

Problems in the Christian Life: Doubt

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[0 : 00] I'm carrying on with a series of problems in the Christian life. Last week looked at guidance. This week the subject is doubt. And for that, if you would turn to Mark chapter 11, coming into the chapter at verse 11.

Mark 11, verse 11. And Jesus entered Jerusalem and went into the temple.

And when he had looked round at everything, as it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the twelve. On the following day, when they came from Bethany, he was hungry.

And seeing in the distance a fig tree and leaf, he went to see if he could find anything on it. When he came to it, he found nothing but leaves, for it was not the season of figs.

And Jesus said to it, May no one ever eat fruit from you again. And his disciples heard it. Verse 20.

[1 : 18] As they passed by in the morning, they saw the fig tree withered away to its root. And Peter remembered and said to him, Master, look, The fig tree which you has cursed has withered.

Jesus answered them, Have faith in God. Truly I say to you, Whoever says to this mountain, Be taken up and cast into the sea, And does not doubt in his heart, Believes that what he says will come to pass, It will be done for him.

Therefore I tell you, Whatever you ask in prayer, Believe that you have received it, And it will be yours. Amen.

May the Lord bless to us that reading. Be to his praise and to his glory. For the message was stand and sing, Teach me thy way, O Lord. Jesus answered and said to them, Have faith in God.

So the second problem we're looking at is the problem of doubt. Now a great number of Christians have this problem. Looking back on personal experience to the moment I was converted in February 1966, I also was plagued with this problem.

[2 : 41] But in my case, The reason for that was a lack of reading of God's word. I'd like to assure you, I've probably made up for it since then.

So what is doubt? Doubt can be defined as hesitation about belief in matters that were previously held to be certain.

In the Corinthians, for example, had doubts about the resurrection. So let's look at this first thing, the possibility of doubt.

Truly I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, Be taken up and cast into the sea, and does not doubt in his heart.

So here our Lord is talking about the problem of doubt with respect to the problem or to the ministry of prayer. So doubt comes from the mind and heart that is not attuned to the promises of Scripture and from faith in God.

[3 : 59] Now an example of this in the ministry of Jesus could be seen at the very end of Mark 13, where after he had finished a number of parables, he went and came to his own country and taught in their synagogue.

And that produced this result. They were astonished and said, Where did this man get this wisdom and these mighty works? He is not this, the carpenter's son.

So they took offense at him. They had doubt. He did not do their many mighty works because of their unbelief.

Doubt in the people of Nazareth with whom he had been brought up. But this emergence of doubt is not only there in the citizens of Nazareth, but also in the disciples of Jesus.

Now following these incidents in Matthew 13, we find in Matthew 14 that our Lord has dismissed the crowd and he went up onto a mountain to pray.

[5 : 15] Following this, Jesus walked on water to come to the disciples. When Peter saw this, after speaking to Jesus, he was invited to follow him by walking on the water.

But when Peter saw the wind, he was afraid. And beginning to think, he cried out, Lord, save me. And then we find that Jesus immediately reached out his hand and caught him, saying to him, O man of little faith, why did you doubt?

You see? He had looked at the wrong thing. Instead of looking at the person of Jesus, he had looked at the circumstances. And circumstances in life will produce doubt.

Going on to Matthew 17, in which the transfiguration is recorded, following that, we find this.

[6 : 31] And when the disciples of Jesus and Jesus came to the crowd, a man came up to him and knelt before him, saying, Lord, have mercy on my son, for he is an epileptic and suffers terribly, and he often falls into the fire, into the water.

Now, you see, this man had doubt. And that doubt was reinforced by the fact that he had first brought his son to the disciples and they weren't able to do anything about it.

He had doubt. But Jesus dealt with the situation and cast the demon out. Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, Why could we not cast it out?

And Jesus said to them, Because of the littleness of your faith. For truly, I say to you, if you have faith as a grain of mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, Move from here to there, and nothing will be impossible to you.

So, all through the Gospels, one thing is clear is this persistence of doubt with the disciples.

[7 : 59] Now, right at the end of the Gospel of Matthew, we read this. Now, the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them.

And when they saw him, they worshipped him. But some doubted. Now, we're not informed in Matthew's Gospel as to who these doubters were.

But John tells us about one of them. Thomas. Unless I see the print of the nails in his hands and the marks of the crucifixion, I will not believe Thomas was one of those who doubted.

Now, let's think secondly about the effects of all this. As they passed by in the morning, they saw the fig tree withered away to its roots. And Jesus answered them, Have faith in God.

Whoever says to this mountain, Be taken up and cast into the sea and does not doubt in his heart but believes that what he says will come to pass. So we're back on to the subject of prayer.

[9 : 26] Now, one of the things you find in the epistles that are written in the New Testament is that very few of them actually quote the words of Jesus.

The exception to this is the epistle of James written very early. And if you make a comparison between it, the contents of James, and the Sermon on the Mount, you'll find that he quotes the Sermon on the Mount time and time again.

And so, he takes up this theme of prayer. Let him ask in faith with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed about by the wind.

That person must not suppose that somebody who is double-minded in his intentions, instable in all his ways, will receive anything from the Lord.

So, the answer to the problem is the emergence of faith. Now, the epistle to the Hebrews spells this out.

[10 : 40] It says this in chapter 11, verse 6, Without faith, it is impossible to please him. For whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and he rewards those who seek him.

It will be remembered that chapter 11 is all about the place of faith in the life of the believer and it encourages us in this direction by providing us with many examples of the men of faith in the Old Testament.

But let's turn, just return a moment to this problem of Christians not reading the Bible. I'm not saying this in any way of condemnation, but if you don't read the Bible, there's two things that happen.

The first thing is you'll find it difficult to grow in the Christian life. but the second thing is more important which is this, that you will not be aware of how God acts in his dealings with men and women because the Bible is a true inspired record of how God indeed deals with men and women through faith.

faith. We are speaking of the persistence of doubt in the life of a believer and what happens is this persistence of doubt takes the promises of God and devalues them of their power.

[12 : 32] That is the function of doubt. it takes the promises of God and devalues them of their power.

Going back to Matthew 17 we read that Jesus said because of the littleness of your faith for truly I say to you if you have faith as a grain of mustard seed you will say to this mountain move from here

to there and nothing will be impossible to you.

So doubt has the power of robbing the promises of God of their inspirational power to change the life of the believer for good.

Now in this example in Mark 11 where Jesus is talking about the exercise of faith in prayer if we cannot believe that God answers prayer there would be very little point in praying at all.

A classic case of this prevalence of doubt is found in Mark chapter 2 when Jesus returned to Capernaum there he was in the house of Simon Peter and because of his reputation four men came carrying a paralytic on a bed and they proceeded to let it down to Jesus through the roof which they had removed when Jesus saw their action which was an action of faith he said my son your sins are forgiven and immediately some of the scribes were sitting there questioning in their hearts why does this man speak to us it is blasphemy who can forgive sins but God alone their hearts were filled with questionings and doubts and that source for all this questioning and doubts was undoubtedly due to their religious tradition which they had inherited so because they had these questions and these doubts they could play no part in the miracle that Jesus was about to perform but this miracle took place because Jesus saw in the four men the faith to believe in him to do something the prevalence of doubt can render ineffective the power of God to save and to heal finally the recovery as they passed by in the morning they saw the fig tree withered away to its roots and Jesus answered them have faith in God whoever says to this mountain be taken up and cast into the sea and does not doubt but believes what he says will come to pass it will be done for him so the recovery from doubt is in the words the command of Jesus have faith in God now let's go back to this incident in Matthew 17 where the father speaking to Jesus says this

[16:16] I brought my son to you for he is a dumb spirit and whenever it seizes him it dashes him down and he foams and grinds his teeth and becomes rigid and I ask your disciples to cast it out but they were not able then we find that Jesus says this how long has he had this he said from childhood it is often cast them into the fire into the water to destroy him but if you can do anything have pity on us and help us and Jesus takes these words if you can all things are possible to him who believes to which the father cries out

I believe help my unbelief as I said already when you examine this this father also had some doubt and that doubt was increased because the disciples were not able to do anything but the words if you can do anything have pity on us and help us don't only reveal the despair which the father had but also the depth of his doubt but notice in this interchange that Jesus has with this man he doesn't condemn him for his doubt but rather shows him a way out all things are possible to him who believes and in this story faith comes not from the mind but from the living person of Jesus that was the case when Jesus was on the earth many people were inspired to do great things because they had seen what he did now we today don't have the physical presence of

Jesus with us but faith comes to us nevertheless through the preaching and the reading of God's word the apostle Paul said in Romans 10 faith comes from what is heard and heard comes by the preaching of Jesus so faith comes to us from a personal interaction interaction with Jesus himself and he is alive today to give you that interaction because he stands in your midst he stands in the midst of your difficulties and your problems and he says this have faith in God it's a personal thing it's radiated by him think of the woman who had the hemorrhage she had heard reports about Jesus and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his garment this was an act of faith and immediately the hemorrhage ceased she felt in her body that she was healed of a disease why because she had this personal interaction with Jesus Christ and today that same Lord Jesus Christ stands before me with my difficulties and you with your difficulties and says have faith in me and if we respond positively to this you will find faith swelling up in your being and if faith swells up in your being it causes you to look at all your difficulties and they pass away because the living Jesus is there and he is Lord of all of them amen we come round the table communion table we will sing the communion hymn for three verses Jesus keep me near the cross there a precious fountain communion table is not our table but it is for all who love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity and in truth and if you have that commitment you are very welcome to share this feast with us together Thank you.

[22:46] Thank you.

Thank you.