

It's All About Faith

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[0 : 00] So Jesus has just been up on the mountain, been transfigured and then he's coming down the mountain. Mark chapter 9 verse 14. 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 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. And they brought the boy to him. And when the spirit saw him, immediately it convulsed the boy. And he fell to 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.

[1 : 18] 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.

I command you, come out of him and never enter him again. And after crying out, convulsing him terribly, it came out. And the boy was like a corpse.

So that most of them said, he's dead. But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up. And he arose. And when he 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. They went on from there and passed through Galilee. And he did not want anyone to know, for he was teaching his disciples, saying to them, the son of man is going to be delivered into the hands of men and they will kill him.

[2 : 32] And when he's killed, after three days, he will rise. But they did not understand the saying and were afraid to ask him.

We'll keep your Bibles open. There's a sermon outline there to follow along with. Let's pray together. Father, we do thank you for your word and for every promise that is in your word.

And we pray that you'll please help us to stand upon them. That we might trust you. That we might have faith in your son. Amen. Because being a Christian at its heart is all about faith, isn't it?

But faith is one of those things that we can get hopelessly confused about. It's simple enough that little children can have it in abundance. But then as adults, we can get ourselves tangled when we start thinking about it.

And it's actually not that hard to find yourself faithless. Find yourself in some sort of unbelief. Though you know Jesus is Lord, maybe at some point you doubt his goodness.

[3 : 39] Or doubt his power. Or doubt his love. Or we might doubt our own faith. Do I actually have enough faith? Or am I not getting what I asked for because I don't have enough faith and my faith's lacking somehow?

Do I even really believe this? Or maybe we just start subtly trusting in things that are not God. Not renouncing our faith, but just skewing it as we put our faith in other things as well.

And then how do I express my faith? That's easy here at church, isn't it? Side by side with brothers and sisters. This little taste of heaven. Singing praises to God about standing every promise of his word.

Like, yeah. I definitely want to do that. I definitely believe that. But what about in the chaos of the week? When life's a mess? Or I'm confronted with sin? Or I'm tempted by sin.

How's my faith expressed then? And this passage is all about faith and faithlessness. We're going to work our way through the story. We're going to see the faithlessness of the people present.

[4 : 44] And there's four people that we're going to see their faithlessness. We're going to see how Jesus achieves victory over Satan's forces. And then I've got three reflections on responding to God in faith in the midst of chaos in this world.

So that's where we're headed. So where are we up to in Mark? In chapter 8, the conclusion of this first half of Mark, where it's all about who is Jesus.

Peter has confessed Jesus is the Christ, the promised king. And then he's rebuked Jesus for saying that, for Jesus saying that he's going to his death. He's seen who Jesus is, but he hasn't seen clearly yet.

Then Jesus has taken Peter, James and John up a mountain where he's been transfigured. They've seen his glory.

We're radiant. He's speaking with Moses and Elijah. And then God speaks and affirms his son out of the cloud. And it's this wonderful, glorious mountaintop moment.

[5 : 46] And then we come to our passage. Down from the mountaintop. Down from this glorious revelation of Jesus the Christ. Down, down into this chaotic mess.

What do they find at the bottom of the mountain? Discord. Dithering disciples. Disappointment. Distress. And a destructive demon. And I couldn't think of any other words with D, but there you go.

Right, it's a mess. Right, the disciples are arguing with the scribes. And there's this great crowd that's watching on. Right, and the crowd see Jesus. They're amazed.

They run up to him. And so he asked them, what are you arguing about with them? And it's a man from the crowd who answers. So have a look at verse 17. Someone from the crowd answered him, Teacher, I brought my son to you, for he has a spirit that makes him mute.

Whenever it seizes him, it throws him down. He foams and grinds his teeth and becomes rigid. So I asked your disciples to cast it out. And they were not able. Now you see this problem.

[6 : 47] Jesus is up on this mountain in glory with three of his disciples. Meanwhile, this man brings his boy with his destructive spirit and asks the disciples to cast it out.

And they try. But they can't. They're not able. And that's weird. Because Jesus explicitly gave them authority to cast out demons. So if you flick back in your Bibles to Mark chapter 3.

It's a couple of pages back. Mark chapter 3, verse 13. Jesus, he went up on a mountain and called to him those whom he desired.

And they came to him. And he appointed twelve, whom he also named apostles, so that they might be with him. And he might send them out to preach and have authority to cast out demons.

All right. And then flick forward a couple of chapters to Mark chapter 6. Mark chapter 6, verse 7. And he called the twelve and began to send them out two by two and gave them authority over the unclean spirits.

[7 : 55] And then jump down to verse 12. So they went out and proclaimed that people should repent. And they cast out many demons and anointed with oil many who were sick and healed them.

All right. So Jesus has given them authority to cast out demons and they have been doing it. But while Jesus is up on this mountain, they have utterly failed.

Right. They're unable to cast out this spirit. And watching their failure are the scribes. Right. Who already hate Jesus. They already accuse him of driving out demons by the power of Beelzebul.

Right. Now they see the lack of power, the lack of authority that the disciples have. And so they're accused. They argue. And they've always had unbelief. And here it is, it's divisive and argumentative unbelief.

And then watching is this great crowd. Right. They're seeing people who have been invested with authority over spirits from Jesus himself fail to cast out a spirit.

[9 : 00] Right. What's the point of believing in something that doesn't work? Right. Even Jesus's most committed followers can't do what they claimed they could.

And as well as that, there's the boy who has this spirit throwing him down, causing him to foam at the mouth and grind his teeth and become rigid.

There's a father come for help, but received nothing. Not from lack of willingness, but from a lack of power. And he's obviously distressed and heartbroken. And so Jesus has come down from this glorious, radiant height into the chaos where Satan is reigning.

Where demon possession is present, complete with foaming and grinding and becoming rigid. There's utter failure to do anything about it. There's division.

There's arguing. There's a distressed father. And it's all very public in front of this great crowd who has seen this failure and this mess. And this crowd just seems to be running everywhere.

[10 : 01] Did you notice that? It's a mess. And it's a picture that Mark has put in here at this point to communicate to us, the reader. It's a lived out parable, if you will, of Jesus coming down from glory to Satan's domain where the God of this world reigns.

And Jesus sees the failure and the argument and the unbelief before him. And he cries out in verse 19. O faithless generation, how long am I to be with you?

How long am I to bear with you? You can see why he calls them that, can't you? The scribes are faithless. They're arguing with the disciples. The father, well, how could he have faith anymore?

After seeing this display of inability. All the crowd and the disciples themselves, why couldn't they cast this spirit out? They're all a faithless generation and the devil is having his way.

So verse 20, 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. You can't get a clearer picture of the disciples' failure than that, can you?

[11 : 13] As soon as it sees Jesus, immediately demonstrates its complete destructive power over the boy. And when Jesus asks how long it's been happening here, it's been a long time.

And the spirit seeks to destroy the boy by throwing him into fire or into water. So the man calls on Jesus with this heartfelt plea. Verse 22. But if you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us.

And Jesus uses in that word, if, doesn't he? You understand where the father's coming from, right? The disciples thought they could do something, but they couldn't. They can't do it, Jesus.

If you can, please help. But Jesus turns it around. It's not whether he has the ability to act, but rather whether the father will believe. Verse 23.

Jesus said to him, if you can, all things are possible for the one who believes. All right, now, what does that mean? All things are possible for the one who believes. Firstly, it's not any magical power, right, of belief.

[12 : 19] I can just trick my brain into believing something hard enough, and then I will unlock unlimited power. Be able to do something. If I believe hard enough, I can fly, then I'll be able to do something. That's not what he's saying. That's just silly.

Nor is it, if I just believe God more, right, what you need to do is just have a huge amount of faith in Him, and so you try and generate more faith in God, somehow, and then He will do what we ask.

And if it doesn't come to pass, it's because of some sort of lack of the amount of faith that we had. That's actually silly, too. That's not what this passage is speaking of at all. What is faith?

Some people would say it's believing still, even when there is no evidence. Maybe you've heard that before, but that's not right. That's called wishful thinking, or possibly stupidity.

What is faith? Faith is believing the evidence. And not just the evidence of what's before us at any given moment, not just the evidence of our eyes and ears, but believing all the evidence, and believing God's revelation of Himself, and the evidence that is there.

[13 : 29] Believing His mighty power, His desire to work for your good, His ability to do so, His love in sending His Son to die for your sin. Believing that Jesus is seated at the right hand of God.

That He's interceding now on your behalf. It's believing the evidence that God can do immeasurably more than we can ask or imagine, and He is at work in this world.

It's believing the evidence of the promises of God that we just sang about standing on, isn't it? So faith is knowing it to be true and trusting it.

Because of the evidence. For if Jesus is truly raised from the dead, if that has actually happened, then all the evidence shows us that a deep-seated, unwavering trust in Him is the most logical, evidence-based belief that we could ever have.

And it's only when we forget that testimony of His Word, leave out the evidence of the resurrection, of His character, found within God's Word, that we start to doubt, disbelieve or go astray.

[14 : 34] All things are possible for the one who believes, simply means this. That God has the power and might to accomplish all things. Do you believe that to be the case?

He doesn't promise to do whatever you believe He will do. And just because He doesn't do it, doesn't mean lack of faith was the reason.

He keeps being God. We don't get to be God just because we've got enough faith. We don't get to tell God what to do. He is God. He chooses. But we can come to Him in faith, believing He can act, trusting His answer, whatever it might be.

So for the Father, He asked Jesus to cast out the Spirit. And it's not Jesus' ability that's in question, but the Father's belief. Do you believe that Jesus can do this?

So immediately, verse 24, the father of the child cried out and said, I believe. Help my unbelief. Which is a wonderful response, isn't it?

[15 : 38] It's so real. He believes, yet He doesn't believe. It's very understandable. He's brought His Son to be delivered. He came to Jesus with hope.

And yet those who thought they could help were helpless. The disciples failed. And so He's got doubt. His faith's been shaken. Such a real and understandable cry from this man, isn't it?

Don't you have the same struggles at times? Perhaps you know God is all-powerful. You know His trustworthy. You do believe in Him. But actually, acting on that belief is hard.

There's an element of unbelief there. Maybe now, gathered here with God's people, singing wonderful praise to Him, hearing from His Word, it is that little taste of heaven each week. Little glimpse of that transfiguration glory.

What about we descend from this gathering to the chaos of life? The kids are on holidays. Chaos. Great. Fighting. Screaming, perhaps.

[16 : 39] Work. Meaningless. Energy low. Tragedy or terrible news. Or temptation comes your way. You know what it is to believe.

But in those moments, perhaps there's unbelief as well. We find in our hearts. Or displayed in our actions. Or our words. The Father recognizes His lack of belief.

And what does He do with it? He turns to the very one who can help Him. Help my unbelief. And isn't that exactly the right response? Jesus is exactly the one to bring our doubts to.

He is the one to bring our unbelief to. Sometimes we don't feel like we can trust God. And it might be terribly painful circumstances. That cloud our trust.

And it's hard to look beyond what we can see and touch and hear. Like this father with his child. It might be the utter failure of Jesus' representatives that's damaged our trust.

[17 : 40] Like this father. But Jesus is the one to come to. He is the one that can help you in your unbelief. We too are part of a faithless generation.

We're bombarded with unbelief and lack of faith in God all the time. And we're told it's ridiculous to believe in God. It's silly, isn't it? And whether for silly reasons or reasonable reasons you find yourself doubting, disbelieving or otherwise having trouble in your faith, bring that to Jesus.

He is the one that we can come to and say, I believe but help my unbelief. Bring it to Him as an expression of trust in Him. And He is gentle and kind and He will help your unbelief.

And we see that in the way that Jesus responds to the man. And it's worth noting that this passage completely debunks that erroneous belief that if I ask for healing or something else, help, but I don't get it, the reason is because of my lack of faith.

This man has an incredibly doubting, incomplete faith. But He's brought that to Jesus and Jesus has responded with power and compassion. He sees the crowd running again and He casts out the Spirit.

[18 : 55] Verse 25. When Jesus saw the crowd come running together, He rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, You mute and deaf spirit, I command you, come out of Him and never enter Him again.

After crying out, convulsing Him terribly, it came out and the boy was like a corpse. So that most of them said, He's dead. But Jesus took Him by the hand, lifted Him up and He arose.

Now Jesus has come down from glory into the devil's domain, where there's this failure, this division, this disappointment, this faithlessness, this tenacious demon possession. And from within this valley of despair and discord, He's brought freedom to the boy.

This episode is a picture to the reader of Mark of Christ's victory over Satan. This is how Christ achieves victory. It was right for the Father to believe, wasn't it?

Even in his unbelief, in Jesus. Jesus is God's Christ. He is the promised King who has authority to cast out even the most stubborn or powerful or deaf demon.

[19 : 57] But how it takes place is really significant too. What happens when Jesus rebukes the spirit? It cries out, it convulses the boy terribly, then it leaves him like a corpse.

And then the boy rises at the touch of Jesus. And it's a lived out parable, it's a picture of how it is that Christ will defeat Satan, coming down from glory to Satan's domain and then through death and then rising again.

That's how the ruler of this world will be driven out. We've seen the unbelief of the scribes arguing with the disciples. We've heard confessed the unbelief of the Father.

And now here's the third unbelief. When the spirit left the boy, what did most of the crowd say? He's dead. And that's what it looked like. It looked like Jesus had failed.

His attempt had actually resulted in the death of this boy. And the crowd didn't believe. And then the fourth unbelief, the key to this passage, comes right at the end when the disciples asked privately, why could we not cast it out?

[21 : 08] And he said to them, this kind cannot be driven out by anything but prayer. What does this mean? What do we do with that statement? Let me say the emphasis is not on the word kind.

This kind cannot be driven out. We're not supposed to go and identify different kinds of demons and their classes, abilities and threat levels and vulnerabilities, put together some sort of demonology or collect them all. That's an exercise in missing the point.

The emphasis is on prayer. Because here we see the disciples' faithlessness. We see their unbelief.

And it's a more subtle kind of unbelief, isn't it? They truly have been given authority to drive out demons. And they have previously exercised this power successfully. But this authority to them is a gift.

And as always, with all authority, when it is given, it's derivative of the one who gives it, right? Their authority to do anything is based on the authority of the one who gave it to them. And here, instead of trusting in the authority of God and His Christ, they've trusted in themselves and the authority they've been given, rather than where the authority comes from.

[22 : 21] So they've come up against this spirit, mutant death, and they can't drive it out. But of course, God can. His chosen king can. Hence, in their failure, Jesus says, O faithless generation.

And the disciples trusted in their gift, but did not ask their God. And they failed spectacularly and publicly, didn't they? So there's two things going on in this part of Mark.

Firstly, Jesus is coming down from glory to drive out the power of the devil through this picture of death and then rising up again. And secondly, it's all about faith and faithlessness, belief and unbelief.

And so the first half of Mark is all about who is this man, Jesus? And we hear Peter's confession in chapter 8 that he is the Christ.

And the second half of the book of Mark is all about, well, what does the Christ's kingdom look like? What does it mean to be in his kingdom? And so first thing from this passage about the kingdom, the kingdom does not look very impressive.

[23 : 28] The transfiguration that happened in the section just before, that looked impressive, that was epic. The appearance of the great prophets, the voice of God, the glowing appearance. And then Jesus comes down to this valley of despair and discord, drives out the demon.

The boy just looks dead. He just looks like a corpse and like the king has failed. People see the mighty work of the Christ who has come and has had victory over the power of Satan and they say, he's dead.

Until Jesus raises the boy up. And if you're looking for a kingdom of power, a kingdom with visible glory of the transfiguration, the offers an obvious magnificence and splendour of the eternal kingdom, don't expect to see it just yet.

The Christ's kingdom comes through death and resurrection. So expect it to not look that impressive. Not to be the thing which superficially wows people.

There was a bit of laughter when Roy said, heaven's going to be church, because we look around and we go, well, church isn't that impressive, is it? It's right to see that, isn't it? But actually it is impressive. It is God's kingdom.

[24 : 45] It's a kingdom to which millions will respond to with unbelief, yet it's one which is seeing people saved from bondage, gathered together to worship the king, people who will be raised up from death to life, and God's kingdom will be filled with all those that he's rescued for all eternity.

So then how do we respond to God and his Christ? This kingdom that comes in such a way, this passage tells us clearly our response needs to be with faith.

With despite the apparent weakness, trusting what we know to be true from his word. This passage helps us consider faith when things look hopeless.

So I want to consider three ways. Firstly, if the human agents of Christ fail you, as the disciples surely failed this father, if the church staffs up, if God's people sin, if pastors fail to shepherd for whatever reason, don't let that take your faith from Jesus.

These things can genuinely shake us. They can cause us to question, if it's all true. I bet the boy's father had those questions. But don't let that be an excuse to walk away from Jesus.

[26 : 05] Rather, come to him when our faith is shaken. Lean into him and say, help my unbelief. God's people sin.

Sin's real. It's present. It's deadly destructive. It does bring discord. Pastors aren't immune from it. God's people aren't immune from it. Don't be like the scribes who, in their disbelief, argue with Jesus' followers.

Nobody becomes so discouraged and wounded that you refuse to come to Jesus. He will help you in unbelief. Come to him. Secondly, if you're in despair and it seems that God's promises have failed you, as it surely looked to the crowd, the boys seem dead.

Don't give up. Don't turn away from Christ. When hardship and tragedy, emptiness, chronic pain, frustration, deeply felt hurt, whatever else it is, when it feels like perhaps God isn't trustworthy, like goodness is not evident, like his power seems absent, see in this section here, this is how God's kingdom works, through his Christ.

Our God specialises in bringing life, long after all hope is gone and dead and it's just dust and dried up bones. When the boys seem dead, Jesus took his hand and raised him up.

[27 : 24] And he himself says, this is what his victory will look like in the next couple of verses. Have a look at verse 30, they went on from there and passed through Galilee and didn't want anyone to know for he was teaching his disciples, saying to them, the Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men and they will kill him.

And when he's killed, after three days, he'll rise. They don't understand the saying and were afraid to ask him. But Jesus is saying, this is the way that his kingdom works.

The Christ will be killed by men. Then when hope is all three days dead, God brings life and glory and joy beyond what anyone expected or understood. And this is what the Apostle Paul tells us what to expect, it's what Peter tells us to expect, just have a look at Hebrews chapter 11, it's throughout the book of Revelation, when what seems hopeless is no barrier to the glory of God being displayed.

Christ defeats Satan by actually dying under the power of Satan. Satan has Jesus betrayed and has him killed and Jesus has died in discord and despair, only then to rise in victory.

And so when the church does seem weak and useless and very far from a picture of heaven, don't despair. When God's purposes don't seem very successful or even like they can't possibly succeed, they've failed so badly.

[28 : 54] When what starts off with so much promise only ends in despair, don't fear. Though you'll waste the way, though your longings and plans will go unfulfilled, though betrayal, sins, sickness, broken relationships, broken dreams might come your way, Jesus is the one who does give everlasting joy and eternal life.

God is a God who raises the dead. This is the way his Christ defeats all the powers of hell. So come to him when it's hard, like the father in this story and ask him for help.

I believe, but help my unbelief. And lastly, third reflection, don't trust in yourself or the gifts that you've been given. The disciples were given the gift of authority to cast out demons, but they didn't rely on God in prayer.

They trusted instead in what they've been given. We don't want people serving the church who are more gifted than they are godly. We want godly people to serve the church with their gifts.

Why? Because we need to be relying on God. It's a subtle shift from recognising God has given me this gift to trusting in that gift and not relying on God.

[30 : 09] But there's many stories of people who have wowed with their giftedness but not relied on God. Just like with the disciples' case, it stirs up doubt and it can lead to disbelief.

Don't be of the faithless generation who relies on the gifts that God gives but forgets to rely on the God who gives them. For we've got a God who works through his Christ to bring about his everlasting kingdom.

He works in the midst of chaos. He works in seeming weakness and yet it's the power of God to raise the dead and there is nothing that can stop that.

He brings new life. All things are possible and he's loosened the bonds of death and sin on everyone who believes. Don't see the mess and the failure of Christ's followers, the apparent weakness of his workings.

See with the eyes of faith. See with eyes that see all the evidence. including the truth shown in God's word that the Christ has come with power to defeat the devil, to release people from captivity, to bring life and he's at work saving and transforming people for his kingdom.

[31 : 17] So trust him and ask him to help you to trust him. Let's pray. Dear God, we believe.

Please help our unbelief. Amen. Amen.