

Real Faith

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[0:00] Mark said, I love mountaintops. I love mountains. We lived here and then we moved away. Where we lived, they tried their best to make a mountain out of!

We were away and we'd come back and visit and we'd say we didn't know what we had, you know. Didn't enjoy it like we should have.

I've seen some of the bigger mountains out west. I stuck my toe in the Switzerland Alps earlier this year and I love them all. I also love spiritual mountaintops.

Our foothills are covered with spiritual retreat centers where mountaintop experiences take place and possibly many of you as well as many of our kids have had life-changing experiences in those atmospheres.

Now you don't have to be on a mountain for God to have a powerful move in your life. Don't misunderstand me about that. I've been in worship experiences on flat land where God moved mountains.

[1:15] And I've had those times with God's people and I've had those times alone. And I love them all. A warning.

Be careful when you leave the mountain because the valleys can be rough. I don't mean the beauty in the valleys.

I love them too. I mean the spiritual valleys that can hit sometimes right after a mountaintop experience. And that's what happens in Mark chapter 9.

The transfiguration has just taken place. For Peter, James, and John it was an unbelievable experience.

However, as soon as they descended, they go into a valley of disruption, a valley of disturbance, a valley of disagreement.

[2:19] I want you to see this. It's in Mark chapter 9 beginning in verse 14. It says this. And when they came to the disciples, they saw a great crowd around them.

Now when it says they came to the disciples, remember that Peter, James, John, and Jesus was on top of the mount with the mount of transfiguration. And as they come down, they meet the other nine disciples.

That's what's happening here. And immediately all the crowd, when they saw them, were greatly amazed and ran up to them and greeted them. And he asked them, what are you arguing about? And someone from the crowd answered him and said, 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 ask 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?

[3:26] 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 on the ground and rolled about, foaming at the mouth. And Jesus asked his father, how long has this been happening to him? He said, from childhood.

And has often cast him into fire and into water to destroy him. But if you can do anything, have compassion on him and help us.

And Jesus said to him, if you can, all things are possible for one who believes.

And immediately the father of the child cried out and said, I believe. Help my unbelief. And when Jesus saw a crowd coming, 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 into him again.

[4:38] And after crying out and convulsing 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.

And when he had 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.

And he said to them, this kind of thing.

People are excited to get to Christ and the disciples, but there's a disappointment because with those disciples who have remained at the bottom of the mountain because it just didn't happen. And when they get there, spiritual folks are arguing. The sick and the needy are desperate. It is a confusing chaos. And God never is in the chaos.

[6:03] He's not the author of confusion. He don't cause chaos. He speaks peace and calms the storm. He spoke into chaos and created the earth.

I mean, he's not in chaos. Jesus comes on the scene and he settles it. However, what we see here is far greater than the event itself.

And I'm not taking anything away from the fact that that young man's life was completely changed that day. But it teaches us much more than that. When I look at this, what I see is three kinds of faith.

I want you to notice this. First, there is a lacking faith. The disciples earlier had been given authority over evil spirits.

Mark 6, verse 7 that we looked at a few weeks ago says, And he called the twelve and began to send them out two by two. And listen, gave them authority over the unclean spirits.

[7:09] Then in verses 12 through 13, in response to that, it says, 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.

So what we have here is not a bunch of disciples that do not know what they're doing or are just trying to mimic Christ of sorts. They've had experience doing this.

And they have seen it work with great power. However, they leaned, I believe, in this passage, they leaned on their previous experience believing that because they had done it before, that they could now do it again.

And they could not. In reality, they couldn't do it the first time. It was only by the power of God that it was done.

And they're leaning on the authority that was granted them by the Holy Spirit. Because when God moves and works in a mighty way, we should never believe that we did it.

[8:20] God-sized things only happen when God does it. Man tries his best to manufacture it sometimes. But that don't mean it's of God.

The disciples' spiritual authority is nothing unless God has given them that authority at the time of the work. Now, don't misunderstand me. They had authority. But understand, that authority was based upon their dependence upon God.

We often think someone lacks faith, and that looks like unbelief. And many times it does. However, sometimes a lack of faith is due to an overconfidence of self.

You know, I've done this before. I can do it again. No.

They had not done this before. God had done it through them. And that may not sound like a big deal, but it's a huge deal.

[9:27] It's the difference in it working and it not working. And I'm sure that when God used them in the past, the word got out. Therefore, this father brings his son, who's having what some of these symptoms appear to be an epileptic seizure.

And he brings him to have the boy healed. Now, I say it appears to be, because there are things that the deafness and the muteness, those are things that don't necessarily align with that.

But I say it appears to be, because epilepsy is what it sounds like. However, that's not what it is.

And I can say that with authority. How do you know that?

Well, I know that because Jesus, in verse 25, calls it a demon. And I know that because in verse 26, the demon came out.

Now, that identifies what's going on here, okay? That's clearly. If it was a disease, he could have healed it, but he wouldn't have called it a demon.

[10:34] Now, he's done that. He's healed the disease. We've seen that in Scripture. No, this was a demon. He would not address a disease as a demon. And I've spoken before about the wickedness of the world and the confusion that comes forth from that.

We live in an interesting time now, and I don't know if it's much different, but, boy, it sure is interesting now. We have a lot of serious mental illness around us that's due to anything from a chemical makeup to a traumatic experience. It can cause all kinds of problems. We also have a lot of drug use that scrambles the mind and deviates the path. We also have Satan, the prince of the air, swirling around our world. And just quite frankly, it's sometimes difficult to tell the difference in one or the other or how, this is the key, how one affects the other because I truly believe there are connections to there. Now, no one size fits all. I'm not throwing everybody in the same basket. Don't misunderstand me at all. There's a lot of us that none of us know, but I know one who does, and that's Jesus. [11:57] And Jesus will call it as he sees it. He does it here. He does it every time. He does it in my life. He does it in your life.

He does it in this boy's life. He was a demon. And only by the power of God is that defeated because Christ is the one that makes the difference.

So Jesus sees these embarrassed, confused disciples. He sees a spiritually dead, he sees spiritually dead church leaders.

Those Pharisees are nearby arguing about the whole thing. He sees people surrounding him that are filled with needs, some of them misappropriated.

They're not really concerned about following Christ. They want Christ to do what Christ can do for them in whatever they feel like their need is. He sees all of that, and in response to that, he says, oh, faithless generation, how long have I been here for you to learn from me?

[13:04] So the question is, who's he talking to? And who's he not talking to? He asked the disciples who had faith, but they put it in the wrong place.

They put faith in their own abilities. And I want to be clear about something. Our faith is only as strong as who we put it in.

I hear people talk about seeds of faith. You'll just have a seed of faith. A seed of faith does you no good if you plant it in the wrong place. Period.

He had a crowd that had enough faith to want, but not really enough to believe. They had that ballgame kind of faith, you know.

Oh, God, let him make the kick. Let him make the kick, Lord. You know, let us pull through. I'll go to church tomorrow if we win this ballgame, you know. They got that lottery faith, you know.

[14:10] I'm going to claim it. I'm going to make a sacrifice. I'm laying down \$2 and chance for it to get a billion. They got that Yahtzee faith.

That bless the dice roll, Lord, you know. And I said Yahtzee because some of y'all ain't playing Yahtzee. You're playing other games. You don't need to be playing.

So what we see here is a lack of faith in a lot of different kind of people. They had seeds of faith, but they had them planted in the wrong place.

But then we see one with a struggling faith. Jesus asked his father, how long has this been happening? And the father said, since childhood.

And then the father said, if you can, if you have compassion on us and help us.

[15:16] And Jesus said to him, if you can, all things are possible for one who believes.

I mean, you're hanging on a fringe for anything. And I'm telling you that when you believe, all things are possible. And immediately in verse 24, immediately the father of the child cried out and said, I believe, help my unbelief.

I'm just going to be honest with you. I love that old boy's prayer. I understand that prayer. I've been there. Lord, I believe, but it's not enough.

I mean, I got it in me, but it isn't where it needs to be. Now, I want to clarify something. Faith changes things, but God's will determines things.

So the key to get our faith tied to God's will, the key is to get our faith tied to God's will. Then we begin to see wonders.

[16:29] But sometimes we're not there. Sometimes we got the I believe, but. You know, I believe, but. And that's a struggling faith.

That's a struggling faith. It's a faith, but it's struggling. And do you know what affected this father? He had watched those disciples fail to succeed because their faith was more in their previous accomplishments than in their present reality.

Their present reality was one that they needed to lean upon God like they were when they nervously did it the first time when he called them out in Mark chapter 6. They needed to do the same here. Our faith is only as strong as who is tied to. And because the faith, the father had seen them fail and seen his son struggling, he said to Christ, if you can do anything and Christ responds, all things are possible. Now, there's a difference between anything and all things. And Jesus makes that clear. Not only can God do something, God can do anything. And we need to believe that, folks. [17 : 47] And that leads to a third kind of faith, and that is real faith. And that's what Jesus had. And we see it here, but we've seen it before.

And I've talked about it extensively. When he was in the desert, he looked Satan in the eye. He quoted Scripture to him during a season of prayer and fasting. Went in the garden about to go to the cross.

He prayed that the cup would pass from him, but it was not about his will, but about God's will be done. He submitted to the will of God without hesitation. Listen to me.

During a season of prayer. Here, when the disciples failed to change lives, he told them how to succeed in seeing God move mightily. He said this kind cannot be driven out by anything but prayer.

It's all connected to prayer. Now, let's get some definitions straight. Hebrews 11, verse 1 tells us what faith is. It says faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.

[18 : 54] What makes for real faith versus failing faith is who we have our assurance in.

Who are we convicted to trust? And there's a difference in one who claims something in prayer as if they hold authority over heaven and one who submits their request to all the authority in heaven. There's a difference. Christ shows us that real faith works through prayer. Charles Spurgeon said it this way.

He said real prayer is going with your heart to the unseen God and tell him what you feel and what you want and trusting him to supply your wants and help you.

It's a dependence. It's not a declaration. It's not a claim by some authority that you have.

[20 : 22] It's not that at all. Wayne Grudman put it this way. He said prayer is faith turned to God. Douglas O'Donnell said prayer is simply faith breathing.

And that reminds me of those times when we want to lay something down before the Lord and we don't even know how to pray for it. We don't know how to pray. We don't know what to say. We know we've got a burden.

We know we've got somebody on our mind. We know we've got some matter that is heavy upon us. And we want to turn that over to God. We want God to intervene. We want to see him move in a mighty way.

We don't exactly know how to pray that. We don't know what to do. And I love what Romans 8, verse 26 and 27 says. You can hang your hat on this, friend. Likewise, the Spirit helps us in our weakness.

For we don't know what to pray for as we ought. But the Spirit enters himself and intercedes for us with groans too deep for words. And he who searches hearts knows what is in the mind of the Spirit because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

[21 : 39] You don't have to worry about the articulation of your prayer before the Father. You don't have to concern yourself with the authenticity of your prayer.

When I was working on my doctorate, when I would write a chapter, I had a couple of people that I sent it to for them to read it because they were good at grammar.

And as you know, I'm not. So I would send it to them. They would tell me what I messed up on.

They would send it back to me. I don't have to submit my prayer to somebody else to get them to clean it up.

And the Holy Spirit does all that for me. He takes care. He takes care of all that. The Spirit helps us in our weakness.

And genuine brokenness and a yielded will is what God honors. I believe, God.

[22 : 53] Help me. Help me, Lord, with my unbelief. And move mightily in accordance with your will. I believe, God.

I want you to understand this. Because I have to remind myself of this. Prayer is not about getting our will done in heaven.

It's about getting God's will done on earth through our yielded hearts to him. It makes all the difference. And I want you to notice one more thing.

It says the boy was like a corpse. That most thought he was dead. But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up.

And he arose. That reminds me that Jesus was dead. And three days later, he lifted himself up from the grave. And arose.

[23:52] And the same resurrection power that raised Christ. And the same resurrection power that brings life to the dead when we pray.

The spiritually dead when we pray. He's the same power that heals the broken when we pray. It's the same power that calms the storms when we pray.

And whatever we need in our life, if we'll bring that to Christ. And hear me. And trust him with it. Don't tell him how to handle it.

Don't declare by some authority that you have what you want done. Trust him with it. Whoever you are, bring it to Jesus.

Bring yourself to Jesus. Whatever questions you have, bring them to Jesus. Bring your unbelief to Jesus with a full faith that I don't know the right answers.

[25:03] But you do, God. I don't have the authority, but you do. Bring your unbelief to Jesus with full faith that he can change your life.

That's when faith gets real. And that's when mountains move. That is real faith.

Whatever you have bowed, whatever I close, I ask you today, what is it that you need to give over to the Lord today? It might be your life.

Maybe you've never surrendered your life to follow Christ. And if you haven't, I encourage you to do that today. If there's an unction within you to consider Christ, you didn't come up with that on your own.

God's giving you that. He's reaching out to you. So you respond and follow him.

[26:10] Maybe you're here this morning and there's just burdens in your life. There's matters that you're trying to clear up and you're trying to fix and you can't do it.

It might be in you. It might be in someone you love. To the point that sometimes when you pray for certain things that don't happen or you don't even know how to pray for it.

I'd just lay it at his feet if I were you. I'd just turn it over to him. I'll warn you, you'll try to pick it back up, very possibly.

But when you do, just lay it right back down. That's how he works in you. Not only in the situation you're praying about, that's how he works in you. As you lay those things down before him.

Maybe God's leading you to Pickens First Baptist Church and this is the place you'd have to place your life. If that's the case, you come. We'll be happy to guide you in that. I know there's burdened people in this room.

[27:25] I don't know what those burdens are. Very few of them. But I know there's burdens here. And I ask you to lay that before the Lord today.

You can do that where you stand in just a moment. You can do it at this altar. You can do it with a pastor praying for you. However God tells you to do it. You do it. Just trust him. Just trust him.

Trust him. Trust him. It's real faith. Lord Jesus, I love you. And thank you for how you allow us to learn from other people's experiences.

Help us not to have to go through the same thing, Father. Because we rely upon you with real faith. Lead us now, oh God, I pray. In Jesus' precious name.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.