son to Jesus as he declared we pray that you would help our unbelief lord in whatever area of our lives lord where that we are struggling with that we are dealing with help our unbelief lord our hearts are gladdened lord we are leaping with joy knowing that you don't cast us away because we are imperfect lord that we we are ecstatic that we don't have to perform that we don't have to mislead that we can speak the truth thank you lord thank you lord thank you lord that you help us to see that all things are possible to him who believes so lord we pray in the name of jesus that you will cause our eyes to be open to the possibilities of life open our eyes to things that we once thought were impossible lord we pray that our desires would be informed by scripture we pray that we would be guided by your word as we consider these words that can be so easily misunderstood god protect us from self centeredness protect us from foolishness god we need your help we need your reminder thank you lord for reminding us today lord we pray that as we that when we leave this place today that every circumstance every circumstance every every situation that we have been dealing with lord that we will put them before you as this man did just as this man did lord we'll put them before you and lord we would allow your sovereignty to have its way lord our faith is in your goodness ultimately lord our faith is in your goodness we we believe that you know what's best for us lord we pray that you would take us to that place not to the place where we are driven by our selfish desires but rather lord where we can declare that we know that you love us and that you know what we have need of even before we come to you lord help us this day and every day in jesus name and all god's people say
amen amen