

Announcements:

- 1) You may have heard that Rusty Wiliford went to be with the Lord
- 2) Thanks to all that worked to refurb our beautiful church
- 3) Mike Miller preaching next week
- 4) Looking to do a clean up day in March

The Right Question

Mark 9:14-29

Read Mark 9:14-29

I want start by reading a quote form the Pillar New Testament Commentary. “True faith is always aware how small and inadequate it is. The father becomes a believer not when he amasses a sufficient quantum of faith but when he risks everything on what little faith he has, when he yields his insufficiency to the true sufficiency of Jesus, “I do believe, help me overcome my unbelief!” The risk of faith is more costly to the father than bringing his son to Jesus, for he can talk about his son but he must “cry out” for faith. True faith takes no confidence in itself nor does it judge Jesus by the weakness of his followers. It looks to the More Powerful One who stands in the place of God, whose authoritative word restores life from chaos. True faith in unconditional openness to God, a decision in the face of all to the contrary that Jesus is able.”

I love the first line of this quote, and how true it is. “True faith is always aware how small and inadequate it is.” Jesus doesn’t berate us for weak faith. What He does get upset and heartbroken about is unbelief. Those are two different realities. Jesus doesn’t give up on us because of a weak faith that moves forward, seeking to follow Him and do His will, but does leave us to on our own when we choose to do things in our confidence, in our ability, in what we bring to the table.

When our faith is in ourselves, really anything other than God, it isn’t the kind of faith that God is seeking, that God responds too. When we place our faith in God, no matter how big or small, God responds and God does great things, in His timing.

Faith is interesting. Faith is confidence of things hoped for, evidence of things unseen. We haven’t seen God, but we have evidence. We have

God's Word, the world around us, the testimony of other believers, the faithfulness of the saints past, and more.

Some think faith is something we build up within ourself. Some think we must in some way dig deep enough to muster up enough faith. Some think they don't have enough faith to do great things for God. Some believe all you have to do is have enough faith and you can have, conquer, or do whatever your desire is. Some believe they can't serve until they have enough faith. Some believe that God doesn't respond to weak faith. Our passage touches on this. But, I think it touches upon something much bigger.

God has given us promises in scripture. If you have great faith, you can see those promises come to pass. God has promised to do great things through us. If you have great faith, God will do great things through you. And, I am here to tell you I absolutely believe that is absolutely the wrong way to look at things...because, it puts our ability and our strength and our ingenuity at the center as well. It is God working in and through us, not about what I can do.

Often times we subtly put ourselves on the throne along with God. We have been a part of some great ministry that God used us in and pride begins to creep up in us. "Ya, look at what I did." When we have had a chance to be a part of something, it is important to remember 'Who' was really doing the work. I am not saying don't be real and true about being used. I am talking about taking any of the glory.

Real humility can see the role you played in the ministry, but the reason is because of Christ in us and working through us. This is part of what Paul means when he says in Romans 12:3, "Because of the privilege and authority God has given me, I give each of you this warning: Don't think you are better than you really are. Be honest in your evaluation of yourselves, measuring yourselves by the faith God has given us." I like how many of the other translations say, "think with sober judgment." Sober has the connotation of clarity, understanding, reason, and seeing with a true balance. Sober judgment is seeing things as they really are. Seeing our frailty. Seeing our inability. Seeing our need. Seeing that apart from Christ we can do nothing of spiritual greatness.

The disciples have been a part of many great adventures with Jesus and seen Jesus do many great things. In Mark 6, they were even sent out to do many of those very things. One of those things was casting out demons. Mark 6:27 says, "And He [Jesus] called His twelve disciples together and began sending them out two by two, giving them the authority to cast out evil spirits." But, this time they couldn't. Were they over powered by the demon? Did Jesus just give them ability to cast some demons out and not others? I believe the issue was their lack of faith that it was by the power of God, instead they began to believe in the 'power' within them. They were given special ability. They were the ones that walked with Christ. It was not about the Person of Jesus and relationship with Him that they had spent so much time with, but they got into the mode of doing. They subtly began to rely upon the gift instead of the giver.

We easily do this too. Especially when it is a ministry we have been a part of. Pastors have to be very careful of this. Those first few years of ministry you are in great realization that you have no clue what you are doing, so you trust in God doing the work through you. As you do the ministry and gain some confidence, it becomes real easy to begin to think, I know what I am doing. It becomes real easy to put yourself on the throne along with God.

You can even do this with the Bible. It becomes about the 'formulas' of scripture, if you will, instead of the One behind scripture, that wrote scripture. We look at scripture and use it as a tool to become 'good'. The pharisees, the scribes, those guys did this. It was about knowledge and what the knowledge could do for them, would do for them. It wasn't received and responded to as a love letter from a loving God. But it is received as a text book of life, for us, to be successful in living life, and so it becomes an act of our own personal will to live according to the text book. We make our outside look good, but the inside doesn't change. Our inside is still filled with the pride of "I can do this."

So how do we combat this? Faith. But it isn't just faith. It is faith placed in the right object. The object of faith matters. What we place our hope in matters. Our motive matters. These are all pieces of faith. If our motive is for God's glory, you can't do that without faith. Hebrews 11:6 says it this way, "And it is impossible to please God without faith." This whole chapter 11 of Hebrews makes these statements, "By faith Abel; By faith

Enoch; By faith Noah; By faith Abraham, By faith Sarah, By faith Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, By faith Moses..." The writer says, "All these people died in faith, without having received the things they were promised." They didn't receive the promise, but they died in faith. Their faith was placed in something more than their life, accomplishments, status here on earth. The very next part of the verse says, "They agreed that they were foreigners and nomads here on earth." There was something greater, beyond this life. Verse 16 says, "But they were looking for a better place, a heavenly homeland. That is why God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them." Their faith was in God and what God was doing, His plan. They were not perfect. Look at the life of each of those faithful Old Testament saints and you will see murders, deception and manipulation, lying, debauchery, and more. God isn't looking for perfect faith. He is looking for faith. God isn't looking for strong faith. He is looking for faith. God isn't looking for those that have all the resources, He is looking for faith.

This is the point of our passage this morning. Faith. Not absolutely unwavering, doubt-filled, perfect faith. He is looking for humble, real, I may be struggling, I may not be struggling faith. He is just looking for faith. Not faith in our abilities or past experiences, but faith in the right object. That object being God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit.

Jesus was just up on the mount of transfiguration with Peter, James, and John. What an experience. They saw the kingdom of heaven. They saw the glory of God. Now they come down the mountain to a scene of chaos, anger, and arguing.

The other disciples were asked to cast out a demon from a boy who was having wild seizures, but they could not cast the demon out. This had to be a blow to their egos and it created questions.

The scribes were there, I believe, to rub it in the disciples face the failure they had. They were like those people that try to make themselves look better than others, and when there is a failure, they take the opportunity to make themselves look bigger and those who failed look smaller. Remember, the scribes and pharisees and religious teachers of the day were hateful towards Jesus. Any chance to take him down they wanted in. The opportunity in their minds arose because those that represented

Jesus had failed. So, it was time to come and make it clear that Jesus was a fraud.

There is a lesson in this for us. When we fail and sin, we make a mockery of Jesus. There will be people who will very quickly jump on the train of accusation. But, remember, Jesus can take ugliness and bring beauty to it. A humbled heart that seeks Him can be used to confound the wise and can find restoration. And in that restoration, the forgiveness and grace of God will be seen. As well, our sin, letting our pride and ego begin to overcome our faith can actually lessen and damage another persons faith. It can begin to have such an effect it can cause other persons to doubt.

When Jesus and the 3 disciples came to the scene, He asked what all the arguing was about. A man in the crowd comes and Matthew's account says kneels "before Jesus and said, "Lord, have mercy on my son. He has seizures and suffers terribly. He often falls into the fire or into the water. So I brought him to your disciples, but they couldn't heal him."

The father's little faith he had was now shaken, because those that represent Christ were powerless due to their own unbelief. They could not get rid of this demon wreaking havoc upon his sons body. This demon was throwing the child in fires...think of the scars, throwing him down, mauling him, probably the head trauma from hitting the rocks on the ground, throwing him into water trying to kill him. This is what the enemy of God does and wishes for, he aims to destroy and kill. Doesn't that sound like John 10:10. "The thief's purpose is to steal and kill and destroy. My purpose [Jesus says] is to give them a rich and satisfying, abundant life." So that is what Jesus does, he restores the boy, But catch what Jesus does first. He tends to the father's faith.

Jesus asks, "How long has this been happening?" The father says, "since he was a little boy." Jesus cares. He wants to understand. Communicating with Jesus opens up our heart. Communicating our needs, emotions, and life circumstances with Jesus opens up our heart. It opens the opportunity for Jesus to intervene, because it reveals faith, maybe not perfect faith, maybe even doubt filled, struggling, weak faith.

Listen to what the father says, "Have mercy on us and help us, if you can." Luke says the father begged Jesus. Matthew says he called knelt before Jesus and called Him Lord. There is some faith here, but it is weak. Jesus

responds, “What do you mean, ‘if you can’?” Anything is possible if a person believes.”

A very important, quick note about what Jesus is not saying in this statement: “If you just have faith and believe you can do anything or have anything.” No, it is about what Christ is going to do through you according to His Word.

Remember in Mark 5, Jaiarus brings his daughter to Jesus to be healed and he basically says, I know you can, but if you will heal my daughter. in our passage the father is saying, “If you can heal my daughter, would you.” Which one has greater faith? I think that is a tough question. But, they both were right in their unbelief, they came to Jesus with how little or much faith they had.

I don’t think this event was as much about the father and boy as much about the disciples and a lesson they need to learn...and really a lesson we need to learn. I don’t believe this is about a lesson in casting out demons or a prescription for it. It’s about faith and the object of faith. It is about faith that is humbled and is trusting in the object of faith.

The disciples were used to having Jesus around. Then they didn’t and they were called upon to act in Jesus’s name when He was up on the mountain. It wasn’t that it was a task they weren’t given before. It wasn’t something they hadn’t experienced before. They had, but this time they failed. Why? Because they act faithlessly. Jesus remarks about their actions, “You faithless people!” Luke says, “You unbelieving and perverse generation.”

The lesson is given to us in verses 28 and 29, and understood when you read Matthew and Luke’s account as well. The disciples asked Jesus later on when they were alone, “Why couldn’t we cast out that evil spirit?” Jesus response in Mark was “this kind can be cast out only by prayer.” This was bigger than them. This was an act that would take faith that is placed in God.

Prayer is a conduit of faith. When we come to God in prayer, we essentially are saying ‘this is bigger than me. I need you.’ Matthew’s account says, “I tell you the truth, if you had faith even as small as a mustard seed, you could say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’

and it would move. Nothing would be impossible.” Jesus isn’t saying you’ll be able to make topographical changes. What He is saying is that with even the smallest amount of faith, you will be able to accomplish things that seem impossible.

Jesus told us that “all things are possible with God” according to Matthew 19:26. Philippians 4:13 says, “I can do all things through Christ who give me strength.”

God builds our faith, but you must step forward into a place for that faith to be exercised. It takes time. It takes humility. It takes realizing how faith is short of perfect, and many times is frail. The father had the right heart. He asked the right question, “I believe. Help me to overcome my unbelief.”

As Scottish minister Alexander McLaren put it, “Faith, which is trust, and fear are opposite poles. If a man has the one, he can scarcely have the other in vigorous operation. He that has his trust set upon God does not need to dread anything except the weakening or the paralyzing of that trust”

This is not about perfect faith, but walking in faith--however much faith you have. Simply ask the same question. Come to God with the same question, "I believe. Help my unbelief".

2 Corinthians 12:9-10 And He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

Communion