

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF VILLA RICA, PCA

Antidote For Unbelief

By

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Mark 9:14-29

Our Lord came down from the Mount of Transfiguration and the first thing he had to contend with was a case of unbelief. It does not appear to be such a case at first because the little boy who was brought by his father to the disciples seemed to have a very severe problem. It would be easy to say that it was not a case of unbelief but a case of demon possession and well nigh beyond anyone's strength to deal with.

As Jesus approaches the crowd that had gathered the first thing he noticed was that some scribes were arguing with the disciples. Jesus wanted to know what they had been discussing. But He knew what they had been discussing. They had been discussing the case of the demon possessed boy and the inability of the disciples to cast the demon out of him. These unbelieving scribes jumped on the disciples and began insisting that they were powerless to do anything and that their Master was unable to help this father and son. How quickly do the enemies of God seize on any opportunity to scorn and ridicule and berate any sign of failure or weakness? But at the appearance of Jesus they became quiet.

Be sure the Devil will stir up opposition and doubt whenever he can. We must be strong in faith and bold for our God when dealing with cases brought to us. Any problem, any difficulty is a challenge to faith to solve in the power of Christ.

The story is given in Mark 9:17-19. **And one of the crowd answered Him, "Teacher, I brought You my son, possessed with a spirit which makes him mute; ¹⁸and whenever it seizes him, it slams him to the ground and he foams at the mouth, and grinds his teeth and stiffens out. I told Your disciples to cast it out, and they could not do it." ¹⁹And He answered* them and said*, "O unbelieving generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring him to Me!" Mark 9:17-19**

I. The Unbelief Of Others Affects Us

The crowd that day was not in a faith attitude. The disciples may have neglected prayer while the Master was away. The case appeared to be most difficult and Satan's spokesmen were on hand to deride and criticize. When Moses went up to the mountain while he was gone the people departed from the faith they had been taught and reverted back to idolatry.

While Jesus and Peter, James and John had gone to the mount of Transfiguration the faith of those who had stayed below weakened. If you run with a worldly crowd your faith will be feeble. Some people come to church full of doubts and throw a dampening blanket on the worship of God. They make church into a time of debate and doubt. Instead of expecting a blessing they are looking to find a little amusement or ammunition for why they have never committed their life to Christ. Those scribes that day were a deadening influence on the disciples and everyone else. They came looking for an excuse to justify their unbelief rather than seeking for an answer to their own sin problem.

Charles Haddon Spurgeon said these wise words: "When cast by providence among sinful people who respect us, we ought to be particularly watchful. The hatred of the ungodly when poured on Christians in the form of persecution is seldom harmful to their spiritual nature, but the friendship of the world is always to be suspected. When the servants of the high priest allowed Peter to warm his hands at the fire, had Peter been a wise man, he would have been afraid that evil would come of it. We are disarmed by kindness, but it is never safe to be disarmed in an enemy's country. "Who," says the old proverb, "could live in Rome and yet be at war with the pope?" Who can have much to do with sinners and not have something to do with their sins? The smiling daughters of Moab did more mischief to Israel than all Balak's frowning warriors. All Philistia could not have blinded Samson if Delilah's charms had not deluded him. Our worst foes will be found among our ungodly friends. Those who are false to God are not likely to be true to us. Walk carefully, believer, if your way lies by the sinner's door, and especially if that sinner has acted a friendly part to you.

We also should learn from this case that sin is no small little problem. The demon had gained possession of this boy at an early age. We don't know how old this boy was but he may have been a youth, perhaps a teenager. When Jesus asked his father when this all began in his son's life he told him it began in his childhood. He said, ²²**"It has often thrown him both into the fire and into the water to destroy him. But if You can do anything, take pity on us and help us!" Mark 9:22**

This father had come to see the seriousness of sin and the Devil's power. He knew quite well that the demon in his son was out to destroy him. Some of you here have seen your own children get under the influence of

the Devil. They have seemingly been deaf to your pleadings and they seem unable to speak with you about the problem. A spirit of the demonic seems to take control in spite of anything you can do. We can identify with this distraught and hand wringing father. He had come to the church and had found that the disciples could not give him any help. But he was desperate enough and humble enough to not leave. Now that Jesus is on the scene he is not altogether sure that Jesus can do anything either but just in the hope that he might be able to do something he implores him if he can do anything, take pity on us and help us!

II. The Sovereign Authority Of Jesus Christ

Our Lord tosses the "If" back at this father --
³**And Jesus said to him, "If You can?' All things are possible to him who believes." Mark 9:23**

The very desperation of this father is fertile soil for faith. Where else would he go for help? If he were alive today he might take him to a specialist, to the emergency room at the hospital or to a clinic. He would seek human help for his son. But this son needed more than a clinic or dispensary or even a hospital emergency room. His case was not to be traced to some inherited or acquired deficiency or defect. His need was spiritual, as are most problems in life. He needed a divine deliverance from his seizures because there was a demonic influence in his life.

Perhaps the boy had gotten into the habit of lying: Perhaps he had indulged in some sinful things that had enabled the Devil to capture his soul. How easy it is for the Devil to take souls captive. How hard it is to break loose from habits and lusts and the shackles of sin., We see young people today getting hooked on alcohol and drugs, on sex, on shop lifting, on cheating, lying and mischief. What starts out as a lark may become a monkey on your back that you can't get rid of.

This father had a little faith but he admitted that he had a lot of unbelief too. ²⁴**Immediately the boy's father cried out and said, "I do believe; help my unbelief." Mark 9:24**

How can a person have faith and unbelief at the same time? Some people have no faith at all. They are totally unbelieving. They are atheistic. They deny that there is any supernatural realm at all. But most people could identify with this father. He said he believed in God, but just how much he believed he could not say. There was a lot in his life that he would have to say was of unbelief. He may have gone to the synagogue. He may have listened respectfully to the rabbis. He may have prayed at times. But he had to admit that his heart was not on fire for God. He wasn't as sure of the things of God and of Christ as He thought he ought to be. But he prayed a very good prayer that day, and it was from the heart. He confessed his unbelief. He admitted to Jesus that he needed help with his faith.

Jesus then cast the demon out of his son. There never was any doubt about the power of Christ to deliver the demon out of this boy. And when he brings deliverance it is permanent. ²⁵**When Jesus saw that a crowd was rapidly gathering, He rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, "You deaf and mute spirit, I command you, come out of him and do not enter him again." Mark 9:25**

Notice that the Devil had stopped the ears of this lad. He was deaf as well as dumb. He had ears to hear put the Devil had effectively stopped up his ears so that he couldn't hear the gospel. The Devil can stop the ears of people right in the church so that even though the gospel of God's love and mercy is going forth they are so locked into a life of sin that they never hear a word of what is being preached. But God used the feeble faith of that father to bring his boy to Jesus, and then Jesus exorcised the demon.

Later the disciples asked him why they had not been able to do what he had done. ²⁹**And He said to them, "This kind cannot come out by anything but prayer." Mark 9:29**

Some manuscripts add fasting. The real problem is revealed in Matthew's account. **And He said* to them, "Because of the littleness of your faith; for truly I say to you, if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible to you. Matt. 17:20**

Unbelief is overcome when we go to Jesus for help. We must consider who Jesus Christ is, what He has done, where He is now. Every problem we face in life requires faith to be resolved. Prayer is the antidote for unbelief. Jesus said so. The truth is, you won't pray unless you have faith, and faith is strengthened through prayer.

I would add to that Bible study and Bible preaching. Faith comes by hearing the Word of God, by believing the Word of God and acting upon it.

Prayer is the means of grace which looks to God alone for the answer. The disciples had depended too much on their own handling of the case brought before them and had not sought to God for the answer to his need. They failed because of little faith in God and too much faith in themselves.

Oswald Chambers was quoted in Christianity Today as saying “Beware of worshipping Jesus as the Son of God, and professing your faith in Him as the Savior of the world, while you blaspheme Him by the complete evidence in your daily life that He is powerless to do anything in and through you.”

There once was a good woman who was well known among her circle for her simple faith, and her great calmness in the midst of many trials. Another woman, living at a distance, hearing of her, said, "I must go and see that woman and learn the secret of her holy, happy life." She went; and accosting the woman, said, "Are you the woman with the great faith?" "NO," replied the woman, "I am not the woman with the great faith; but I am the woman with a little faith in the great God. "

The father of the lad in this passage of Scripture did the right thing -- he brought his son to Jesus and he prayed for more faith. His little faith was rewarded. Maybe you have a little faith today and you have a big problem. Go to God in prayer about your problem and persist in your request for an answer. The Lord tells us that importunity and persistence will gain the answer. By such importunity and persistence we are impressed with the fact that it is God who brings answers to problems, not we ourselves.

O help us through the prayer of faith
More firmly to believe;
For still the more thy servant hath,
The more shall he receive.

Have you come to Jesus with your sin problem? He alone can solve that problem. He alone is the Savior. Come to him today and bring every problem you have. He is able to deliver you. Cast away your doubts and fears. Come to Jesus and find the forgiveness and peace that he alone can give.

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