

Faith and the lack of it

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Date: 01 January 2000

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- [0 : 00] The ninth chapter of Mark's Gospel and to verse 24. Mark chapter 9 at verse 24.
- And straightway the father of the child cried out and said with tears, Lord, I believe, help thou mine unbelief. Lord, I believe, help thou mine unbelief.
- This verse speaks about faith. One of the most important aspects of our religion is faith. It is the most basic aspect of our part in religion.
- Faith is what links us with the work of Jesus Christ for sin. I'm sure we're all familiar with the phrase being justified by faith.
- Even other religions have faith. We speak of the different religions of the world as being the different faiths. And so faith is something that's very basic to religion of any kind.
- [1 : 14] But particularly to the true religion. We believe Christianity is exclusively the true religion. And in it, faith is vitally important.
- And here in this situation in our text, we come face to face with some of the realities of faith. Because we have here a situation of great need.
- This man's son is demon-possessed. It's a real demon possession. It's not something that can be explained in any other way.
- Because Jesus cries out to the demon, tells the demon to leave this boy eventually. The demon seeks to destroy the boy.
- He causes him to have what it would appear to be something like an epileptic fit from time to time. And he causes various other things to happen to this boy.
- [2 : 18] But the real cause was the fact that this boy is demon-possessed. And the disciples, we are told, could not cast out the demon.
- Now, we often think of the disciples as being the twelve. Or at times after Judas Iscariot betrayed his lord, the eleven. But here we have the nine.
- Because Peter, James and John were up with Jesus on the mountain of transfiguration. As we read in the first part of the chapter. And the man comes to the disciples and asks them to cast out this demon.
- They are unable to do so. And so the man is still in need. And Jesus comes to him and hears his plea. And Jesus responds to him by giving him a challenge to his faith, a test of his faith.
- Jesus said unto him, If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth. And the man realizes that he is caught between faith and unbelief.
- [3 : 26] Lord, I believe. Help thou mine unbelief. And I'm sure all of us here can relate to that man. None of us has perfect faith.
- And I'm sure the fact that we are gathered here today means that we have some faith. And so this situation that's spoken about here is a very realistic one.
- It's a situation that we can identify with. Aware of having faith. And aware at the same time of the great limitations and poverty of our faith.

And so this reminds us once again of how realistic the scriptures are. The scriptures present high standards for us. The standards of perfection of Jesus Christ.

But at the same time, these same scriptures speak to us in a real position as sinners who are imperfect. So I want us to think about these words of this man.

[4 : 33] And to think first of all of the importance of faith. We perhaps go to the previous verse. To verse 23 once again. To see the importance of faith. If thou canst believe, said Jesus, all things are possible to him that believeth.

The question Jesus is asking the man is not, do you think I can heal your son? But it is, do you actually believe that I can?

He's not concerned with Jesus' own abilities. These are quite assured. The question is, will Jesus do something?

Does this man believe that Jesus is able to do something? Jesus emphasised faith a lot in his ministry.

We see it right at the beginning in Mark's gospel. In the very first chapter at verse 15. This is Jesus coming into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God.

[5 : 35] And saying, the time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent ye and believe the gospel. That is his message. Repent and believe the gospel.

Repent and believe the gospel. Now what is this faith that is being spoken about here in this particular situation? This man believes and yet he is aware of unbelief.

What is this faith? And at what different levels can it be at? Well, very often we're very vague about faith. There are a lot of people, maybe some in the congregation here today, who if you ask them to say, do they believe?

Yes, I believe. Yes, of course I believe. A lot of people outside churches today, people who wouldn't dream of going into a church today, would say, yes, I believe.

But the important thing is, what do we believe? Do we believe simply in God? That God exists? That's very important.

[6 : 40] The letters of Hebrews tells us that that is the basic idea of faith. Anyone that comes to God must believe that he is or that he exists. That's basic.

But so what? James, in his letter, tells us that the demons, the very demons like the one that was taking control of this boy, they believe in God.

They believe God exists. They know God exists. And they tremble. They're afraid of God. So it's not enough simply to say that we believe in God.

That's faith at a very low level. But it's not what we call saving faith. Saving faith is something much greater than that.

We go to that then. Next, what is saving faith? Belief in Christ for salvation. Well, the disciples believed in Jesus Christ for salvation.

[7 : 42] And yet, they weren't able to cast out this demon. They could do nothing in this situation. So what does faith mean in this circumstance?

I believe. Help thou my unbelief. I think the clue to that is found in Hebrews chapter 11. That great chapter which tells us about the people who believed in God.

Through faith. So and so did such and such a thing. That is the pattern of the verses. And people did things through their faith.

Sometimes they did very great things. Who through faith subdued kingdoms. Wrought righteousness. Obtained promises. Stopped the mouths of lions. Quenched the violence of fire.

Escaped the edge of the sword. Out of weakness were made strong. Waxed valiant in fight. Turned to flight the armies of the aliens. There are some of the phrases that are used.

- [8 : 45] As the writer to the Hebrews just mentions in summary. Some of the great things that people did. Through faith. We find it also in Acts chapter 3. When Peter and John. By the power of God. Healed that lame man. And they were asked about it. How did they manage to do that? Well, they referred to Jesus Christ. And his name through faith. In his name hath made this man strong. Whom we see and know. Yea, the faith which is by him. Hath given him this perfect soundness. In the presence of you all. It was through faith. Faith that God will do great things. Verse 23 again. If thou canst believe. All things are possible. To him that believeth. Jesus said something very dramatic himself. On another occasion. If you have faith.

- [9 : 43] As a grain of mustard seed. You shall say unto this mountain. Remove hence to yonder place. And it shall remove. And nothing shall be impossible with you. Great things are possible. To those who trust in God. Those who are in tune with him. Those who are in a close relation with him. It's seen in all these people. Who are spoken of in Hebrews chapter 11. It's seen in people in the Old Testament. People like Abraham. And Daniel. Who did great things. Through their close relationship with God. Their faith in God. And it's supremely seen of course. In Jesus himself. Look at the great works. That he did. Jesus spoke about. The faith that moves mountains. It's an advanced level. Of faith. The man.

- [10 : 40] Here. He says. I believe. Help my unbelief. He's not at that advanced stage here. The disciples. Were not at that stage. At that point. But Jesus was. And he holds out the possibility. For them. For them. And so it's important. That we believe. For salvation. It's important that we have faith. Now the most basic faith that we need. Is saving faith. Remember. As I said. It's not enough to say. I believe. That God exists. So what? That's not going to save us. That does nothing. To deal with our sin. The most basic. Faith that we need. Is saving faith. Trusting in Jesus Christ. As the one who takes away. Our sins. But we must go beyond that as well. Faith must be strengthened. And. It must grow. As a result of a close walk with God.

- [11 : 38] That's the sort of faith. I believe. That is spoken of here. Something that goes beyond. Mere saving faith. Saving faith. Is a marvellous thing. It grants eternal life. To whoever believes. But we must go further than that. And go on. In our faith. So that's the importance of faith. How important it is. It is vital. It is. A very important thing. Indeed. But then. Let's look at. This man's. Awareness. Of faith. He says. I believe. He says. I do believe. Jesus says to him. All things are possible. To him that believe it. And this man says. I do believe. Yes. I believe. He believed that. Jesus could cure his son. After all. This man had come. To Jesus. He believed. That there was. An answer.

- [12 : 34] He believed. And he knew he believed. He can say that. I believe. Now that's the sort of. Situation that we should. Aim to be at. At the very least.
- To have that level of faith. Which enables us to say. I believe. And I know I believe. I know I am trusting. In the Lord Jesus Christ. Now very often.
- Our faith is tested. And it's tested. In such a way. That we sometimes. Reach the stage. Where we wonder. If we do believe. At all. That is. A very common situation.
- That our faith is tested. By our circumstances. Whatever these may be. And we wonder. Do I really believe. At all. That that's what we should. Aim at. That we be in the position.
- Where we believe. And we know that we believe. Remember what Paul says. When he's writing to. To Timothy. Nevertheless. I am not ashamed.
- [13 : 28] For I know. Whom I have believed. And I'm persuaded. That he is able to keep. That which I have committed. Unto him. Against that day. I know. Whom I have believed.
- So that's a good. Thing. To be able to say. I do believe. I do believe. In the Lord Jesus Christ. For salvation. But alongside.
- This knowledge. Of his own faith. This man. Recognizes. That there are limits. To his faith. He says. Help. My unbelief. He realizes. That alongside.
- Faith. There is. Unbelief. Faith and unbelief. Side by side. In this man's heart. Faith. Now it's very difficult. For us to. Understand how that can be.
- We know. It's the case. Because I'm sure. All of us. Would agree. With that. That's true of ourselves. That we do have. Some faith. But alongside it. There's an awful lot. Of unbelief.
- [14 : 24] How can we. Illustrate this. Well there are various. Illustrations. That you might have. You could think of it. For example. As being. A measuring rod. Or something like. A ruler. And down at one level.
- Is zero faith. No faith at all. And up at the other end. Is perfect faith. And. At a very low level. We have those. Who believe. That God exists. That's faith.
- But it's. It's not very much faith. You have to go to a certain extent. To believe. In the Lord Jesus Christ. As. Salvat. For salvation. Before you're saved. Saving faith.
- At one point. The basic saving faith. But. Going beyond that. To the sort of faith. That Jesus Christ had. As a human being. That enabled him. To do. Such great things.
- Or we might think of it. As being. Uh. A mixture. Of. Like. Orange juice. That you might drink. You would get. A little bit out of the bottle.
- [15 : 21] And you would add water to it. To dilute it. And. You might do the same. With something far stronger. As well. Of course. And you'd get this mixture. Of the two things.
- The pure concentrated. Uh. Liquid. And the water. To dilute it. And you. We might think of it. In that way. Or we might think of it. Like a map.
- I'm sure you've seen. Uh. A map. That people might use. Say for example. The general election. There'll be a general election. Coming up. This year. And. On election night.
- What we'll see. Is. We'll see. A picture. Of. Of Britain. And there'll be. Uh. Part of it. Coloured in red. That's the part. That was held by Labour. And part of it. Coloured in blue.
- The part was held by the Conservatives. And so on. And we can think of it. Our lives as being like that map. And. The level of faith we have. Is those parts. That are. Are coloured red. Let's say.
- [16 : 15] Uh. And. There's parts. In our lives. Where. There is unbelief. And these are coloured. Some other colour. These are three possible illustrations. I don't know. Which is the best.
- I don't know which is the. The most. According to scripture. But it's. To help us understand. That. There is this mixture. There is faith. And unbelief.

This man. Is very typical. Of us. I believe. Help. My unbelief. Our faith. You see. Is affected. By our emotions. For example. Our fears.

And our doubts. Fears. About all sorts of things. Fears about the future. We might be worried. About what's going to happen to us. In the future. Fear. But.

The experience of faith. For the believer. Is. That it gradually grows. It's something that grows. And advances. We learn to trust in God. More fully. Often.

[17 : 10] Through. Difficulty. Faith. And. We learn to lay our burdens. Upon him. Faith is never going to be perfect. For us. In this life. It's something. Which should grow.

And develop. As we experience. More and more. Of the Christian life. But. It's not something. That will ever be perfect. And so. We're in this situation.

Where. Like this man. We have. Weak faith. Imperfect faith. Yes. We believe. But. There is. A considerable amount. Of unbelief.

Now. I want to say. Two more things. About that. Before we go on. To the next bit. We're not to be satisfied. With weak faith. We're not to say.

Well. This man's typical. I'm the same. He says. I believe. Help my unbelief. I'm satisfied. With my level of faith. Just now. We should never.

[18 : 05] Be satisfied. With any. Unbelief. In our hearts. We can't be satisfied. With weak faith. When Jesus himself. Rebukes. The disciples.

And the others. Round about. For their lack of faith. Verse 19. O faithless. Generation. How long. Shall I be with you. How long. Shall I suffer you.

Jesus is there. Giving them a rebuke. For their lack of faith. So we should. Never. Be satisfied. With lack of faith. We should. Always be seeking. To develop.

Our faith. And how do we do that. Well. Let me stress. Once again. The way in which. We deal with our faith. Is by. The. Taking part.

In what we call. The means of grace. That's why we have. Church services. That's why we have. The preaching of the gospel. That's why we have. The bible. For ourselves. To read. That's why we have.

[19 : 00] The privilege of prayer. And that's why we have. The Lord's Supper as well. These things. Are the means of grace. These things. Are the means. By which.

God's grace. Can come into our hearts. And our faith. Can be increased. And if we neglect. Any of these things. Then we are neglecting. Our faith.

And we are being satisfied. With a lower level of faith. Than we ought to have. And that. Is something. Which will make us. Liable. To the rebuke.

Of God. The rebuke. Of Jesus Christ. There's a danger. That we do that. You see. The people of Israel.

Did that. There was a generation. That died in the wilderness. A whole generation. Of the people of Israel. Died out in the wilderness. Instead of going into. The promised land.

[19 : 53] Why? Well. The writer to the Hebrews. Tells us. They could not enter in. Because. Of unbelief. It's the tendency in us. To be satisfied.

With a low level. Of faith. grace. And so. Let's not neglect. The means of grace. Let's not neglect. These things that are given to us.

And particularly. Since. We will be having the Lord's Supper. Next week. Let us remember it. In terms of the Lord's Supper. It is a means of grace. God. In his wisdom.

He understands us. He knows what we're like. Jesus. Understands. What human beings are like. And he. Has ordained. This sacrament. Where.

But the bread and wine. Are a visible reminder. Of the. And symbol. Of the broken body. And shed blood of the Lord. And why is that there? It's to help our faith.

[20 : 49] He understands. That we need these tangible symbols. To help us. And so. To partake of the bread and wine. Is a means to. Among other things.

To increase. Our faith. And so. If we neglect that. If we are. True. Saved believers. If we have this saving faith.

Then. We are neglecting. Our souls. If we do not. Come to the Lord's table. Now of course. There has to be a certain level of faith.

Before someone who comes. To the Lord's table. Simply belief in God. Is not enough. There must be faith. In Jesus Christ. The saving faith. That I was speaking about earlier. But remember.

We can go beyond. Mere. Saving faith. If we can put it that way. So we are not to be satisfied. With weak faith. But at the same time. We are not to be.

[21 : 44] Not to despair. Because. Of lack of faith. After all. This man. Acknowledged. His lack of faith. And Jesus. Still.

Healed. The man's son. God is merciful. He is merciful. Even to those. Who lack faith. And in any case. Sometimes. We are not aware. Of the precise level of faith.

We have. It's. It's a very. Slippery idea. For us. To try and. Grasp hold of. To know. How strong. Our faith is. The times. When we think. Our faith is strong. May not be the times.

When it is strong. Because faith is dealing with. Things that are unseen. And a person who is really. Exercising faith. May sometimes. Be in a position. Where they think.

They have no faith at all. Our duty is to. Follow God's word. And if we can do that. In the midst of difficulties. Whatever these difficulties.

[22 : 40] May be. If we can continue. To. Keep going. Doing our duty. Before God. Whatever that duty is. In our own individual circumstances. Even though.

We are very much aware. Of weakness of faith. Then perhaps. We are exercising more faith. Than we thought we have. If we are. Leaving things.

In his hands. In his. Capable hands. Then we may find. That we actually have more faith. Than we think we have. It's very easy for us. To. Cret.

About our lack of faith. It's very easy for us. To. For example. With regard to the Lord's Supper. As we examine ourselves. And as we look at ourselves.

To think. Well. I don't have much faith at all. I have no faith. Why should I go. To the Lord's table. Sometimes we can examine. Our faith so much.

[23 : 34] That we actually weaken it. Rather. We are to go on. We are to seek. To live. By faith. If we are conscious. Of. A lack of faith.

If we are. Aware of that. And if it makes us anxious. And worried. Well what do we do. We just simply. Follow. What God's word says. We continue. Making use. Of the means of grace.

We seek to. Carry out God's commands. To love him. With all our heart. And soul. And mind. And strength. And to love our neighbour. As ourself. We go on. With these things.

And that is. Real faith. Real faith. Is when we. Get on with these things. Even in the midst. Of an awareness. Of unbelief. And so.

We've been thinking about. The importance of faith. And also. This man's awareness. Of his faith. And how. Unbelief. Was there. Present. With the faith. But what's this remedy.

[24 : 29] That he seeks. What's the remedy. For lack of faith. Well. It's seen in these words. Help thou. My unbelief. These words. That are. Addressed. To Jesus.

Help. My unbelief. This man. Admitted. That he had. A lack. Of faith. And he came. To Jesus. To have his faith.

Strengthened. Now. When he comes to. Ask Jesus here. We're not to. Think of it. In terms of. Coming once. And asking once. And that will be.

The end of it. He is asking. For continuous help. He's asking for. Daily help. With this. He's saying. Lord. Daily. Help my unbelief.

Continue. To help me. With my unbelief. That's what the. The similar thing. To what the disciples asked. On one occasion. They said. Lord. Increase.

[25 : 23] Our faith. If we have an awareness. Of our lack of faith. Then. Let us ask God. For help. Let us ask Jesus Christ. For help. He is the one. Who gives us faith.

Faith. We're told. Is the gift. Of God. Now when this man's. Asking. For help. With his unbelief. He's not. Asking Jesus. To help him. To have such a.

Level of faith. That he is. Worthy. To have his prayer. Answered. It's not like that. At all. That would make. Faith. A work of righteousness.

That we. We get something. Because. We have faith. We deserve it. Because we have faith. It doesn't work like that. It works. It works. In a completely different way.

If we have lack of faith. We look. To Jesus Christ. For him. To increase it. Remember. He is the one. Who provides us.

[26 : 18] With salvation. The writer. To the Hebrews. Tells us this. Lay aside. Every weight. And the sin. That doth so easily. Beset us. And let us. Run with patience. The race.

That is set before us. Looking. Unto Jesus. The author. And finisher. Of our faith. These words are said. Immediately after.

The chapter. Which has that. Great list. Of the great people. Of faith. We are to. Look to Jesus. The author. And finisher. Of our faith.

He is the one. Who provides us. With faith. And he is the one. Who will help us. With our unbelief. And he is also. Our example. If we go back.

To this incident here. With this. Demon possessed boy. And we see. Jesus response to it. In verses 28. And 29. Jesus.

[27 : 13] Told the. Evil spirit. To leave the boy. And the disciples. Other. Understandable. The curious. They say to Jesus. How come. You managed to. Cast out this demon. And we couldn't.

And we read in verses 28. And 29. Why could we not. We cast him out. And he said unto them. This kind. Can come forth. By nothing. But by prayer.

And fasting. Prayer. And fasting. Is necessary. You see. Prayer. And fasting. And fasting. As a sign. Of a developed faith. A faith that is developed.

Through. Spiritual self-discipline. Once again. It goes back. To this question. Of the development. Of our faith. And what is necessary. For that. What is necessary.

For that. Is a close. Walk with God. Jesus here. Is our example. He's our inspiration. He's the source. And we are to seek. To emulate him.

[28 : 12] He is our example. He's the pattern. By which we are to live. Our lives. And what was his life like. His life is a life. Of total. Personal. Devotion. To God.

Such personal. Devotion. To God. That he thought. The same way. That God thought. And therefore. When he. Asked. Something. In prayer. He would receive it.

Because he would only ask. For those things. That God was prepared. To give. And. As it turned out. These things were great things. He did many. Wonderful things.

In his ministry. Now what about our situation. How far are we. Prepared to go. Are we prepared. To seek. This extra faith.

Are we prepared. To. To seek. The. The. Sorting out. Of our. Unbelief. Are we prepared. To go. To the extent. Of. Prayer.

[29 : 08] And fasting. Are we prepared. To go. To the extent. Of. Being devoted. To God. If we do. Then. We will find. Things. Happening. Then we will find. God. Answering. Prayers. This is what. John says. In his first. Letter. And this is the confidence.

That we have. In him. That. If we ask. Anything. According to his will. He. Heareth us. In the Psalms.

We find these words. Delight thyself. In the Lord. And he will give thee. The desires. Of thy heart. The way to help. Our unbelief. Is to draw closer.

To God. To draw closer. To Jesus Christ. To delight. Ourselves. In God. And in everything. To do with him. And if we do these things. Then.

[30 : 07] He will give us. The desires of our heart. Why? Because the desires of our heart. Will be. For the right things. The things that God. Is prepared to give us. And that is the way.

In which. Faith is increased. Who are the people. Who have. The greatest. Effectiveness. In. The service of God. You look through the Bible.

You look through history. And you see it's those. Who. Were closest to him. Those. Who. Were devoted to him. Those who.

Made full use. Of the means of grace. People of prayer. People who studied. The word of God. People who wouldn't miss. A service of worship.

People who. Would. Make use of the. Sacrament. Of the Lord's Supper. And so on. These are the people.

[31 : 03] Who are used by God. These are the people. Who. Have. Greater faith. If we want to be used by God. If we want to be part of this.

Then we must seek. This advance. Now our faith will be tested. Our faith will be tested. As this man's faith was. There will be trials. There will be difficulties. But we must. Keep going.

So we are in the situation. Like this man. We can all. Identify with him. It's a very simple text. Suppose you remember nothing. Of the sermon.

Remember this. Lord I believe. Help thou mine unbelief. We can make that. Our prayer. We know what it's like. To have some faith. And. We know what it's like.

To lack. In faith. Let's seek to advance. For some people. It will mean. Advancing. From simply belief. That God exists. To belief.

[32 : 01] In the saving work. Of Jesus Christ. That's the most. Important. Level. We can reach. As I've said. That is so vitally important. It's not enough. To believe. That Jesus.

Is. Simply the saviour. We have to. Personally. Trust in him. But beyond that. We have to. Seek to have a closer walk. With God.

To increase. Our faith. To. Undertake this great adventure. That's what it is. For the Christian life. An advanced faith. Is a great adventure. Otherwise.

What will happen. Our faith will be weak. Our faith will be. Like the disciples there. And. We will. Miss out. On a great deal of blessing.

We will be poor specimens. Of Christianity. So let's make sure. That we. First of all. Do believe. That we believe.

[32 : 56] In the Lord Jesus Christ. As our saviour. But that we acknowledge. The lack. Of faith. That we have. And that we seek. To increase that faith.

By. Devoting ourselves. To God. And to his service. And by making full use. Of. The means of grace. That are available to us. Let us pray.

Oh Lord. We ask. That thou. Help us to. Understand. Thy word. Faith is something. Which. On occasions. Is mysterious to us. We sometimes.

Wonder whether we. Have faith at all. We are like. This man. In. In. In the gospel. I believe.

Help. My unbelief. Oh Lord. We ask. That we may. Not be satisfied. With. Weak faith. That we would not be satisfied.

[33 : 55] With. Anything. Other than. True. Saving faith. And so. We pray this morning. For those. Any among us. Who may be. In that position. Whose faith is.

Only in the existence of God. Or in the existence of Jesus Christ. As the saviour. Rather than a personal. Commitment to him. Oh Lord.

We ask. That thou. Enable them. To. Come to. Faith in him. True. Saving faith. We pray also. That. Having come.

To know the Lord. As our saviour. We would advance. In faith. That we would realise. That. We. Do not have. Perfect faith.

And that we would. Seek to increase. And to grow. And advance. In our faith. We give thanks. For the example. Of the Lord Jesus Christ. Of his. Abilities.

[34 : 49] As a human being. Of his. Commitment to thee. As a human being. And we pray. That we may. Seek to emulate him. So.

We. Bring this prayer. To thee. And we make it. Our own prayer. Lord. I believe. Help thou. My unbelief.

Amen.