Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief

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Let us pray.

Dear heavenly Father, most gracious holy Lord, I thank you, Lord, for the preservation of thy people this week, the preservation of our souls, the preservation of our bodies. And thy great faithfulness, Lord, to bring us here once again. I pray, Lord, according to that faithfulness, asking for thy faithfulness again to provide food for thy sheep, nourishment for our souls, to open our hearts to give us an understanding, to grow us this day in thy grace and knowledge, to reveal to us more of who thou art, O Lord, as we struggle in this wilderness, as we struggle in this world that thou would be pleased to show us who thou art. And, Lord, may you increase our faith to believe in thee. And, Lord, may you, indeed, bring forth thou power that we may do so. Bless this day and the messages that will come that they be glorifying unto thee, that they be exalting of thee. Lord, remove the creature and exalt thyself to the praise and glory of thy name. In Jesus' name, I pray. Amen.

Turn with me today to the ninth chapter of Mark. We have our text found in Mark 9. I'm going to read the account that we're talking about today and then read it down to the focal verse of today that the Lord has laid on my heart to speak about. Beginning in 9:14,

> "And when he came to his disciples, he saw a great multitude about them, and the scribes questioning with them. And straightway all the people, when they beheld him, were greatly amazed, and running to him saluted him. And he asked the scribes, What question ye with them? And one of the multitude answered and said, Master, I have brought unto thee my son, which hath a dumb spirit; And wheresoever he taketh him, he teareth him: and he foameth, and gnasheth with his teeth, and pineth away: and I spake to thy disciples that they should cast him out; and they could not. He answereth him, and saith, O faithless generation, how long shall I be with you? how long shall I suffer you? bring him unto me. And they brought him unto him: and when he saw him, straightway the spirit tare him; and he fell on the ground, and wallowed foaming. And he asked his father, How long is it ago since this came unto him? And he said, Of a child. And ofttimes it hath cast him into the fire, and into the waters, to destroy him: but if thou canst do any thing, have compassion on us, and help us. Jesus

> said unto him, If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth."

Then our text this morning where we will focus.

> "And straightway the father of the child cried out, and said with tears, Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief."

How do you get here? How does this verse even make any sense? How can we stand today and reconcile, "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief"? I think if we are all in agreement this morning, we know that this is a very dire situation for this man. It seems to be a hopeless situation, a desperate situation. As he brought his child to Christ, he made one stop off to the disciples first. The disciples had cast out devils. The disciples had healed in the name of the Lord but this particular time they couldn't. And so, the man, when he comes to Christ, he has an interesting saying: "If thou canst do anything." But if you can do anything, Lord, have compassion on us and help us. Then Jesus answered him the way he did. Amazingly when Jesus answered him, something miraculously happened. The man went from "if thou can do anything' to crying out "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief."

I want to look at that verse today because, of course, it divides easily. "Lord, I believe," and "help thou mine unbelief." For the exercised child of God, they understand where this one was brought. This is a, what we like to call, a heaven born prayer. It is not authored by the individual. Prayer, true prayer, is not authored by the individual, it comes from the Lord. It comes with power from the soul of the child of God through Christ who dwells in the child of God.

I believe it was Irons once who said that "true prayer is breathing out the will of God from the will of God." That's powerful because it shows where the rightful crown belongs, on the author and finisher of our faith; the author and finisher of our prayer life; the author and finisher of our lives. It's an amazing thing as we look at "Lord, I believe," immediately that verse that I just shared with you, the author and finisher of our faith from Hebrews 12:2 comes to mind. But also one that comes to mind is what the Lord said, Jesus said, in John 6:29 when he said, "Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God that ye believe on him whom he has sent." That's a powerful statement.

We try so hard to believe. We try so hard to lay hold of something and I've got to admit to you, years ago when I read this account, I walked away from it saying, "Wow, this person didn't have any faith at all." Because my understanding of faith was something that the Lord gave it and then I acted upon it. So, apparently, this one has no faith because he didn't act upon it. But something, the power of Christ, to bring this one to say, "Lord, I believe," does he sound like he's one who believes when he says, "if thou canst do anything"? He comes to the Lord and says, "if thou canst do anything." It seems as though he doesn't know him.

But I have to ask you: what brought him here? What brought this child of God to his Lord? It's what, I think Hocker called it, "lean faith." Some call it "little faith." But our Lord says, "If you have little faith, you can say to a sycamore tree, Up and be thrown into the water. If you have little faith, you can say to the mountain, Be cast into the sea." Listen, none of us are bulldozers, so that's not a literal passage. It's the power of the Lord and what the Lord gives the soul. And this one who is in a dire, dire affliction and make no mistake about it, it's his affliction. You say, "No, it's his son's affliction." But it's his soul that's feeling it. It's the love that he has for his son. All of this has made this one very, very heavy and desperate.

But the Lord doesn't leave his children faithless. As he told Thomas, "Be not faithless but believing." It's the love of our Savior to impart faith. And you say, "Well, it doesn't seem like much faith when he comes and he says, If thou can do anything." And it's true. It is little faith but that faith as the Lord says in John 12:32, "And if I be lifted up from the earth will draw all men unto me." The faith of Christ brings the child of God to Christ.

I was talking to my children last night about the world and how to live in the world. Sometimes I think we have it backwards, we think we need faith to live in the world. And I shared with them what Jesus said, "I've overcome the world. Be of good cheer. I've overcome the world." And if he's overcome the world, I have to view the world as an enemy then. So, I don't believe that faith leads you to the world. Faith doesn't lead you out into the world to partake in the world. Faith leads to Christ. Faith apprehends a Lord and a Savior.

"I've overcome the world." Sometimes we view it that way. We want to do things and we get excited about worldly things, speaking for my own self now. And I think, "Well, that's a good thing. I need to faith to embark upon that." But faith will never lead the child of God to the world. It leads them to Christ. It testifies of Christ.

This one, as he's brought to the Lord Jesus Christ, he's brought with, as I said we would deem it, lean faith, little faith, whatever it is, but that little faith according to our Lord, would move a mountain. And you know what it did? It moved a mountain. A mountain of doubt and a mountain of fear. That's what you hear in this, "If thou can do anything, Lord." Well, he didn't call him Lord at that time. "If thou can do anything," that's just full of fear. Have you ever been there? Have you ever been in the midst of that trial or in the midst of that affliction, or the midst of that temptation and it be so bad that you cry out to the Lord and say, "Lord, why are you doing this? If you can just remove this from me, Lord." How do we get there? That's faith. That's faith. You say, "No, faith believes that he will do it." Yeah, but faith brings you to Christ. That's the little faith that's present even in verse 22, even there when he says, "If thou can do anything," that's the gift of faith but how did he come to the Lord?

"Lord, I believe. Lord, I believe." It doesn't sound like you believe. No, I believe, Lord. It sounds to me like he's one well-versed in the truth. He's well-versed in the Messiah. He knows the doctrines as we do. He knows the truth. But I want to tell you something, too, about "Lord, I believe." Do you know what's in that? Assurance.

“Lord, I believe.” Has he ever authored this prayer in your soul? That you believe? “Lord, I know that you’re the healer. Lord, I know that you’re the one who has designed this trial for my soul. Lord, I know that you have made everything in a way that you’re not going to give me more than I can bear.” That’s the faith of the Son of God.

Sometimes we desire that faith to be so much stronger. We desire to see physical mountains moved. We desire to see something gone from us because that’s what we believe sometimes is best for us. “Lord, I believe.” That’s the hope of the child of God. Hope and faith are sister gifts, they go together.

But that assurance that he has the Lord says in John 6:37, “All that the Father giveth me shall come to me and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.” You say, “Well, that’s kind of odd to say.” But this one was given the faith to believe that he would come to the Lord and the Lord would not cast him out, would not cast him away.

And we like to look at that and we like to say, “Well, he went to the disciples first.” But, don’t we do that? Don’t we sometimes share our feelings with the people of God? Don’t we come to them sometimes with our burdens first? Don’t we desire to hear what they say and what they think? I do. I share many things with my wife. Sometimes before I even pray about them and that brings me shame when the Lord brings it to me like he is right now.

And that’s the thing. The Lord said, “No, today you will come to me.” And I hope you desire that. I hope you desire that the Lord brings you to him where it’s just you and him, to deal with whatever it is that he has authored in your life. That he has authored.

“Lord, I believe.” Yes, it’s small faith. Yes, it’s assurance. But what else I see in this is what the Lord said in John 6:45, “It is written in the prophets and they shall be all taught of God.” Taught of God. “Every man, therefore, that hath heard and hath learned of the Father cometh unto me.” You see, this one that seems to be in great despair has heard of the Father in his soul. And the Lord, even in this perilous time, even in this time that seems like there’s no hope, his door has been shut in his face because the disciples couldn’t heal him. The scribes now are coming over and saying, “Uh-huh, who is this Messiah? He doesn’t have power to heal. You don’t have power to heal.” And that’s why the Lord calls them a faithless generation, by the way. The scribes and the crowd seem to be rallying against them because the boy is not healed.

It is a faithless generation. “Lord, how long shall I be with you,” he asked. “Lord, I hope you’re here to my last breath.” And for the child of God, he is. He is the grand prophet that teaches. He is the one who brings you to the end of yourself and at the end of yourself, after being stripped of all the pride and being stripped of all the worldliness and being washed in the laver and being washed and purified by the Holy Ghost, he shows you, “Lord, I believe.”

But, see, it's as Paul said, "I live by the faith of the Son of God." I don't think this one, if we could interview this one, would tell you that he was the author of his faith. Going from verse 22, "If thou can do anything," to "Lord, I believe," in two verses. But that one very important verse in between, the power. The voice of the shepherd in the day of the Lord's power.

"Lord, I believe." But there's something else in this and it's called deliverance. Maybe you doubt that. Maybe you say, "No, no, no, the child has not been healed yet." That's sight. I'm talking about soul.

"Lord, I believe." Do you know what's absent in that statement? Bondage. "Lord, I believe." When we are afflicted, when we are in trials, when the hardness of this life comes, there is so much bondage in it because there's bondage in fear, there's bondage in doubt. "O Lord, will you be with me? Lord, will you heal this affliction? Will you ever make it the way it was maybe a month ago? Will those things ever be?"

"Lord, I believe." It's assurance. It's being taught of the Lord. It's faith, as little as it may seem but it's a revelation of his truth of deliverance. John 8:32 says, "And ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free." I hope you see that before the Lord heals this child in the next verse, which we didn't even read, the one has already been healed in his soul.

"Lord, I believe. I believe." Is he enough? Certainly he is. Certainly he is. "O Lord, I believe. You have set me free, Lord. Free from the bondage of not believing." You say, "Wait a minute, don't you know the rest of this verse?" Oh yeah, I know it. I know it well. I know it real well.

So, what about the rest of this passage? We know that Paul tells us in Ephesians that "by grace he is saved through faith and not of yourselves, it is the gift of God." And we know that this one now has been brought to the end of himself to cry out. By the way, straightway means "at once," that's the Greek. And straightway, at once, the father of the child cried out. That's the day of the Lord's power. And he said with tears. Tears of what? Tears of contrition. Tears of humility. Tears of being humbled. Because when the Lord strips the child of God in these times, he strips him also of pride. That's why I know that this is a heaven born prayer because our prayers usually don't admit the depravity that we have. We're not sitting there telling the Lord that I'm an unbelieving sinner.

"Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief." Yeah, that's the absence of pride. That's the Lord revealing our insufficiency. That's the Lord revealing to us the depth of the fall. That's the Lord revealing to us how it will always be down here on this earth. That there always will be a struggle. We can't get away from that struggle in the Word of God, can we? It's all through it. There is always a struggle. Even when faith is present, unbelief is still there. Unbelief. And it's such a small little word and it's one we gloss over a lot because there's a lot of times in this life that are revealed that we don't believe. We say it even, "I don't believe that. How am I supposed to believe that?"

How many times do we say it in the recess of our mind? I know that speaking of the affliction that the Lord has graciously brought into my home with my wife, there are days when the day seems to be so free of pain, so free of bondage and just an absolute day of rejoicing but I'll be honest with you, I doubt those days. When those days come, I'm thankful for them but in my mind I'm thinking, "What does tomorrow hold? What is tomorrow going to be like? Today is wonderful, Lord. Thank you. But what about tomorrow? What will tomorrow be like?"

Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief." Paul said in 2 Corinthians 3:5, "Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think anything as of ourselves." That's so true. We can't think a higher plane and live above this world. We can't think and have that positive thought that "I know I can. I know I can." The child of God doesn't think that way because he is shown his depravity. That's what we're seeing here as the Lord reveals the power. I want you to understand that verse 23 says, "If thou canst believe." The Lord is saying to him, "If you can conjure up your faith, believe. If you are willing to do it. If you can do it, then believe."

But notice the rest of that verse, "All things are possible to him that believeth." "If thou canst believe," as if to say, "Can you believe on your own?" And it's an interesting thing that as he comes to Christ with the word "if," of doubt, the Lord comes back with the word "if," of power, of strength. "I'll take your if and I'll show you where the end of the if is." Don't you hate that little two letter word? Satan uses it all the time with the people of God. "If this was the case, then this would be the case. If you were a child of God, you wouldn't sin that way. If you were God's child, you wouldn't have this ongoing affliction. If you lived better, you wouldn't be in this position that you're in." I was definitely brought up that way. Always. Something bad happened to somebody, they weren't living right. Something good happened to somebody, they were living right. That's right out of the pit of hell. That word "if," that little two letter word. "Well, if you would have just done this, you wouldn't be in this situation."

I will shamefully admit to you that I go through this every time we have a flare-up in my home of this affliction. "Oh, if we just wouldn't have done this. If we just wouldn't have went down this path. We're going to learn that next time. We're not going to do that next time." Where is the sovereignty of my Lord in that?

But even though I believe, and even though I know my Lord is Jehovah Rophe that will heal, is healing, does heal and heals the soul, still unbelieving that he'll do it. How do these two things go together? Are we capable of faith? I've never found it without him. I've never been led to Christ without Christ no matter how hard I prayed, no matter how much I read, no matter how much I do. Truly, without him we can do nothing.

But as he says in 23, "all things are possible," to the faith he gives. "All things are possible to him that believeth." My faith, the faith that I give is the faith to move mountains, the mountain of doubt, the mountain of fear, the mountain of unbelief.

This truly is a heaven born prayer. You can't get here on your own. I don't care how many times you cry out and just say it as a matter of words, "Lord, I believe; help mine unbelief." This is a soul crying out. This is a God authored prayer. I'll show you that in just a minute. And that's how we get from "if thou canst do anything," to "Lord, I believe; help mine unbelief."

Hold your finger there and turn over to Romans 8 for the answer of how he got there. Look at verse 26, "Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities." The Greek word there is weaknesses. "Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our weaknesses for we know not what we should pray for as we ought." Did we just see that? This one in dire need and in total desperation, the best he could say to the Lord Jesus Christ, the ruler of all things, the giver of life, the best he could do is "if you can do anything." That's a picture of us. That's the way we feebly come to the Lord, but as I said, it is faith, a faith of God's own giving.

But he knew it was weak. He was shown it was weak. He didn't have the strength. This is where the strength, "for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession." The Greek word there is "pleads our case." "The Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered." I don't know about you, but that touches my soul. When the Lord brings that with his power, that touches my soul. It's very revealing to me. It reveals to me my inability. It reveals to me my insufficiency but it does reveal to me the sufficiency of my Triune Lord and the ability of my Triune Lord that he is able.

"That the Spirit himself maketh intercession." He pleads my case. Whatever that case may be, "with groanings which cannot be uttered." I think about that and I say, "Well, that means form prayers and all of those things that we put in neat little boxes to ask for." The Holy Spirit knows and intercedes and that Spirit dwells in the child of God.

Look at 27, "And he," the Holy Spirit, "that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit." He knows the mind of Christ, he knows the mind of the Father, he knows the mind of the Triune Lord. What about you and I today? Have you ever heard that phrase about prayer touching the will of God? This is how. This is when.

"And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God." That's how this poor soul that's in dire agony, that's how this poor person in this seemingly hopeless situation could cry out to the Lord, "Lord, I believe." He didn't even know that faith was present. "But if thou can do anything." And the Holy Spirit says, "I'll make intercession for you. Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief." Because the Holy Spirit reveals to us what we are without Christ.

And as Mary didn't recognize Christ on the day of resurrection, as the two on the road to Emmaus did not understand the Lord, as the lady at the well was told by the Lord, "If only you knew the gift of God," as the thief on the cross sat there and reviled the Lord, we know nothing until the day of his power, until the day of his revelation.

Those are really amazing passages. I used to sit there and go, “Man, how could you not recognize this.” How could you not see that. How can the disciples follow Jesus everywhere and him tell them a hundred times over that was going to the cross and they wouldn’t see him anymore and they go to him, Are you going away? What are you talking about? And that’s left on record by the Holy Spirit to reveal to us something about ourselves. That we’re in constant need of our Savior. We’re in constant need of the Holy Ghost.

I pray the Lord makes you tender today to see that and for those in this room today who are in the midst of afflictions and the loved one around them who are suffering with them, may the Lord bring you to cry out to him, “Lord, I believe.”

I think I have the license to say this, that I know about every one of you in this room, that I know every one of you would say, “I believe in you, Lord. I know that you’re the healer, Lord.” But if you’re anything like me, you’re going to have doubts. You’re going to have fears. And all this lifetime we’re subject to these things to bring us to our Lord as our sufficiency. And praise be to him that he does.

“Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief.”

Dear heavenly Father, most gracious and holy Lord, bring thy sheep to thee this day, author the prayers of faith. Lord, come with power in thy faith to believe. And, Lord, forgive us for our unbelief. Reveal to us, Lord, that you are our sufficiency, that you are our portion, that you are, Lord, our all-in-all. To the praise and glory of thy name. In Jesus’ name, I pray. Amen.