

A Faith That Believes

Luke 9:37-45

now returning to where the rest of the disciples were camped out.

Once again in the text we will consider today we find a wonderful display of the compassion of Jesus as He reaches out to help a desperate man. But within the context of this account we see not only His compassion and cure but in it He invokes a challenge, one that we must all consider. As Jesus challenged the faith of the father so this text challenges us to consider our own faith. Let me ask you this question: How much faith do you have?

With that, let's consider our text in Luke 9:37-45.

The pleading father

The puzzled disciples

The powerful Savior

A practical faith

I. The PLEADING FATHER

A. His Appeal – v. 37-38 (Matthew 17:15)

We begin by noting that it was the next day when this encounter took place. What happened on the previous day you might ask? From the preceding verses we note that Jesus, along with Peter, James, and John, had gone up a mountain where Jesus wanted to spend some time praying. While praying He was transfigured so that His glory shone through Him. At the same time Moses and Elijah instantly appeared with Him and they began to discuss His death that would take place in Jerusalem. It was a startling and revelatory event for the disciples. Startling because Jesus had never before revealed Himself in this way and never had they been witness to such a meeting with two great representatives of the Old Testament in Moses and Elijah. It was revelatory because they were privileged to see Jesus in His glory, something no one else on earth had ever witnessed before and something that won't be witnessed on earth until He returns. Apparently Jesus and the three disciples had spent the night up on the mountain and were

Here's a truth we know all too well. We go to a seminar or a retreat and want to stay there in that moment because it's such a wonderful feeling. We love being so close to God and never want to leave. But at some time we realize that we have to come down from the mountain and go into the valley where there are battles still to be fought. It is on the mountain we experience the glory of God. It is in the valley we experience the grace of God. We must go into the valley because that is where the people are who need help, who need God. As much as we would like to stay on the mountain where we feel safe and close to God, we must return to the valley and face the battle.

They were met with quite a scene. A large crowd had gathered and in the crowd was a desperate father. By the description about the son, we have to assume that the father was very distraught. He had come to the disciples requesting their help. We find in the text that the purpose for this emergency visit was on behalf of his son. We don't know the son's age, nor do we know how long he had been plagued with this condition. The only thing we know is the nature of his condition. Dr. Luke tells us that the boy was demon possessed. Because the disciples were unable to deliver the son by casting out the demon, the father pleaded with Jesus to help. He asked Jesus to show compassion and mercy on his son and we learn that this is his only son. An only Son who was sent by the Father to seek and save the lost is now met by a father pleading for his only son

Reflect over your life and think about a time when in desperation you went to the Lord pleading for Him to have mercy. For the believer it would be the day of salvation, when like the penitent tax collector we asked Him to have mercy on a sinner. There may have been other occasions when you pled with God over some urgent, tangible need: It may have been a plea for God to restore health to

you or a loved one.

It may have been a plea for God to provide financially for some debt.

It may have been a plea for God to forgive some sin.

It may have been a plea for God to keep you safe from injury when you realized you are about to have an accident.

The need is urgent and beyond your ability to help. What are the circumstances that have caused you to desperately cry out to the Lord? This hurting father despaired because his son could not be helped. With hope fading he came and appealed to Jesus.

B. His Account – v. 39 (Mark 9:21-22)

We have had other accounts in the gospels of those who were demon possessed and how Jesus delivered them from their plight. None are as graphic. Even the account of the demon possessed man in the region of the Gerasenes is not as graphic.

Luke describes the son's condition as being symptomatic of epilepsy.

He had seizures and foamed at the mouth.

It happens without warning.

His body would writhe in convulsions.

He would screamed.

The father also states that the demon is destroying the son.

It was a frightening experience for the son and those who witnessed it.

In Mark 9:21-22 we read that the demon would throw the son to the ground.

He was unable to talk.

He would gnash his teeth. His body would become rigid after which he would become listless, appearing lifeless.

We hadn't lived at Camp very long when Mom recounted a story about an evening she was leaving chapel with a friend during a Ladies retreat. Mom recalled that her friend went into an epileptic seizure falling to the ground, convulsing, foaming at

the mouth. Mom had her camp handbook that she rolled up and placed in her friend's mouth to keep her from clamping down on her tongue. All she could do was sit with her friend watching her drool orange die all over until the seizure was over. She felt helpless to do anything else.

How helpless the man must have felt all the times he witnessed this occur with his son. Helplessness is the petri dish of hopelessness.

Mark records that the father indicated this had been going on since the boy was a child adding that often the demon would attempt to destroy the son by throwing him into the water to drown him or into the fire to burn him. This account graphically shows us the violent nature of demons.

The father appealed to Jesus with a graphic account of what occurs during these episodes of demon possession hoping his description would move Jesus to do something. But notice the allegation he brought. It is the reason for the appeal to Jesus. We see it in verse 40.

C. His Allegation – v. 40 (Mark 9:18)

Somewhere, somehow the father had heard that the disciples were fresh off a tour of preaching and healing. Back in verses 1 and 2 Jesus had given them power and authority to go into the surrounding towns and villages for the purpose of teaching the good news about the Messiah and to heal people of illnesses and to cast out demons. A little later we read that they came reporting to Jesus everything they had done. In Mark 6:18 we read that they "drove out many demons." But in this instance they appear impotent. They had clearly demonstrated the ability to cast out demons earlier even though Jesus was not present with them. So in this case were they incompetent or apathetic? The father tells Jesus that the nine disciples were unable to perform this task.

I don't think the father was wrong to go to the disciples. They had clearly demonstrated the authority to cast them earlier, but here they could not. We'll see in a moment what they lacked. Before that, look at the father's acknowledgment.

D. His Acknowledgment – Mark 9:24

“Immediately the boy's father exclaimed, ‘I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief.’”

The Message “Then I do believe. Help me with my doubts.”

I think we have all been where the father is at some time or another. We believe in the power of God but we need to have our faith increased. The man honestly acknowledged his own limited faith and need for more. He acknowledged that Jesus was able and if it required more faith he wanted that, whatever it would take to heal his son.

At some point the father had to get over the disappointment of the disciples inability to cast out the demon and come to the only one who could help. He had to believe that Jesus could do what the disciples could not. Such is the plea of the father.

II. THE PUZZLED DISCIPLES

Let's go back now and look at the disciples, the nine men who were unable to cast out the demon. First, let's note that they were involved in a quarrel.

A. Their Quarrel – Mark 9:14 (Matthew 17:19)

As Jesus and the three other disciples came down the mountain, they noticed the other nine disciples arguing with some teachers of the law. Scripture gives us the *context* of the argument, but does not give us the *content*. When Jesus asked what they were arguing about, the father came forward and stated that he had brought his demon possessed son to the disciples to heal but they could not, so a quarrel broke out.

Did the quarrel start because the religious leaders found a good opportunity to chide the disciples for their apparent lack of ability? Was this a sort of playground taunt?

Did they argue over some point of the Old Testament law that the disciples somehow missed in their attempt to cast out the demon?

Did they accuse the disciples like they would Jesus claiming that they must also be demon possessed to try and cast one out?

Were the disciples attempting to defend Jesus?

We'll never know what they argued over except that it was related to their inability to help the son. So all we know is that there was this quarrel.

Later on when they were in a private setting, they had a question to ask Jesus.

B. Their Question – Mark 9:28

With their previous success they were now curious as to why in this case they were unable to cast the demon out so it was only natural for them to ask.

Maybe you've asked a similar question. Oh, not about casting out demons, but something else. Lord, how come when I faced this temptation yesterday I had no problem overcoming it and yet today I give into the same temptation?

Was the supernatural power and authority given them by Jesus earlier only temporary or was the power somehow diminished in a way that rendered them incapable of casting out this demon?

Was it because Jesus wasn't around?

Because they could not perform this miracle in the life of the boy, they put up their defenses. They quarreled and then they questioned.

We have looked at the father and his desperate plea for his son.

We have looked at the disciples who were puzzled by their inability to cast out the demon. Now let's look at the response of a powerful Savior.

III. THE POWERFUL SAVIOR – Mark 9:19-27

A. An Admonition that Expresses Displeasure – Mark 9:19

Jesus was inwardly grieved and He expressed His grief by calling them an unbelieving generation. Their unbelief was painfully evident and Jesus expressed it in such a way that indicated their continued unbelief was a burden to Him especially with so many obvious proofs that should instill belief in Him.

As the Lord looks down on us today, what kind of faith does He see? Does He see faith flourishing or floundering? Does He see a strong faith or a shaky faith? Does He see a faith that is faithful or failing? Would He admonish us for our lack of faith?

Jesus was stating that the entire nation of Jews was unbelieving; this included the disciples. They were not only unbelieving, Jesus said they were perverted. It means to twist or bend out of shape. It was used to describe a careless craftsman who had misshaped a piece of pottery so that it became distorted when it was fired in the oven. He is not speaking about moral perversion, but of spiritual perversion, a perversion that is evident in those who don't believe.

John MacArthur adds "Any person who does not genuinely trust God cannot escape having a distorted view of Him and His will."

What Jesus says also gives an indication of His desire to be back with the Father when He adds "How long shall I be with you? How long shall I put up with you?" Maybe His human nature was wondering if the suffering and death He would soon experience was worth it given their lack of belief.

B. An Appearance that Exasperates Demons – Mark 9:20-21a

As we have seen on several occasions when Jesus encountered demons, they all have a similar response. They initially attempt to do more harm to the person they possess. This demon is no different. He violently threw the boy to the ground when he saw Jesus. The demon knew that he had no power to disobey Jesus and must submit to His authority. He became incensed at Jesus' presence and the command to leave the boy and tried one last time to harm him. He still wanted to be in control, but knew he must obey the command to leave. We read in Matthew 17 that at this one last attempt the crowd thought the boy was dead.

C. An Answer that Encourages the Doubtful – Mark 9:23, 29; Matthew 17:20

The man was losing hope. The disciples had failed. A quarrel had broken out. All he wanted was his son to be freed from this demon. He came to Jesus. He pled with Jesus. Here's how Mark records the exchange. "If you can do anything, take pity on us and help us." "If you can?" said Jesus. "Everything is possible for him who believes."

What encouraging words those must have been to the father. Hope was being rekindled. Let those words strengthen you today with whatever you are pleading with Jesus about.

Now let me interject here that I am not suggesting and neither is Jesus stating that if you have faith you can get whatever you want. This is not a *name it and claim it* principle He is advocating. What we ask for must be according to the will of God for God to respond. But we must have faith because we see throughout Scripture that nothing is impossible with God, nothing is too hard for Him.

Jeremiah 32:17 "Ah Lord God, Thou hast made the heaven and the earth with Thy great power and

stretched out arm and there is nothing too hard for Thee.”

Nothing is impossible when you put your trust in God;
Nothing is impossible when you're trusting in His Word.

Hearken to the voice of God to thee:
“Is there anything too hard for Me?”

Then put your trust in God alone and rest upon His Word;

For everything, O, everything, yes, everything is possible with God.

Why is it we lack faith? We lack faith because we don't know God as we should. The more we know Him, the greater should be our faith in Him to the point of realizing that nothing is too hard for Him. When God is the object of our faith, faith in the unseen has better vision than in what is visible. We are told in Scripture to walk by faith and not by sight, but that someday faith will become sight.

Perhaps your prayer today is like that of the father.
“Lord I believe, help my unbelief.” “Help me with my doubts.”

Let the words of Jesus encourage you today that nothing is impossible for Him.

Couched in His response to their question, Jesus also has a word of encouragement to the disciples. Mark 9:29: “This kind can come out only by prayer.”

This isn't a criticism. It is instead an effort to get them to realize that they need to be diligent in their spiritual disciplines. Here's Matthew's account.

Matthew 17:20 - "Because you're not yet taking God seriously," said Jesus. "The simple truth is that if you had a mere kernel of faith, a poppy seed, say, you would tell this mountain, 'Move!' and it would

move. There is nothing you wouldn't be able to tackle." The Message

The disciples had to be feeling pretty low, insecure and unsure of themselves after their failure. They probably felt like they had just gotten the wind knocked out of their sails and beat down. They had tried and failed. Their previous success had just met its match and they came up short. They had power and authority, but they lacked one thing. And I think that Jesus wanted to bring them back to a point of remembering that they needed to rely on Him not their own ability or previous successes. Isn't that what we tend to do? Don't we try to ride success from previous victories? We live on the past

Jesus says they lacked spiritual discipline. Matthew says they had neglected seeking God through a time of prayer and fasting. Mark says they needed faith. Sometimes we can get so comfortable in our spiritual walk we ride the spiritual high for a while and think that we can just float along. We're like a glider. We get the initial lift from the plane that's towing us and when the cable is cut loose we soar around for a while lost in the moment as we float along forgetting that eventually gravity is going to pull us back toward earth. We have lost our initial momentum. We do that in our spiritual walk as well. We have a great spiritual experience, we just spent some time in prayer, reading/studying Scripture, and worship and we think we can drift along on that experience for a while without needing to get spiritually replenished.

Those of us who have run a marathon know how important it is throughout the race to hydrate. If we don't there can be some serious repercussions for our lack of getting fluids replenished. Yet how many Christians believe that it's not important to regularly be replenished spiritually through prayer, Scripture and worship? Those spiritual disciplines help build our faith and apparently the disciples had been neglecting them. We know what it's like. The demands of life can squeeze those things out, but

those are the very things that sustain us when the road of life gets really hard, they help bolster our faith. Maybe the disciples thought that just being around Jesus was enough spiritual stimulation.

We need to learn a lesson from the disciples and remember that we are powerless without Christ, powerless without faith. Never have the mindset that we can handle all the little stuff but when the really big stuff comes along that's when we'll call on Jesus, that's when we kick our faith into gear. Folks, if we don't have faith in the little stuff, we won't have faith when it comes to the big stuff. We need to heed the words of the old hymn "I need Thee every hour."

D. An Authority that Emancipates the Despairing – Mark 9:25-27

The boy was brought to Jesus. He spoke a simple command to the demon and the demon obeyed. The boy was freed from a life of demon possession and the father had his son restored. When we cry out to Jesus to be freed from the power of sin He will emancipate us.

We have considered several things from this passage.

The pleading father

The puzzled disciples

The powerful Savior

Let's wrap it up with talking about a practical faith.

Faith must have feet. Faith results in action.

IV. A PRACTICAL FAITH

A. Faith Saves the Imperfect Sinner

John 3:16; Ephesians 2:8-9

John 3:16 tells us that a person is saved by believing or trusting in Jesus Christ whom God gave as a sacrifice for our sin. The result of such belief or faith is that we will not perish but will be given eternal life.

Before the very first sin in the garden, God had a plan to redeem man knowing that he would give into sin and therefore doom all mankind to the consequences of sin, which is death both physical and spiritual, the latter having the greatest consequence as it bears eternal punishment. But God announced in Genesis 3:15 the coming of a redeemer, one who would bear the penalty of sin and both Testaments bear witness of the redemptive process by which God would restore broken fellowship due to sin. From the typology of the Old Testament sacrificial system to the commandments given by God, they bear witness that man cannot keep the law. It shows us that we are indeed guilty.

Then in the New Testament we see in the coming of Jesus the One the Father would give to die for our sin so that whoever believes in Christ will receive the free gift of eternal life. This gift is available to all on the basis of their belief in the finished work of Christ on the cross. It is received by faith believing that His sacrifice sufficiently satisfied the just demands of a holy God.

Ephesians 2:8-9 tells us that salvation is by God's grace who gives to us what we don't deserve and it is by faith we receive it. God provided what we needed in the one-time sacrifice of His Son. Our response is faith. Faith does not rest in any merit of our own for we have nothing to give that would satisfy God in payment for our sin. We have no resources to secure salvation. It is only and always a gift. While this grace is available and free we bear the responsibility to believe and receive. To neglect this gift is to bear the consequences of the penalty that comes for such rejection.

It is faith that saves the imperfect sinner.

Faith can be delineated into three elements. Each is required in the exercise of saving faith.

There is the intellectual element or the mind. It is the cognitive side of faith. We come to understand what the Bible says about our lost condition apart from God and agree with His assessment about our

sin and our need of salvation. But simply knowing God has made a way of salvation will not save us.

There is the emotional element of faith. Louis Berkhof writes “When one embraces Christ by faith; feels that it meets an important need in his life, and is conscious of an absorbing interest in it – this is assent.”

There is also the volitional element of faith, it as an act of the will. Saving faith, writes Berkhof, “is not merely a matter of the intellect, nor of the intellect + emotions combined; it is also a matter of the will, determining the direction of the soul... This third element consists in a personal trust in Christ as Savior and Lord, including a surrender of the soul as guilty and defiled to Christ, and a reception and appropriation of Christ as the source of pardon and of spiritual life.”

I can intellectually agree that a chair is well crafted and suited to hold my weight when I sit down. I can even observe others sitting in chairs and determine that it looks safe and appealing.

I can emotionally agree that the chair not only looks safe, but it also appears to be comfortable appealing to a felt need for rest from standing.

When I determine by act of the will to actually sit down, that is when faith is fully realized.

Faith saves the imperfect sinner.

B. Faith Seeks the Infinite God Hebrews 11:1-2, 6

Some scholars say this is a definition of faith.

Some scholars say this is a description of faith.

Some say it's a combination.

Faith is the fundamental element by which we live. (John MacArthur) “It is substantial confidence that becomes an absolute, unshakeable conviction.”

Every day we place our faith in others, in things.

Why are we so willing to put our faith in those things but have little faith in God? When Jesus

said if we had faith as small as a mustard seed we could move a mountain, He didn't mean we could actually move a mountain; He used it metaphorically to mean that even with small faith great things could be done. So what does that tell us about our faith? It tells me we need more.

“Faith is the confident assurance that what we hope for is going to happen. It is the evidence of things we cannot yet see.” (NLT)

That's what chapter 11 is all about, Old Testament saints were so convinced by faith of what was promised they believed it as if it was already theirs. Why could they have such confidence? It's because they wholeheartedly believed in the God who promised. They had unshakeable conviction in God.

Verse 6 suggests that we cannot please God without faith. Faith begins by first of all believing that God exists and then it believes that God rewards those who seek Him by faith, but a second condition is added. We not only need to believe that God exists; we also need to seek Him by faith.

Read through the Gospels and count how many times Jesus speaks about people who had little faith and ask yourself if we are any different.

Faith seeks the infinite God. Chafer says it is personal confidence in God suggesting that the individual has had a real experience with God that encourages faith and enlarges faith. Warren Wiersbe suggests that faith needs to grow. Faith will never remain static, never stay the same. It will either increase or decrease. It all depends on our view of God. For faith to be real faith it must be active.

Faith walked away from family and homeland to venture to a Promised Land.

Faith walked around city walls.

Faith built an ark when there had never been rain.

Faith led an army of 300 against formidable odds.

Faith seeks God. Faith believes God even though
all you have is a promise

C. Faith Sees the Impossible

A grief stricken, desperate father came to Jesus with
a little faith that Jesus could heal his son. He came
with what faith he had and asked Jesus for more.

Do you believe that Jesus is able to do the
impossible?

Does your faith ask Jesus for the unlikely?

At 85 years old Caleb went to Joshua and asked for
the hill country. He believed by faith that God
would give to him what He had promised because
he trusted in God.

George Mueller prayed in faith for five friends to
trust Christ. For fifty years he prayed believing that
God did not want them to perish, but have eternal
life. By the time of his death four of the five had
trusted Christ. A month later the last friend came to
Christ.

By faith what are you asking the Lord for today that
seems impossible? As you seek God about that
matter, how much faith do you have that God can
answer or do you need to ask Him for more faith?