

Unbelieving Faith

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- [0 : 0 0] If you have your Bibles, I'd like to ask you to open them with me to Mark chapter 9. Mark chapter 9, and we're going to be looking at verses 14 through 29.
- This morning, we're going to be taking a look at my favorite verse throughout Scripture. It's my favorite verse because I find so often myself identifying with the Father that we find in this passage.
- The Father in this passage is coming to Jesus, and He's totally desperate. He's in circumstances that are beyond His control, and He's turned to every source of help He could possibly find up until now, but He has received no help.
- You see, His Son was possessed by a demon. He had gone to religious leaders. He had gone to some of Jesus' disciples. But up until now, He's found no help.
- And He approaches Jesus and says, if you can do anything, please help us. And Jesus assures Him that all things are possible to those who believe.
- [1 : 0 9] And this is where my favorite verse comes in here. For He comes to Jesus and He says, I believe. Help me overcome my unbelief.
- Help me overcome my unbelief. If the man believed in Jesus, he knew that he was able. I'm sure he had heard stories up until now of Jesus healing the sick, raising the dead, casting demons from people.
- But maybe he was fearful a little bit or had a little bit of doubt creeping to the back of his mind. Because up until now, he had gone to those who he assumed should have been able to help him.
- But he had found no help up until now. And so he says, I believe. I believe. Help me overcome my unbelief.
- Have you ever found yourself in a situation like that? Have you ever found yourself in totally desperate times? Desperate situation or circumstances that are out of your control and beyond your ability to deal with?
- [2 : 1 4] I'm sure most of us have found ourselves in those situations at times. And while we know that Jesus is more than able to do anything we ask, we know He's able.
- But do we ever have that little bit of doubt creep into the back of our mind of will He? Will He answer our prayers the way we've asked Him to?
- We know God is able. But sometimes we question whether He will. Or maybe we've faced situations in life, circumstances in life, and they've just beaten us down so much that we're weary, that we're tired, and we just don't know where to turn.
- And we allow a little bit of doubt to creep into our mind. You know, this passage is amazing. It speaks to me so much because I find myself in the same situation at times where we know Christ is able.
- But we have to be honest and say, Jesus, help me overcome my unbelief. But this passage is also one of the most misinterpreted scriptures in all the Bible.

[3 : 24] We often hear pastors and others saying, if you just have enough faith, just have enough faith, then God will do whatever you ask Him to. We especially hear that in these name it and claim it preachers.

Just have enough faith. And then when God doesn't answer the way we wanted Him to, they're, oh, you didn't have enough faith. But is that what really the scriptures teach us?

Is that what God's really teaching us or Jesus is teaching us in this passage? And so before we look at our scripture this morning, I want us to go to the Lord in prayer.

And I want us to take time to ask God to speak to each one of our hearts. I'm sure we're in different situations in life, different circumstances in life. And many of us may be in moments like that where we've been praying for God to answer our prayers for a long time.

And until now, He's not done it. He hasn't responded in the manner in which we want Him to, at least. And so we're allowing a little bit of doubt to creep into the back of our minds.

[4 : 32] Where is God? Does He love us? Will He answer as I have requested? Well, let's go to the Lord in prayer. Father, we thank You for this day.

Again, we thank You for the privilege of being able to come together as the body of Christ. And to lift Your name high above every name and to worship You. We're thankful that we can take a day to set aside all of our worries, all of our concerns, all of our fears.

And just come before You, Lord. And I ask, Lord, today that You speak to us in Your Word. I pray that You speak to every heart here today. Every life.

Wherever each of us may be in the journey of life, different situations, different circumstances. I pray that You help us to set aside those worries, those cares, those fears.

And just come to You and allow Your Word to speak to us. And grant us faith. Maybe today there's someone here that they've been fearful to step out and receive You as Lord and Savior.

[5 : 43] They know all the claims about You, Christ. But they're fearful to make that step. And I pray, Lord, today You'd give them the faith to recognize You as God.

The Messiah who died upon a cross for our sins. That we can put our faith and trust in You to receive forgiveness of our sin.

And be adopted into the family of God. And we thank You, Lord, for this. And we praise You always in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, let's look together at our scripture. We're going to look at Mark chapter 9, verses 14 through 29.

When they came to the other disciples, they saw a large crowd around them, and the teachers of the law arguing with them. As soon as all the people saw Jesus, they were overwhelmed with wonder and ran to greet Him.

What are you arguing with them about, he asked. A man in the crowd answered, Teacher, I brought you my son who is possessed by a spirit that has robbed him of speech.

[6 : 52] Whenever it seizes him, it throws him to the ground. He foams at the mouth, gnashes his teeth, and becomes rigid. I asked your disciples to drive out the spirit, but they could not.

Oh, unbelieving generation, Jesus replied. How long shall I stay with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring the boy to me. So they brought him.

When the spirit saw Jesus, it immediately threw the boy into a convulsion. He fell to the ground and rolled around, foaming at the mouth. Jesus asked the boy's father, How long has he been like this?

From childhood, he answered, It has often thrown him into fire or water to kill him. But if you can do anything, take pity on us and help us.

If you can, said Jesus, everything is possible for him who believes. Immediately the boy's father exclaimed, I do believe. Help me overcome my unbelief.

[7 : 55] When Jesus saw that a crowd was running to the scene, he rebuked the evil spirit. You deaf and mute spirit, he said, I command you, come out of him and never enter him again.

The spirit shrieked, convulsed him violently, and came out. The boy looked so much like a corpse that many said, He's dead. But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him to his feet, and he stood up.

But after Jesus had gone indoors, his disciples asked him privately, Why couldn't we drive it out? And he replied, This kind can come out only by prayer.

Jesus and his three disciples that made up his inner circle, Peter, James, and John, they had just had this amazing experience on the Mount of Transfiguration where Jesus truly revealed his identity to Peter, James, and John.

They heard the voice of the Father speak. They met with Moses and Elijah. Can you imagine that? And here they come down off of the mountain where the other disciples were waiting, and a crowd had formed.

[9 : 05] And they began to see that the disciples were engaged in an argument with the religious leaders. And so Jesus came, and he asked, What are you all arguing about?

Now, I'm reading into this, but I can just imagine there was silence for a moment. There was just a bit of silence. Nobody wanted to tell Jesus, you know, what they had been arguing about.

But finally, we see in verse 17, the father speaks out, and he says, Teacher, I brought you my son who is possessed by a spirit that has robbed him of speech.

Whenever it seizes him, it throws him to the ground. He foams at the mouth, gnashes his teeth, and becomes rigid. I ask your disciples to drive out the spirit, but they could not.

You know, when we take a look at these verses, and we take a look at the other gospel accounts of this same story, we begin to see the condition that this boy was living in, and certainly his father as well.

[10 : 09] If you're a parent, you know the hurt and the pain and the sorrow that you feel when your children are struggling, or hurting, or up against circumstances that are beyond our control.

And so we see this horrific picture of this boy's life. He's possessed by a demon that often throws him to the ground. He then is left foaming at the mouth.

He grinds his teeth. He becomes rigid as a board. If you drop down to verse 22, you also see that this demon often throws him into the water, or into fire trying to kill him.

He's also deaf and mute. So you can imagine this boy, he's covered with scars, he's covered with burns, and he just lives a horrific life, which in turn leaves the father living a just horrific life of worry and fear.

And if you really put yourself in that position this morning, put yourself right here in the midst of the scripture, you can begin to feel the desperation of this father.

[11 : 18] You can feel his agony and his pain. If you've ever had a child that you've struggled with, maybe they've had health issues, maybe they've gone wayward away from the Lord, or maybe there's just been other circumstances in their life that you've struggled with, you know that you can feel this father's hurt and his pain.

And he comes to Jesus because he's obviously heard that Jesus has healed the sick. He's heard that he's cast out demons from others, and so he has great hope that this is the answer.

This is what he's looking for, and he comes to find Jesus, but Jesus is up on the mountain with Peter, James, and John, and he's unavailable, and so he goes to the other disciples.

The disciples, who just three chapters before this had been sent out by Jesus to heal the sick and to cast out demons. You know, they had been doing this themselves, and so the man comes to the nine disciples that were at the foot of the mountain, and he asks them to help him and to cast out this demon, but they were unable to do so.

We have to ask ourselves the question, if they had been sent out in chapter 6, and they had already been out there casting out demons and anointing people with oil and healing them, why then were they unable to cast this demon out of this boy?

[12 : 54] Why were they unsuccessful this time? Well, let's put that question on hold for just a moment, and we'll come back to it in a minute. When we drop down further in the chapter, they asked Jesus that very question, and so we're going to come back to that in just a moment.

But Jesus comes down the mountain of transfiguration. He sees them arguing with the crowds. He finds out what's going on, and so he asks them to bring the boy to him.

He says, bring the boy to me, and the father states that if you can do anything, take pity on us and help us. And you can just imagine Jesus looking at the guy and say, if I can, if I can help, and he assures him that all things are possible for him who believes.

Now, this is where this passage, this passage, and other passages throughout the New Testament are often misinterpreted. Again, I said a moment ago, we often see individuals say, if you just have enough faith, just believe, and God will do exactly what you want him to do.

But is that really what scripture is teaching us? You know, I remember back in 2005, my dad was diagnosed with a brain tumor, and I went home, I knelt beside his chair, laid hands on him, and prayed, and I believed with all my heart, as much as I could, that God would heal him of this brain tumor, and at 65, he would not die.

[14 : 38] But less than a month later, my dad passed away. And God didn't answer my prayer the way I had wanted him to, and had asked him, now, did I not have enough faith?

Did God let my dad die because I didn't have enough faith? Well, I don't believe that's what scripture teaches, do you? Jesus said, if you have the faith of a mustard seed, which a mustard seed is the tiniest of all seeds, one of the tiniest seeds, he says, if you have the faith of a mustard seed, you can tell this mountain to move, and it will move.

And I don't believe for a moment that when we look at the entirety of scripture, that we can walk away from the entirety of scripture, because usually scripture is the best commentary for scripture, isn't it?

We have to look at all of scripture, and it has to complement one another. If we come away with something that contradicts another passage of scripture, then we're coming away with the wrong conclusion.

But we have to look at the entirety of scripture, and yes, Jesus does confirm on more than one occasion that faith plays a role in answered prayer.

[15 : 52] Faith does play a role. He says, here, all things are possible to those who believe. We also see, remember the lady who had been bleeding for a number of years, and she knew if she could just touch the hem of his garment, she would be healed.

And so, she pushed her way through the crowd and got as close to Jesus as she possibly could, and she reaches out and touches his garment, and instantly, she was healed.

And he felt it. He knew energy had gone out from, or healing power had gone out from him, and so he stopped and said, who touched me? Well, the disciples thought he was nuts, didn't they?

Like, what do you mean who touched you? You know, all this crowd pushing in on you, but finally the lady said she was the one that reached out, and what did Jesus say? He says, your faith has healed you.

So, faith does play a very significant role in our lives in answered prayer, but I don't believe for a moment that the Bible teaches us that if you just have enough faith, then God will answer your prayers the way you ask them, or what you're asking of him.

[17 : 08] As a matter of fact, if we turn to 1 John chapter 5, look with me if you will. John chapter 5 verses 14 and 15, this is one of those scriptures where we have to use scripture to interpret other scripture.

And this is a very vital scripture to me in understanding that if we have enough faith, how will God respond? 1 John 5, 14 and 15, this is the confidence we have in approaching God that if we ask anything, now pay attention, if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us.

And if we know that he hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have what we ask of him. If we pray anything according to his will, how do we know the will of God?

How do we pray the will of God? How do we know his will that we can put it into prayer? Well, the word of God, for starters, the more time we spend in God's word and the more time we spend in his presence and we develop that relationship of just resting in him and resting in his word and knowing the word of God, the better we can know the will of God.

And the more we know the will of God, the more we can incorporate it into our prayer lives and instead of just simply having prayers that are always focused on ourselves and our wants and our desires, we begin praying the very will of God.

[18 : 58] And the more we spend in his presence and the more we develop that intimate and personal relationship with God, the more he changes our hearts.

He changes our heart so that our desire is the will of God. The more we dwell in his presence, the more we want more than anything else is for the will of God to be done.

Pastor Daniel did not pay me to say this. But a few weeks ago he introduced a Bible reading plan here. If you've not picked one of these up, there's still a couple up here.

There may be some in the back. It's also in the newsletter. It's also on the website. Practice spending time with God daily in prayer.

Allowing him to speak to us. And then instead of praying you know just fleshly worldly prayers that we're asking God allow his Holy Spirit to direct us and guide us that we're praying the very will of God.

[20 : 17] Is it wrong to ask for healing? Is it wrong to ask for things like this? No. It's not wrong. I wasn't out of God's will to pray that he heal my father.

It's not wrong to pray that if you need a new job or your marriage is struggling that you pray for these things. We should pray for these things. You should bring in other believers to join you in praying for these things as you're able.

But remember when Jesus prayed at the Garden of Gethsemane, he asked that this cup be taken from him. He said remove this cup from me.

But what else did he say? Not my will, but your will be done. And so Jesus was showing us there that there are times when we pray for God's will or we pray for things in our lives.

But more importantly, we want God's will to be done in our lives even when we don't understand why. I didn't understand.

[21 : 23] Why did God allow my dad to die at 65 when he was just starting to retire? Looking forward to the golden years of spending with my mom.

He said he was going to come see me more often. But why did God allow him to die? I can't answer that.

But I do know that one day when we're in heaven it's not going to be all that important anymore, is it? All of our tears will be wiped away.

All the struggle, all the pain, all the sorrows that we face, the challenges that we were up against, that we wondered, God, where are you? Why are you not answering? We don't understand.

When we stand before God, maybe we'll understand better. But it's not even going to matter. When we're standing in the presence of the Lord, in his heavenly kingdom, all those things are going to be washed away and it's all going to be worth every little thing that we've gone through and all the challenges, all the obstacles, all the pain.

[22 : 32] And we don't understand, but we have to have faith that God's will is so superior to our understanding and our beliefs. God's will is beyond our wildest understanding and imagination and we just have to come to him and trust him and trust that his will is best.

Now this father states to Jesus, I do believe. Help me overcome my unbelief. This man has searched high and low everywhere possible for his son's deliverance from this demon, but up until now he's found no answer.

So we can understand the difficulty this man may be having with faith. Maybe he's just worried that he doesn't want to get his hopes up just to be crushed once again.

But at least he goes to the father or to Jesus and he says, you know, help my unbelief. He's coming in total honesty. You know, when we struggle in our faith a little bit, just be honest with God.

You know, I'm struggling here. I don't understand. I'm going through pain and sorrow, Lord. Just be totally transparent with God and share with him the hurt or the pain or the doubt that's creeping into your mind and ask him to help you overcome that unbelief.

[24 : 06] Have him help you, give you the faith that you need to trust him and his will when we don't understand it, we don't like it, and it's hurtful or painful, that we can trust God's will even when one of our loved ones pass away and die or when they continue to experience pain.

Have you ever been there in a situation like that where this man found himself? circumstances beyond your control? You believe that Christ is more than able to do anything, but maybe because of the circumstances of life that you've gone through, life has beaten you down, life has been painful and hurt, you're weary, you're tired, and you find it difficult to really believe and we begin to let that doubt creep into our minds.

Or maybe you've prayed about a situation or circumstance in your life for a very long time. You've prayed for years maybe even, and up until now you've received no answer.

For years you've asked God for a specific answer, but up until now God has not answered it at least in the way you would like for him to. And we allow ourselves to have those doubts creep in our mind, where is God?

Why is he not with me? Does he hear me? Does he love me? Is he able? You know, what's wrong with me? You know, Paul found himself in a similar situation like this, where he found himself with a thorn in the flesh.

[25 : 59] And for three seasons, he prayed and asked God to remove that thorn from his flesh. Listen to God's response to him in 2 Corinthians chapter 12, verses 8 and 9.

Three times I pleaded with you, Lord, to take it away from me. But he said to me, my grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.

What did God just tell Paul? No. That's basically what he said, isn't it? Paul, it was, we don't know what the thorn was, but it was painful, it was difficult, it was a challenge to him.

He may have even seen it as a hindrance to continuing on his ministry. And he pleaded with God, please remove this thorn from my flesh. And God said, no.

So my grace is sufficient for you. Rest in me. Endure the thorn. Because God had allowed the thorn to enter into his life for a purpose and a reason, and he wasn't removing that thorn until it had accomplished the purpose that God had allowed it to be there in the first place.

[27 : 18] You know, maybe you're in a situation like that. You've been praying, asking God for something, and he says no. But he's saying, my grace is sufficient for you.

Rest in me. Rest in the power and the strength of God and trust him that he's working in your life in a way you don't understand that's beyond our comprehension at this time.

Now drop down with me to verse 28. Verse 28, we see that Jesus is alone with the disciples, and they come to him and they ask, why were we not able to cast out this demon?

And we see that Jesus states, this kind can come out only by prayer. Some of your Bible translations include and fasting.

Prayer and fasting. And the implication that I gained from this is the disciples had gone out in chapter 6 in the name of Christ, in the power and the authority of Jesus Christ, and they had gone out and they were healing the sick and they were casting out demons.

[28 : 39] But they got so comfortable in their abilities to do this, that now Jesus was up on the Mount of Transfiguration and they were trying to cast that demon out in their own power.

They were trying to cast that demon out of this boy and heal him in their own strength. We're no match for Satan. We're no match to the powers of darkness when we go in our own strength and our own power.

Jesus said this type can only come out through prayer and we'll add the word fasting on there. Fasting is just an intense, a more intense way to go to God in prayer.

To do without what your physical body needs to put God first and to seek him or to cry out to him, to beg him, to plead with him, to intervene in a situation.

But to go in prayer. You know, maybe you're facing a circumstance or a situation right now that you realize is beyond your power. It's beyond your ability.

[29 : 55] Spend time praying. Spend time pleading with God if necessary. Spend time lifting that up to you. First Peter says, cast all of our burdens on him and trust him because he cares for us.

Trust that he will work in that situation. There's also another message to us here. We get so comfortable, don't we, at times doing church, being the Christian, carrying out the work of the church.

You know, we've, many of you've been a Christian 40, 50, 60, 70 years and we get so comfortable that we think we can handle things in our own strength and our own power and our own abilities.

But you know what? If you look at the church in America today, we have more resources, whether it's money, technology, we have more things available to us to carry out the work of God and yet we're seeing a decline of the church.

And so if we can do what Christ had called us to do in our own power and our own strength and our own resources, we had already done it. But we can't.

[31 : 22] When we try to do what God has called us to do, to take the gospel message to the world, we've got to make sure we're doing that through prayer and total, total, total dependence upon Jesus Christ and his power and his ability to work in and through us.

Jesus said in John 15, 5, I am the vine, you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit.

Some of y'all who've done experience in God, help me. But apart from me, you can do nothing. What does that mean? You can do some things?

You can do a portion of things? Speak it. Speak it. Come on. Nothing. That means we as children of God can do nothing if we're not abiding in Christ and relying completely and totally in him to do the work in us.

So as a church this morning, as a family, as an individual, when you realize God is leading us, whether it's to take the gospel to the world, whether it's to do vacation Bible school, whether it's to sing in the choir, what do we learn from this passage?

[32 : 56] We can do nothing in and of ourselves. We should get, if you're in the choir, get up early on Sunday morning. Stay up late on Saturday night and pray and ask God to use the gift and talent that he's bestowed upon you to bring glory to him and to lead others in worship because when you're singing a song up here, you're not just up here entertaining.

You're leading us in worship. Whether we go out to do Bible school, don't just say, well, I'm a teacher. I know how to teach the word. Spend time in prayer asking God to give you every word.

Give you patience. Speak into the hearts of these children. Whether we're teaching a Sunday school class or working in the youth or being an usher.

property and grounds. Whatever we do, do it in the name of Jesus and spend time in prayer. Pray, pray, pray.

Asking God to use our church to be a lighthouse in this community and take the gospel message out of the walls of this building and into our community, into families, into homes.

[34 : 12] Let's break down the walls of drug addiction in this community. Let's break down the walls of broken homes and broken marriages. In case y'all don't know, drugs have become an epidemic inside our schools.

And we need to pray and pray and pray that God is working, that God is moving, that God is stirring.

In case you also haven't noticed, we need a revival in America. We are so desperate for God, but we're not going to do it in our own strength, in our own power.

We've got to rely on Jesus Christ to work in and through us, to work through our churches, work through our sister churches, work through pastors, raise up pastors all across this land to proclaim the word of God in power and in strength and to bring us as a nation back to Him.

I want to ask the musicians if they'll come and begin leading us this morning in our time of invitation. Now I just want to ask you, is God speaking to you today?

[35 : 30] Is He speaking to your hearts, drawing Him to you? If you need to make a decision this morning, I would just ask you to respond during this time of invitation.

I'll be glad to pray with you here. Let's stand as we sing.