

**Mark 9: 14-29; “A Father’s Faith Strengthened”, Sermon # 74 in the series –
“Astonished at His Teaching”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall
on June 17th, 2018, in the Morning Worship Service.**

Jesus had come down from the mountain of transfiguration with his disciples. And when He did, He saw the rest of his disciples surrounded by a great multitude, and the scribes were disputing with them. The controversy was over the disciples inability to cast a demon out of the son of a man who had brought him to them. Since Jesus had not been there, and the disciples had failed to do what Jesus would have done if he had been there; I believe that these scribes were taking advantage of their inability, to make them think that they were utter failures as Christ’s disciples. Then suddenly, Jesus shows up with Peter, James, and John, and everything changes. Things always change for the better for those who believe, when Jesus is present and stretches forth His power to save and to heal. May it be so here this morning.

The theme of the message this morning is faith. I want you to see that when your faith is strong, it honors God. I want you to see that when a person is exercising their faith, they will see great spiritual things done for the kingdom of God and Christ; for themselves, and for those for whom they pray for. Some of us here this morning may believe that all faith is the same. If you have faith, you have it, and that is the end of the matter. Oh no, my friend; you must not think that way. There are some believers who are growing stronger in their faith and they are glorifying God. And then there are those who are weak in faith, and they are skeptical and doubting. And because of it, they are seeing very little fruit in their life being born to God because they do not understand how important it is that they be believing.

So this morning I would like to show you 1st of all – That the person who has true and saving faith will bring the impossible to Jesus. Then 2nd – Our Lord may see the need to challenge and rebuke you if you only have a little faith. And 3rd – True and saving faith, when it is weak, may sometimes question the Lord’s ability to help. And 4th – A person who has true and saving faith will at last receive the correction and instruction of the Lord concerning their faith.

1st of all – Those who have saving faith will bring the impossible to Jesus.

(verses 14-18)

Verse 14 says that “when He came to the disciples, He saw a great multitude around them, and scribes disputing with them.” “Immediately when they saw Him, all the people were greatly amazed, and running to Him, greeted Him.” Some of the commentators in trying to figure out why the multitude were amazed have suggested that it was because Jesus’ face was still shining a little from the experience of the Transfiguration. But I do not believe that this was so. If it was so, then why would He have instructed the disciples not to say a word about it until He was raised from the dead? No, His face shining would have caused far more questions about that, than even the incident that we now have in front of us. There would have been an immediate recognition on the part of the people, of even the slightest outward evidences of Jesus’ real and eternal glory being manifested; and questions would have been asked.

No their amazement, I believe, was because the multitude thought that it was very providential, and very exciting, that Jesus should show up just at the time when He was needed most; to solve the mystery of the difficulty, as to why His disciples could not cast out this mute spirit from this boy. They knew that Jesus had the power to deal with this situation; but they also felt the weight of the scribes words to them, which were probably something like this: Why should a person be a follower Jesus if you cannot do what Jesus has already given you before, the power to do? If you really have been given this power, to cast out demons, then why can’t you do it now? Why be a follower of Jesus when you cannot know the outcome of all of your requests in prayer? Why be a follower of Jesus if he cannot always be there for you, to change for you the things which so desperately need change?

By the way, there will always be religious people around who will think and act like these scribes. They will hold to a form of godliness, but they will deny the power of it. They do not live by faith in the Son of God; rather, they continually have a “prove it to me” mentality. Well, Jesus was there now; and some of the people, at least, were convinced, based upon what they had previously seen Him do, that He would do something now, once again. Before I go into the actual words of the father to Jesus concerning his son’s condition and the disciples inability to deal with it, I want to point out to you something very important. The father of the boy said in verse 17, “Teacher, I brought you my son, who has a mute spirit.” Now let me ask you, ever so plainly, ever so simply this morning – Do you bring your greatest problems to Jesus? Do you believe that Jesus can do something for you to change the problems of nature which are too great for you to solve?

Fathers, do you bring the problems which your children have, to Jesus? Do you bring to Him the problems that they have had from birth, and the sinful problems which they have by nature, so that He might do something about them? You say: I really feel for this father of the text that we are studying; he had a great problem to deal with in his son. It was good that he had the faith, that he knew that he should bring his son to Jesus. I am very thankful, you say, that my son does not have problems like this man did. Ah, my friend, but you may have problems like this man did, but yours are spiritual problems if you know them and see them aright. Do you realize that your child, your son or daughter, may indeed be spiritually quite a bit like this man’s son who he describes so well for us in our text?

Does your son have a mute spirit? Is he ever found speaking of the things of God and Christ, or he is mute? Is he very, very quiet? Do you have a son who is in the kingdom of darkness; who needs to be delivered from that kingdom and brought into the kingdom of light? Do you have a son who Satan is working in him so strongly, that whenever you try to speak to him about conversion and faith in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins, that he resists you greatly? Oh, I am not suggesting that when you do so, that the Devil seizes him, throws him down, that he foams at the mouth, or that that he gnashes his teeth. But it may indeed be true that he may become rigid toward you and he might tell you that he does not like to think about such things, and he doesn’t want you talking about such things.

I am asking – Do you think about the very difficult and painful problems that each of your children has by nature? By nature and from their birth, your children have been dead in their trespasses and sins. Because you are their father, they have inherited from Adam, through you, a sinful nature that is not inclined to do the things which are written in the Word of God. This is why you may be teaching them in the way that they should go, but they are not responding to it in the way that you would like to see them respond. Their first and primary and chief delight is not God and fellowship with the Father and the Son; their first and primary delight is to be free to do and to think as they see fit. Their freedom is to be free from God and the rules and commandments that you would give to them on God’s behalf.

Their supposed freedom, if they are religious children, is to worship God in the way that they think best. And their motives for doing so are purely selfish. They do not particularly like the preaching of the Word of God, unless it is entertaining to them, and they do not like having you correct their ignorance of God’s good will for their life. They do not think that they need to be converted to Christ. They believe that they are really quite self-sufficient. I would say that they are quite a bit like this man’s son. But the wonderful thing to notice here, is that the father brought him to Jesus. He couldn’t do anything to change the boy, but he had heard about Jesus and what He could do, and so he brought him to Jesus. This is what every father ought to do with the problems in themselves that they find, or the problems in their children that they find. Bring the problems and the people to Jesus. Jesus can heal the body, if He chooses to do so. But even more, Jesus can, and He most certainly will heal the deformed and demon-oppressed or possessed soul; He can, and He will, heal the sin-sick soul, and take away the heart of stone, and remove the

resistance toward Himself, of any person who comes to Him and has dealings with Him by faith. Do you pray about these things, dear father?

I believe in irresistible grace, do you? I believe that when God comes to the soul of a person with His saving grace, that He changes that soul and causes Christ to be seen as desirable and beautiful. That person wants to come to Christ to be saved and healed when they are effectually called. The person who has been given grace desires to think about Christ; they desire to come to Him and find His salvation for themselves. Fathers, bring your children to Jesus in prayer if they will not come themselves. Bring even the most stubborn and resistant ones to Him in prayer. God can create new desires in the most resistant and ungodly of people. The Father God can also give grace to the most compliant of children; those who think that they do not need Christ. Christ has the power to overcome all of our greatest resistance to Him, and to persuade us to take Him by faith. This father had faith in Jesus, and that faith was evidenced by his bringing the problems which were too great for him to solve, to Jesus. I trust that this is what you will want to do as well.

Now 2nd – Our Lord may see the need to challenge and rebuke you if you only have a little faith. (verses 18 and 19)

The father says in verse 18, “So I spoke to your disciples, that they should cast it out, but they could not.” “Jesus answered him and said, ‘O faithless generation, how long shall I be with you?’” “How long shall I bear with you?” “Bring him to Me.” Now it has been a great difficulty among commentators to be able to figure out just who the Lord Jesus is speaking to when He says, “O faithless generation”. Is he speaking to His disciples? Is he speaking to the father? Is he speaking to the scribes? Is he speaking to the multitude? I think the key is found in the words themselves – “O faithless generation”. I think that it is all of them together. It should be obvious to everyone that His was a righteous complaint, which he spoke on this occasion, for there was no sinful frustration, no sinful anger, and no sinful impatience in the heart, the words, or the actions of our Lord on this occasion. To say so would be to bring a charge of sin upon Him which the rest of the Bible states that He never had.

So what is He saying here then? He was saying that it was a very great grief to His holy heart that men do not trust in God, and in Himself, when indeed, they have every reason to do so. He is saying that unbelief leads to the perversity of blaming our problems upon others, or even upon God Himself, when it is really our own fault. Jesus, in Matthew 17: 17 says, “O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you?” Let us think about the unbelief of the scribes first. It was moral perversity in their hearts that they so often demanded from our Lord a sign, so that they could then believe. It was perversity in them that even when He did perform a good work of healing or casting out demons, that they still would not believe. It is an evil and an unbelieving generation that seeks for a sign, Jesus said to them on another occasion, and that applies to the attitude of the scribes on this occasion.

On this occasion they were probably ridiculing the disciple’s weakness and inability to cast out the demon in Jesus name. And their mocking attitude probably had a real influence on the father of this boy; so much so, that when he was explaining to Jesus that His disciples could not cast it out, something of their sarcasm and unbelief must have come through this father’s voice, to trigger such a reaction as this from the holy Lord Jesus. What should we say to these things? Well, I think that we need to learn a lesson here. The lesson is this; that our faith and our hope should always be fixed upon God Himself, in the primary sense. It should be fixed upon the Lord Jesus Christ, in the primary sense, and not upon men. When our hope is fixed upon men, we will always in the final analysis be disappointed. Let me ask you – Are you like this, dear believer in Christ? Are you someone who wants so much to boast in what other Christian men are able to do, that you find yourself becoming greatly disappointed in God, or in the truth of the Reformed faith, or you even become disappointed and unbelieving in terms of the power of God, because you do not see the results that you believe that you should expect to see, from these disciples that you are looking at?

What I think that you need to understand is that men can only do what God gives them the grace to do. And what they do accomplish or do, if it is from God's wisdom and power, it is not meant to turn your attention to them; to begin to boast in them. Whatever they are able to do spiritually which may impress you, you may mistakenly think is because of their own inherent ability that they have improved upon by Christ's grace. But that is Arminianism. You may even go so far as to be boasting in the ability of other Christians to do truly spiritual things, because they have been able to live uprightly before God. But then you see them on another occasion, and they fail to meet up to the Bible standard, or your expectations of them. They are inconsistent you think, and so you are very disappointed. They are not to be trusted in, or followed ever again.

Truly it is a great mistake to boast in men, for all the power that they have, has been given to them by God. They could do nothing unless it had been given them from above. It is not their own wisdom or determination that has allowed them to do what they do, and to be spiritually or morally upright, as God would have each of us to be. It is God alone who gives true Biblical success in spiritual things. And the glory should all go to Him and not to the man. 1st Corinthians 4: 7 says – "For who makes you differ from another!" "And what do you have that you did not receive?" "Now if you did indeed receive it, why do you glory (or boast) as if you had not received it?" You see, these disciples had been delegated this authority and power to cast out demons in the past, but now they could not exercise the same power, and so they were being criticized and ridiculed by these scribes. Let us understand, that the power that unbelief wields, is a perverse power. The scribes who came down from Jerusalem in Mark 3: 22 had said that Jesus cast out demons by the power of demons. And thus they committed an eternal sin. Take heed, you who listen to me, of ever ridiculing the power that God gives to men; the ability to preach and to see souls raised from the dead, and the power of the Devil destroyed in those who are possessed or oppressed. That ridiculing is perversity.

Now let's think about the multitude. There were no doubt many there that day who truly loved the Lord Jesus and wanted His disciples to be able to cast out the evil spirit from this boy. But yet many among them may have been only curious, and not really believing. Let us remember that even though we do not trust in men, that we do pray for those whom Christ has appointed to preach the Word, so that the means appointed might be blessed. Nothing is ever accomplished through unbelief. In Mark 6: 5 it says that, "Jesus could do no mighty works there in his own country, except He laid His hands on a few sick people and healed them." "And He marveled at their unbelief," it says. How much more would He have done, if people would only have believed. You must look to yourselves, and to your own hearts, here this morning, and ask yourselves this question: Am I a skeptical person in terms of the ministry of the Word, or am I believing that God will use this means to the salvation of souls, and the building up of His people in their faith?

Let us think about this man. I think that he had allowed the scribes to influence him too much. I think that since the Lord's disciples had not been able to cast out the demon that he had allowed himself to think that the Lord Jesus could not either. What is this but unbelief? Occasionally you will hear of a minister who falls into sin and disgraces the ministry and dishonors His Lord who he has professed to love and serve. And sometimes along with this, you will find that those who had helped to put this man into the ministry, and saw it as a trust that he held on their behalf, then leave the church, or turn away from Christianity altogether. This is nothing other than raw unbelief. You say to me: Well, they were disappointed in him, and they had a right to be disappointed. And I would say to you: So they did. But does that mean that all men in the ministry are to be mistrusted, or that the Lord Himself is to be mistrusted because that man fell into sin? No, there ought to be grief on such an occasion, but there ought not to be unbelief. That man's fall ought to show us the greatness of the battle against the World and the Devil, and our own flesh. And we ought to re-double our own efforts to be faithful and to strengthen the hearts of those whose faith is wavering around us. Let us remember that Jesus is the only perfect man. Beware of

putting men, even the best of men, anyone else than Jesus; up on a pedestal, to think that they could not fall. Rather pray for them, and have the faith to believe that it is a very great gift for men to be given such a privilege to preach and to see men helped and saved through His preaching.

Then think of the Apostles themselves. The proof that these men were faithless in this particular situation and needed to be rebuked is found in Matthew's gospel, Chapter 17, and verse 19, if you will turn with me there. "Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, 'Why could we not cast it out?'" "So Jesus said to them, 'Because of your unbelief; for assuredly I say to you, if you have faith as a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there, and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you.'" I hope that you now can see what had happened to these disciples; they had fallen into faithlessness in this situation. They had saving faith, but it was small. In the margin in verse 20, it says that the word that Jesus used, "unbelief", could be translated, "little faith". Well how much faith did they need? They needed the faith which was the size of a mustard seed. They needed mustard seed faith. They needed to exercise their faith in Christ, whether He was with them, or not with them. They needed to believe that He would do great and miraculous things because He is able, and He loves to help His people. Let me ask you if you have this mustard seed faith today as a Christian? It is only the privilege of Christians to be able to look at mountains of difficulty and still have the faith to believe: My Jesus can help me to deal with this, and to remove it, if it is in accordance with His will. Oh, that you and I will remember this.

3rd – True and saving faith, when it is weak, may sometimes question the Lord's ability to help. (verses 20-23)

"Then they brought him to Him." "And when he saw Him, immediately the spirit convulsed him, and he fell on the ground and wallowed, foaming at the mouth." "So He asked his father, 'How long has this been happening to him?'" "And he said, 'From childhood.'" "And often he has thrown him both into the fire and into the water to destroy him." "But if You can do anything, have compassion on us and help us." "Jesus said to him, 'If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes.'" Some translations make it a question and it has Jesus saying, "If you can!" "All things are possible to him who believes." "Immediately the father of the child cried out and said with tears, 'Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!'" Now, this conversation is not included in the gospel of Matthew, but it tells us much about this situation and the father's faith. In Matthew, the child's malady is called Epilepsy. But to compound this "falling disease" as it used to be called, this child also had had this evil spirit working within him. Satan will always try to take advantage of our weaknesses. The evil spirit would often throw him into the fire and into the water in order to destroy him if he could.

Let us understand that Satan will always try to use us for his own evil purposes and then destroy us if he can get no further profit from us. This awful situation in the life of this man's son had brought him to the point where he did not know if anything could be done for his son; even if it was the Lord Jesus that he was talking to. This is why the father said, "If you can...." But the Lord Jesus reversed this statement and gave it back to the father as a matter related to his faith. "If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes." Why is it that so many people cannot find relief and help and deliverance from the greatest of their problems and sins? It is because they cannot, and they do not, believe that even God and Christ can do anything about them. Let us understand that it is not a matter of, if Jesus can; it is a matter of whether God is willing. When the leper came to Jesus in Mark 1, verse 40, he said, "If You are willing, You can make me clean." Then, it says, "Jesus, moved with compassion, stretched out his hand and touched him, and said to him, 'I am willing; be cleansed.'" This man comes begging for compassion and yet says, "If you can...." There is not faith coupled with the request. So Jesus rebukes Him and instructs him, and then waits for the response.

When will we learn that whom the Lord loves, He also reproveth and chastens? Will you receive it, if it is needed in your life? Look at the good response of this dear man. "Lord, I believe, help my unbelief!" He did not say: Lord Jesus, you do not understand how hard it is for me to believe anything! This has been such a long affliction. I think that I have a right not to believe that even you can do this great thing of helping my son." Some people think that way; they reason that way. They think that they have a right to withhold faith, love, and obedience from God based upon their experience of affliction. Some even feel that they have a right to be angry with God and to express that anger and frustration because they believe that "God is big enough to be able to take it".

But I want to tell you this morning that this is not the language of faith. Faith will believe God and hope in God at all times. Faith will even do what this dear man did, and declare that his faith is weak, but still he will pray to Christ that he might take away his unbelief and ask for more faith. Oh that you would believe and learn this valuable lesson even today, if you have not learned it before! Oh that you would learn it before you come into the crucible and your faith is tested as a believer! Let this father's example be received by you. Believe the words of Jesus, that all things are possible to him who believes. And cry out to Him that he would remove the unbelief and give you stronger faith to lay hold of His help and His strength.

And then 4th – A person who has true and saving faith will at last receive the correction and instruction of the Lord concerning their faith. (verses 25-27)

"When Jesus saw that the people came running together, He rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, 'Deaf and dumb spirit, I command you, come out of him and enter him no more!' "And the spirit convulsed him greatly, and came out of him." "And he became as one dead, so that many said, 'He is dead.'" "But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up, and he arose." It must be remembered by every one of us that Jesus knows best how to glorify God and to deliver His people from all distress. He knows how to answer their prayers so that all of His purposes concerning them are accomplished. The Lord Jesus came into the world to destroy the works of the Devil. The possession of this child was one of Satan's master works. And Jesus would never let the possession of this child stand. His father was one of God's Elect people.

His father had come to him for the deliverance of his child from the Devil. And he was going to receive it. Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit, and what a thorough work it was. He commanded the evil spirit to come out of him and to enter him no more. The spirit tried to maintain his possession, and he convulsed the boy greatly. But he was no match for our strong Redeemer. The spirit tried to kill the child before he left him, but Jesus would not let this happen either. Those whom Christ undertakes to save, shall most certainly and definitely be delivered from the evil one. The greatest of Christ's acts of grace, apart from the gift of salvation which He gave to this man, was His so working in this father's heart that his faith was made stronger; strong enough to believe that his son would also be saved and delivered. He now knew that with Jesus, all things were indeed possible. It was a gift and a grace which would never leave him. He will willing to receive Jesus' correction and to act upon it.

I pray that it will be the same with you. When Jesus comes to save you and to help you on to greater faith and holiness, He will protect you from the evil one. He will build your faith and strengthen it, to believe that all of Satan's works shall be destroyed in your life. Jesus knows what God's eternal purposes are, and He will always act according to the eternal decree, to deliver all of God's Elect people from Satan's power, and to destroy his works in their lives. But let us see to it that we receive and believe this truth, that all things are possible to him who believes, and let us have faith in God that He will protect and deliver us from all evil. If you believe in God, believe also in Christ.