

**Goal: That the hearers trust only in Jesus to overcome their disbelief.**

How is your faith doing, today? If there were a faith scale would you consider yourself to be a 10, really strong and confident, or a 1 feeling very weak, faltering on the brink of unbelief? Maybe you're thinking, "*Oh, I'm somewhere in the middle.*" But I think that if we're honest, we actually waffle from one extreme to the other, several times a day. One moment, we're absolutely certain of what we believe, then something happens or it doesn't, or someone says or does something and we start to wonder if we really believe at all. The desperate father's plea, hits pretty close to home. "***[LORD,] I believe; help my unbelief!***" (Mark 9: 24) And I think this is the confession of every believer.

Do you remember the context in which those words were spoken? Jesus had just taken Peter, James, and John with Him up a mountain to reveal His glory to them. We call it the Transfiguration. While they were up on the mountain, a desperate father approached the other disciples for help. ("***Jesus 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."***) (Mark 9: 16 – 18) His son was possessed and he hoped that Jesus could drive out the unclean spirit. But since Jesus wasn't available, His disciples thought they could handle it. They'd done it before when Jesus sent them out 70 of them two-by-two. And they returned awestruck, "*even the demons are subject to us in your name*" (Luke 10:17)? So, they can handle this, right?

No! They tried, but this unclean spirit wasn't leaving and the crowd started to grow. Within the crowd were some scribes and they were more than happy to take advantage of this opportunity to criticize Jesus. It's then that Jesus returns with the other three to find His disciples surrounded by a crowd and arguing with the scribes. I think it's obvious, He's disappointed and He scolds them all, "***O faithless generation, how long am I to be with you? How long am I to bear with you?***" (Mark 9: 19)

I feel sorry for the disciples. I mean, while Peter, James and John hanging out with Jesus and seeing something really amazing, they were left below to contend with unclean spirits, fickle crowds, and antagonistic religious folks. Then, when Jesus comes back, He chastises them too. It seems unfair? I mean sure, the scribes didn't believe, but the disciples were doing what they thought they could do. The problem was that they fell into the same age-old trap that Moses and David and Solomon and so many others did. They thought they were responsible for their success. And we can fall into that same trap.

Time and time again, I hear people describe faith as a choice they made or something they feel or as something they can do, like having perseverance. I'm sure that

all of us at one time or another have said, “*Just have a little faith,*” as though faith itself is the source of power. That’s having faith in faith, not faith in Jesus, not faith in God’s promises in His Word. Instead, they put their faith in their own will, their own conviction, their own power, and that’s what the disciples did. To give you a visual, it looks something like [this](#). The disciples attempts to cast out the unclean spirit didn’t involve prayer or faith in Jesus’ promise, rather their faith was in their own abilities.

Now, there’s a modern fallacy that goes like this, “*It really doesn’t matter what you believe as long as you believe in something.*” Sounds good right, even politically correct. But try to apply that to something that isn’t spiritual, like: “*It doesn’t matter who you trust with your money as long as you trust someone.*” I think that we’ve learned our lesson from Wall Street. So, if it makes a difference who you trust with your earthly wealth, shouldn’t it make more of a difference who you trust with your heavenly wealth.

I have to say, if we trust in ourselves, our quality of our faith and our works, for our eternal well-being, we’ll find we’re in the same crisis of faith as the disciples. Often we think, “*I got this,*” but then we realize that God’s law requires absolute perfection. One sin, one little indiscretion, and we’re all doomed. If we put our faith in ourselves, we’re trying to do the impossible and we’ll face God’s wrath.

So, once we realize we can’t trust ourselves, we might look to the other religions. It seems like that is what the father had tried. “***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. (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!” (Mark 9: 21 – 24)*** No doubt the boys father had spent years looking for help and the world probably offered many cures, but none worked. In the same way, we can search the world for religions to trust, lifestyles to bring fulfillment, and people to give us love, but none will work.

Only Jesus, the Son of God, is able to save us, and give us abundant and eternal life. Only Jesus loves us unconditionally and sacrificially. I know we want to believe it, but it’s difficult, isn’t it? The father knew the difficulty of believing yet struggling with unbelief. He’d been disappointed so many times, even by Jesus’ disciples. So, He begs Jesus, “***if you have the power to do anything, have compassion on us and help us.***” Jesus sees the father’s crisis of faith, and in compassion, Jesus helps him, as well as His disciples, overcome their unbelief, just as He does for us.

Jesus’ promises that He can do anything and He reveals His divine power over sin

and evil to refocus their faith. Likewise, He comes to us today to re-center our faith on Him and promises. Just as Jesus dealt with the unclean spirit, He also deals with each and every one of our sins. He doesn't ask us to work harder or believe more. He did all of the work! He took our sins on Himself and carried them to the cross where He received our punishment and purchased our forgiveness. Jesus conquered sin with His suffering and death and conquered death by rising from the grave.

But, we live in this sinful world and we face struggles that often lead us into disbelief asking, "Lord, if you can, if you really have the power to do it?" Jesus assures us, "**All things are possible for the one who believes.**" (Mark 9: 23) "But this situation is different. I really screwed up!" Again, "**All things are possible for the one who believes.**" "But Lord, I've everything I could and I just couldn't do it. I lost my faith." Again, Jesus says, "**All things are possible for the one who believes.**" "But...but..." There are no buts, there's no limit to what Christ can do for sinners like us, and no limit to the power of what He did on Calvary's cross to take away the sins of the world. You need to just be still, know that He is God, and hear Him say, "**All things are possible for the one who believes.**"

But how do I know that my faith is strong enough to take hold of God's power? That's the lie the devil uses to try and destroy our faith. It's the misguided belief that somehow our faith is something we produce in ourselves that our salvation depends on us. This lie gets us naval gazing, looking inward, at our experiences, and comparing what we think our faith should be, and we look at things we do to show our faith. But we need to remember that faith is not our doing. "**No one can say, "Jesus is Lord" except by the Holy Spirit.**" (1 Corinthians 12: 3) Just as the father had to bring his son to Jesus, so also the Holy Spirit needs to bring us to Jesus and [plugs us into His promise](#). That's what He does when God baptizes us with water and His Spirit, when He feeds us with His body and blood, and when He speaks to us through His Word, the Holy Spirit plugs each of us into the promises of God in Jesus. Therefore, it's not about your experience, your strength, or your ability, but it's all about the power of Jesus.

Which brings us back to the father's prayer: "**I believe; help my unbelief!**" When we pray this prayer, we acknowledge that our faith is weak and we can't do anything to strengthen it. Therefore, we cry out to God from our complete helplessness, begging Him to help our unbelief in the One Who makes all things, even our salvation, possible. And we pray that He would keep us in the one, true faith, not faith in ourselves, but faith in Him and in Jesus Christ our Savior, until we are received into heaven. I began by asking, "How is your faith, today?" I hope that we might all confess and pray, "**Lord, I believe, help my unbelief!**" Amen.