

## Lord, Increase our Faith – Matthew 17:14-21

### I. Introduction:

- A. Evidence suggests that during our Lord's earthly ministry, Peter, James and John were His foremost disciples.
1. They certainly got the most face time with the Saviour – the most ink; the most personal counseling and the most rebuke.
  2. In the first part of this chapter, these three were privileged to be with the Lord when He was transfigured.
  3. While the Lord Jesus was in His true state – glorified and worshiped – the rest of the disciples were at the foot of the mountain, dealing with a man and his demon possessed son.
  4. I'd like to use those nine disciples to illustrate you and me – true disciples, but not exactly God's elite.
  5. Even though Peter, James and John had some of the same problems we have, I think that in some ways we can be seen more clearly in the rest of the disciples.
  6. Not only aren't we seeing the Lord in His glorified state, because we are down here at the foot of the mountain occupied with the world, but we aren't exactly successful in our personal & ecclesiastical service.
- B. This message is not meant to be a rebuke for any of you, because I include myself among the nine.
1. What you might see as rebuke is first and foremost for me.
  2. I don't see the demons of sin flying out of people around me as I try to serve the Saviour.
  3. The reasons for my failure provide the basis for this message and what might become a short series.
  4. As someone who is far from an expert in this subject, I would like you to join me in my desire toward greater spiritual victory.
  5. I'd like us to examine, what I hope will be the key to bringing the Lord the glory He deserves in His creation.
- C. When Christ left the splendor of His glory at the top of that mountain and returned to focus on the needs of sinful people, His blessing fell on the demon possessed young man.
1. This is still what our society needs. Our world is full with demon possessed children.
  2. Our church has been commissioned to deal with this kind of problem and to experience this divine power.
  3. This is what you and I need personally. We **need** to be useful. I **want** to be useful.
  4. Our **neighbors** need us to be the people of God we were designed to be.
  5. It should be our desire to bring glory to our Saviour, by being more like Him than we ordinarily are.
  6. And our hearts should be crying out with its own special tears: *"Why could not we cast him out?"*
- D. Knowing that the service of God is not actually about us, still we should cry, *"Why could not WE cast him out?"*
1. Remember that these disciples – our ministerial forefathers – were called of God into this ministry.
    - a. **Matthew 10:** *"When Christ had called unto him his twelve disciples (not just the primary three, but all of them)..."*
    - b. *When Christ had called unto him his twelve disciples, he gave the power against unclean spirits, to cast them out..."*
  2. After the Lord had saved them, the Lord of the harvest called His disciples into His work.
    - a. Eventually He said, *"Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature."*
    - b. He said, *"Ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you, and ye shall be witnesses unto me..."*
  3. But just a few chapters after their initial calling, they proved to be utter failures. They couldn't help this boy.
  4. And over the coming months and years, there were seasons of great victories and seasons of great dearth.
  5. Sometimes they experienced the power of God, but more often than not, they didn't.
- E. What brought about the periods of failure such as what we see here in **Matthew 17?**
1. It certainly was not any failure in the Lord.
    - a. He had not withdrawn His commission nor the power which He had given them.
    - b. Recognizing that some victories are harder to win than others, and some people are harder to win to Christ, that is no reflection on the Lord.
    - c. We can have seen Him save even the chiefest of sinners.

2. And the problem was not in the dead souls to whom the disciples were ministering.
  - a. The problem was not in the demon possessed boy or in his father.
3. The lack of success was something in the disciples themselves.
4. And the Lord wasted no time in pointing it out.
5. They asked, *“Why could not we cast him out? And Jesus said unto them, Because of YOUR unbelief.*
  - a. *For verily I say unto you, If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you.*
  - b. *Howbeit this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting.”*

F. Why do we not see greater victory in all of its possible aspects?

1. It is not because these are the last days. Don't put the blame on something which the Bible doesn't blame.
  - a. Yes, we are approaching the end of the age, and evil is waxing worse and worse.
  - b. But that is not the reason for weakness in God's saints.
  - c. Our weaknesses and strengths are not contingent on our circumstances.
  - d. Even during the Tribulation there will be pockets of revival brought about through God's ambassadors.
2. The problem is in us – the servants of the omnipotent God.
  - a. The conduit of the Lord's power has become constricted.
  - b. God's victories are not flowing through us as they were meant to do.
3. The Lord Jesus will ask the question: *“When the Son of man cometh shall he find faith on the earth?”*
4. If it was up to you and me, and most of the professed believers on the earth, the answer would be *“no.”*
5. Again, I am not pointing my finger specifically at you, but toward all of us and myself as your pastor.

**II. *“Why could not we cast him out? And Jesus said unto them, Because of your unbelief.”***

- A. Earlier, in **Matthew 14**, we read about a storm out on the sea of Tiberias, while the Lord Jesus was elsewhere.
1. Today we could say that there is a sense in which the Lord Jesus is elsewhere.
  2. We could say that He is in Heaven, preparing a retirement village for Christians who haven't served well enough to deserve a Heavenly retirement. Praise God for His grace!
  3. Today we are in the middle of a tumultuous society that is threatening to sink our little ecclesiastical ship.
  4. And then a man of faith, one of Christ's elite, sees the Saviour through the darkness – through the winds and the raging sea.
  5. *“Lord, if it be thou, bid me come unto thee on the water.”* And Peter hears the word *“come.”*
  6. So he steps out by faith, walking on the water, doing the physically impossible... for a few moments.
  7. But then reality steps in, and he hears the boisterous wind and sees the slippery, dangerous waves.
  8. Down he goes; his heavy robe becoming even heavier with the rain and waves, threatening to send him 141 feet to the bottom of the lake.
  9. But *“immediately Jesus stretched for his hand, and caught him, and said unto him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst doubt?”*
- B. That is an important question in so many ways. Why did you doubt, Peter?
1. Where did your little faith go? Why can't you trust me to do the impossible through you?
  2. And today, why can't you and I trust God sufficiently to be used miraculously?
  3. Isn't it because we live in the flesh, and the flesh lusteth against the spirit and spiritual things?
  4. Why is it that we trust the Lord for things for a little while, and then our faith evaporates in the polluted atmosphere governed by the Prince and power of the air?
  5. Isn't our failure because we don't sufficiently exercise the faith we have?
  6. Peter stepped out of the boat by faith, because the Saviour bid him to come.
  7. But then he let that faith slip, and he immediately slipped beneath the waves.
- C. In **Luke 17:5** the disciples said to Christ, *“Increase our faith.”*
1. Do you know what the Lord did? He didn't say, *“Ah shucks, Why didn't you ask earlier.”*
    - a. He didn't smile and say, *“I have been waiting for you to ask.”*

2. No. He began to lecture them, placing the failure in their laps.
3. He didn't wave a magic wand over their heads, and He didn't sprinkle moon dust in their hair.
4. Even though faith is the gift of God, you and I are responsible to take it, use it, exercise it and strengthen it.
5. The disciples' weakness in faith, was born and bred; created and spread; by their own sinfulness.
6. *"Whatsoever is not of faith is sin."*
7. They were not wrong in asking Christ to increase their faith, but they were wrong in thinking that it was up to the Saviour to strengthen and increase that faith.

D. **Mark 9** gives Peter's account of what Matthew records in his chapter 17.

1. Peter was there that day, having come down from the mountain probably at the side of Christ.
2. So he may have heard something which Matthew missed, and he passed that on to Mark for our benefit.
3. It reveals that the boy's father may have had more understanding of the problem than the disciples did.
4. Jesus said to the man, *"If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth."*
5. *And straightway the father of the child cried out, & said with tears, Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief."*

E. Every true Christian is a man or woman of faith.

1. If we haven't been saved through faith, then we haven't been saved.
2. If you have eternal life, that is proof that you have been given God's grace of faith.
3. The problem on the lake was not with Peter's faith in Christ, it was in the offsetting strength of his unbelief.
4. The Lord declared, *"All things are possible to him that believeth."*
5. Peter should have been crying out with tears, *"I Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief."*

### III. Where is Christianity's problem today? Why can't we cast out those demons?

A. As I have said, it's not a problem with the Lord or His willingness to bring glory to His own name.

1. He says that the problem is in our unbelief. It's in our un-faith.
2. *"Why could not we cast him out? And Jesus said unto them, Because of your unbelief."*

B. There is probably not one member of our church who does not believe that our God is omnipotent.

1. We know, and we believe, that God can do anything He chooses to do.
2. When he tells the disciples they can order trees and even mountains to be cast into the sea, we are sure that if God wanted the landscape to be so changed, he could do it.
3. Intellectually and theologically we are people of faith.
4. But practically and experientially, most Christians are not.
5. As much as I dislike my neighbor's locust tree, I would never dream of asking God – and trying to trust God – to cast that tree into the Puget Sound or into Lake Coeur d'Alene.

C. And don't we do the same sort of thing in much of our prayers and throughout much of our ministries?

1. We pray for a certain young man to be saved, knowing that God could give to him a new heart.
2. But do we actually believe and trust that God will do that this next Lord's Day?
3. The problem is not with our faith, which is theologically sound, but with our more practical unbelief.
4. We believe that God can give us the ability to walk on the rolling surface of Lake Pend Oreille, but we wouldn't dare trust Him to do it by stepping out of the boat.
5. But of course, to us He has never said, *"come,"* as he did to Peter that night.

D. But what **HAS** He said?

1. He has said, *"All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth."*
  - a. *Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost:*
  - b. *Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen."* And lo, *"I am with you always."*
2. He has said, *"I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."*

3. There have been thousands of churches of Christ throughout the ages, which are not in existence today.
  - a. Some have been destroyed by persecution, as their members gave their lives for their faith Saviour.
  - b. And some have been eaten up by false doctrine and other sins.
4. But I will stick my neck out and say: many of those churches simply fell into dissipation through a neglect of practical faith.
5. They were not seeing the salvation of demon possessed boys, and it didn't disturb them.
6. They let the power of God slip through their hands without realizing it. And how did they do that?

#### IV. The Lord Jesus tells us exactly why we lack His miraculous power.

- A. We don't have to wonder about the cause of our spiritual failures. The Lord wants us to know.
  1. The nine average disciples asked the Lord, *"Why could not we cast him out?"*
  2. *And Jesus said unto them, Because of your unbelief.*
  3. *For verily I say unto you, If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you.*
  4. *Howbeit this kind goeth not out but by **PRAYER** and **fasting**."*
- B. Directly coupled to our failure in faith is our failure in prayer, reaching out toward the source of our faith.
  1. Yes, we pray that the Lord will work miraculously in the hearts of the people in the Deer Park church.
  2. And we pray for the salvation of those lost people who are close to our hearts.
  3. But do we pray with the expectation of seeing those miracles? Do we pray in faith? In expectation?
  4. In other words, can't our unbelief be seen even in our prayers?
- C. Now, I'm not one of those *"name-it-and-claim-it"* charismatic heretics.
  1. I'm not talking about some sort of mystical, religious or spiritual visualization program.
  2. I'm talking about trusting God to do things which He has indirectly and sometimes directly promised to do.
- D. We will probably will return to this illustration in some future lesson.
  1. But for a moment consider the men who carried their crippled friend, tearing up the roof of a man's house in order to drop him down before the Lord Jesus. They believe that Christ could heal their friend.
  2. They possessed a theological faith in the omnipotence of Christ.
  3. But beyond their theological faith, they actually expected to see their friend walk out the door of that house.
  4. That is supposed to be our ministry. That should be our kind of faith.
- E. The word *"expectation"* must be a part of our theology of faith.
  1. Yes, Christ can save anyone. But do we have faith to **expect** Him to do so?
  2. Can we remain believers after years of waiting for the Lord to answer our prayers?
  3. Can we remain believers when God shows us that our hopes & wishes are close, but not exactly, His will?
  4. The woman with the issue of blood, had faith to trust Christ for the healing of her body, but He healed her soul as well, giving her more than what her faith then asked. That was grounds for revival.
  5. But if she hadn't exercised her little faith, she would have had nothing.
- F. My heart is filled with all sorts of thoughts on this subject.
  1. I plan to be sharing some of them with you over the next couple of weeks.
  2. But in the mean time, Austin and I plan to be here this Saturday morning at 7:00 for prayer.
  3. We need – I need to work on my faith and my prayer of faith.
  4. Any of you men who want to join us are welcome, but I'm not calling this an official church function.
  5. I'm not sure that genuine revival ever came out of an *"official"* church prayer meeting.
- G. However, this evening we **are** in the midst of an official service.
  1. I invite you to pray tonight in faith and expectation. Exercise your faith. Expect God's blessings.
  2. It is my prayer that we begin to see miraculous answers to our prayers of genuine faith.