

Lord I believe help thou mine unbelief

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[0 : 01] Let us turn to consider words you will find in the chapter part of which we read. Mark, the Gospel according to Mark, chapter 9, verse 23.

Jesus said unto him, If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth. And straightway the father of the child cried out and said with tears, Lord, I believe, help thou mine unbelief.

There are always two things in the Bible which are linked together. And these are faith and salvation.

Over and over again you have that emphasis. Believe and thou shalt be saved. But what the Bible does not tell us is how strong that faith must be.

All the Christians who are referred to in the Bible didn't have the same degree or strength of faith.

[1 : 30] For example, Thomas' faith wasn't as strong as, say, Paul's faith. There were times when Peter's faith wasn't as strong as it was at other times.

But what is true is this. That faith must be there if we are saved. Without it, we cannot be saved.

And faith is presented as that, therefore, which brings us into contact with the one who saves. It isn't faith that saves.

It isn't strong faith or weak faith that saves. It is the Christ in whom we believe who saves. And faith is, therefore, that attitude of mind and heart which brings the individual into contact with Christ.

Now, that fact is illustrated perfectly in the story before us here tonight. It is a very distressing and a very sad scene.

[2 : 53] Our Lord descended with the disciples, with Peter, James, and John, from the Mount of Transfiguration. And when they arrived at the foot of the mountain, they found there a crowd gathered together.

And the pick that we have, Matthew, Mark, and Luke put together, is it? This crowd, particularly the scribes in it, this crowd was remonstrating with the other disciples of Jesus.

And when he arrived on the scene, he addressed his words immediately to the crowd with a question. What are you talking about?

What are you arguing about? What is the question at issue? What are you debating about? And that immediately brought this man to the front.

And he told the circumstances. He related the circumstances. He was there with what appeared to be a demon or a devil-possessed boy, his own son.

[3 : 59] And this father was in great anguish of spirit. It is obvious from the three stories, from the stories it is recorded in the three Gospels, it is obvious that this man had tried every possible human resource and means to help himself and his boy.

And as a last resort, he had come to the disciples of Jesus. How he had heard about them, we don't know. But he came in the hope that the disciples would cast the devil or the demons out of his boy.

And he tells Jesus, I have come. I came with him to them. They failed like every other avenue I tried. And this seems to have been the debate.

Why were the disciples not able to help this man and this boy? So Jesus says to them, as so he was saying, Stand to one side.

If you have a problem, the person to come to is me. And so he brings this father face to face with himself and says to him, If you feel that you need help, The only one who can help you is me.

[5 : 28] Or at least he put it like this, If you feel that you need help, I am here. And so the man responds, If you are able to do anything, as you claim.

That seems to be the way verse 22 ought to be. If thou canst do anything, If you really are able to do anything, Have compassion on us, or on me, and help us.

And Jesus said unto him, If thou canst believe all things that are possible to him that believeth. And straightway the father of the child cried out and said to his Lord, I believe, help thou mine unbelief.

No. In a sense, Jesus is doing with this man what he does with everybody in the gospel. Whenever the gospel confronts man, it confronts a person with need.

You may not know your need, you may not be aware of it. But the fact of the matter is that you and I have a need. That one person alone can meet, and that person is Christ.

[6 : 37] Now what we need is salvation. And this is what the gospel does. Every time it is preached, it presents the individual who hears with the offer of salvation, and reminds him of his need of that salvation.

And in looking at the way in which the story here unfolds, and the way in which it can be applied to ourselves, I would like to consider with you just two or three things in this connection.

First of all, how did Christ deal with this man? And secondly, how did this man respond to Christ? And thirdly, what was it that grieved this man in the presence of Christ?

Now, how did Christ deal with this man? Well, in the first place, he dealt with him compassionately.

There was great compassion in the heart of our Lord as he was confronted with this situation. So, he has an interview with this individual.

[7 : 53] And the first thing he says to him is this, you question my power. You say to me, can you do anything?

That is, of course, in the way of help. You are questioning my power to help you. And so he sets out to find out if this man really believes that Jesus can help him.

You see, there's a difference between a person saying, I know that Jesus can do anything. That's one thing. But the other thing, you see, is applying that to yourself and saying, yes, I know that Jesus can apply that power in my case.

So that, though many people may have what we refer to as a historical faith, a belief in Jesus as the savior of people, not many people can go in the next step and say that they believe that Jesus is their savior.

So what Jesus is doing here is this. He's probing. And he's finding out what really is at the root of this man's statement here.

[9 : 32] Or of this man's question. If you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us. So, he brings two things together.

He says to this man, do you really believe that I can help? And on the other hand, do you really believe that I can help you?

Now, what is Jesus bringing together there? Well, he's bringing together his own omnipotent power on the one hand and the existence of the man's faith on the other.

Now, in putting it like that, I am in no way suggesting to you or to anybody else that faith can exist without the omnipotent power of God.

It can't. It can't. You cannot believe in Jesus to the saving of your soul any more than you can keep the tide from coming in on the beach.

[10 : 47] You cannot trust in Jesus as your saviour any more than you can give being to yourself.

You can't do it. So, Jesus asking this man, have you got it in yourself to lay hold of my omnipotent power to help you?

I'm putting it simply, do you have the faith that believes that I can help you? Because, says Jesus to the man, the problem is not what I can do for you.

The problem is what you believe I can do for you. You see, let's not forget this. There are no problems on the side of the Lord when it comes to dealing with human need.

The Lord has the power to meet the need of every human being. The great question for the human being is this, do you believe that God can help you?

[11 : 59] That's the question. And this is the, these are the two things I said that Jesus brings together here. The difficulty says to this man, it's not on my side, it is you, it is on you.

the power that I have is infinite. I have power to help. But, do you believe that I have that power to help you?

And so as they stand and look at one another, Christ makes the condition of help this man's faith. The man had said to him, can you do that which requires omnipotent power?

I've tried everything for my son. Can you now help my son with your omnipotent power? And Jesus turns the question back at him and says, can you do that which requires omnipotent power in you?

Can you believe that I can help you? And so he equates his ability to heal this man's son with the man's ability to believe.

[13 : 11] He puts him to the test. Let me see, he says, if you can believe that I can do what you ask of me. Do not doubt the power that is in me to help you for there is enough power in me.

This is what Jesus said. So he was saying to him, there is enough power in me to help you. But I want to test the reality of your faith in my ability.

So, here you have the same emphasis, the same thrust as you have throughout the gospel narratives.

As I said earlier, the difficulties in the way for those who want help do not lie with Jesus but with themselves.

You know the way that this is put variously. Let me explain one way in which it was put to you. You've heard it said often enough that the reason why people are not saved, the thought for that does not lie in God, it lies in them.

[14 : 23] Now, no one who reads the gospel can deny that fact. I know that there are people who attribute the blame for their unsaved condition to the Lord himself but that cannot stand the test that man is put to under the gospel.

And so this is how Jesus dealt with his money. Just ask him a simple question. You ask if I can help you, well I say this to you, if thou canst believe all things are possible to him that believeth.

You see, the ability to help you goes without saying, I have that power. The question is, do you have that power in you that enables you to lay hold of the power that is in me?

And that's a great question for you and for me here tonight. It's a very simple question, and very profound at the same time, very solemn, one, probably more serious one, you could ask yourself tonight, is that, has this been worked in my heart, this attitude of mind and heart that requires the exercise of omnipotence, do I have faith to lay hold of the Christ who can help me?

Well, more particularly, let us look at how this man responded to Christ. Straightway, the father of the child cried out and said with tears, Lord, I believe, help thou my unbelief.

[16 : 08] Now, this is one of the unforgettable cries of the human spirit. He makes no attempt whatsoever to clothe his feelings with eloquence.

He doesn't try to harmonize faith with the sense that he has of unbelief. Here we have a simple confession of faith.

this man cries out in the fervency of the spirit, Lord, I believe, help thou my unbelief.

And here you have a wonderful picture in the Bible of the struggles and the tensions and the warfare that exists in a believing heart. It was Bishop Ryle who said, it is of great comfort, he says, to know that a Christian may be known as much by his inward warfare as by his inward peace.

And it is a comfort to know that. That here you have a classic expression of faith. A bold statement of faith.

[17 : 24] And at the same time, the man in wonderful honesty blurts out, Lord, at the same time, help my unbelief.

Now then some people may say, but I believe that as well. I believe that Jesus can help. Well, let's see what things are present in a true confession of faith.

There is what we refer to as a general or a historical confession of faith, and there is also this saving faith. What's the difference? What things do you look for in a true confession of faith?

Is it enough to say, well, of course I believe. But it isn't enough to say that. It isn't enough to make what the theologians call an intellectual assent to the truth that Jesus is a savior.

Even the devils believe that. They believe that. God. What then do we look for? In faith. And here I would say that perhaps there are some people who may tend to make care to disagree with this.

[18 : 38] And I know that there are people who probably tend to think that we in this part of the world over emphasize this. You see, where did this man, where did Jesus make this man look?

Do you know where he made him look? He made him look into his own heart. He made him look into his own heart. Now there are some people who say you should never look to yourself. You should never look into your own heart.

But my friend, faith doesn't exist in anybody else's heart. And faith doesn't exist outwith my heart. Faith is the exercise of my heart or the exercise of all the faculties of my soul upon another.

But I am the one who believes. And I'm the one who must ask myself, do I believe? Do I know that I believe? What do I have that enables me to make the confession I believe?

I believe. What do we see in this man? Well, in the first place, there is an earnestness of spirit. He cried out, saying, I believe.

[19 : 46] There's a vast difference between a shrug of the shoulder and saying, oh, yes, I believe. And knowing the earnestness that accompanies the confession of faith, I don't believe.

You can believe without being earnest about it. It's as though he would say to Jesus, of course, I believe.

He couldn't restrain himself. He cried out, I believe. And there's something else that you have here.

There is an emotionalism in this confession that he makes. There is great subjectivism. Oh, yes. He cried out and he said with tears, I believe.

Now, I don't mean by that, that every believer must know what it is to shed tears. There are some people for whom it is far easier to shed tears than it is for others.

[20 : 43] Far easy. I remember a young Christian some years ago in Glasgow complaining to someone else at the very beginning of his Christian experience at the time he was converted worried that he wasn't able to, he was in a meeting and he saw a lot of people crying in that meeting.

And it worried him that he wasn't crying. And he said to an older Christian, he expressed this concern to him. And the older Christian comforted him.

He said, it is necessary for you to shed tears literally, to be a believer.

And it isn't. I accept that. It isn't. But at the same time, I don't believe that a person can believe in Jesus. A person who has come to some element of maturity can believe in Jesus without knowing the tremendous involvement of heart and mind and will in committing himself to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now I know that this is difficult for people who have been brought up in the Christian faith and who from a very early stage in their childhood have come to faith in Jesus.

[22 : 16] Perhaps I look back over the years, they find it difficult to say that there was ever a time in their life when they weren't believers. I know that there are people like that. But these same people know what is, even to this day, involved in trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ.

The times in their lives when they feel inwardly the cry that escapes them as they seek to live by faith in a world where it is difficult to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

The point I'm trying to make is this, faith isn't just the easy expression off the shoulder kind of comment, yes I believe. There's far more to it than that.

There is this earnestness, there is this cry, there are these tears, there is this anguish as he cries out, help me. You see, as he looks inwardly for the evidence of faith, notice at the same time how faith expresses itself.

It goes out with itself and it goes to another and he cries to him, help me, help me. And how many times does that cry escape your lips as a believer?

[23 : 34] when you find yourself saying to the Lord Jesus Christ I believe, you say it even for believing itself, I made that point earlier, faith requires omnipotent power working in yourself and to believe and to continue to believe you have to cry Lord help me, I can't do it myself, help me, that's the evidence of faith.

I can't love thee, Lord help me to love thee, help me to pray, I can hold my knees and I find it so difficult to pray, Lord help me to pray.

For every single exercise of every, for every exercise of every single grace, you need help from the Lord, you cannot do without it and that's the evidence of faith being born in the heart, you can do nothing without the Lord.

Now do you believe? Do you see what it is? It is that which, as I said earlier, takes you out with yourself, takes you to another and makes you cry to another for needed help, needed grace.

A man, says Andrew Gray, that great preacher in Glasgow of the last century, here's a man whose spirit is roused, a man striving with his whole soul, and the cry that he utters, the tears of which his eyes are filled, testify of a beating, panting heart and proclaim the deep convictions of his being.

[25 : 11] You see, there is feeling in this confession, there is meaning in this confession. A faith that brought him into personal contact with Christ.

He needed Christ. Christ. He knew that. And he wanted the blessings that Christ had to confer upon him. He wanted that desperately.

Nothing else would do for him. And he knew that he was the only one who would help me. Help me. Help me to cast myself on thy love and thy power and on thy grace.

And this is what the cry of faith expresses today. We have nothing but what the Lord will give to us. We can do nothing but as the Lord enables us.

And as someone put it, when men think they can believe Christ without grace to enable them, their mistake is as great as if they thought that a corpse could walk or speak or eat.

[26 : 28] if there's one thing in this life that the believer has understood and learnt and is learning to this day, it is this.

Without me you can do nothing. And this is how faith expresses itself. Lord help me.

Now, at the same time, let me try to avoid a pitfall here. This in no way is allowed to become a pretext for doing nothing as you are confronted with your need in the gospel.

The more you realise your need and the more you realise your weakness and the more you realise your inability it doesn't make you a lazy individual spiritually it only acts as a stimulus it stimulates you to action and this is the problem I think with us tonight and I would like you to ask yourself tonight as a Christian those of you who are believers here tonight may not this be one of your greatest problems that you aren't looking enough to another for help is it not this one of the problems as a congregation as a church that we are too self reliant we aren't looking to the Lord as we ought to and is this not what leaves you tonight in an unsaved state that in your need you haven't come to another for help you see my friend your inability to save yourself it's no soft cushion for you on the way to a lost eternity if you really believed what you say you would apply to the

Lord for help and he wouldn't turn a deaf ear to your cry do you then have that faith this was how this man responded to Christ cried out and said with tears Lord I believe and then you have finally here that which troubled this man in the presence of Christ help thou my unbelief you think that

[30 : 01] I believe my faith is weak but at all costs help my boy help my boy deliver him from this evil spirit and as we know as the story unfolds the Lord healed this boy but at the same time here is a man who recognizes that there are hindrances in his life to the exercise of the faith that he would want to have in the Lord Jesus Christ unbelief and here perhaps there may be encouragement for some people here tonight who think that if they were real believers or true believers and genuine believers if they were Christians in the real sense of the word that they wouldn't be so conscious of this unbelief in their life now what exactly is unbelief belief what is it well it isn't non-belief unbelief is probably best expressed or explained in this way it is a power that is resident in every human heart that is opposed to what

God says that's what it is the power of the principle resident in every human heart that is opposed to what God says it produces distrust in the word of God in the sovereignty of God in the goodness of God in the control that God exercises in this world in the faithfulness of God you've got a classic example of this in the book of Genesis let me refer you to it you know when man sinned what happened to what happened to Adam when he sinned what did he give place to unbelief you see the devil suggested to Adam that God wasn't as good to him as he thought he was he says God has given you all the trees of this garden to eat and you tell me that he's forbidden you to eat of one tree what kind of a god is that do you say that that's

God being good to you when he would forbid one tree to you why one and what did he say to you did he really say to you that if you ate of that tree that you would lose the life that you have that's not true that can't be I tell you he says why he doesn't want you to that tree he doesn't want you to have the knowledge of evil that he has that's why so he saw the seed of doubt in the mind of man and he made man distrust God he made man turn away in unbelief from the word of God and from the authority of God and from the goodness of God God gave man everything that was conducive to his good he left nothing out of that and yet man went and distrusted what God said to him and what God was to him and what God gave to him that is unbelief and that is how unbelief operates in the human heart to this day the gospel call comes to man with the offer of salvation and man refuses to submit himself man doesn't believe what

God says take a very simple example of this now I know that this isn't the only thrust of the gospel but it is a thrust of the gospel the gospel that a shadow of a doubt tells men and women boys and girls that the most satisfying life in this world is the life that is lived by faith in Christ no person who reads the gospel can deny that that there is no life in this world worth comparing with the life that is lived with Jesus Christ as the savior of sinners that is one of the great emphasis of the gospel but how many people believe that very few they don't trust that emphasis on that presentation of the truth they believe that the life they live is far more satisfying than the life that Christ gives that's unbelief and they turn away and distrust from what

God says and they care not to believe and so this man as he believes in Jesus Christ as he makes this confession of faith confesses also to the Lord Lord I see unbelief in my heart even as I believe take it away from me this is his great complaint that there is this element of distrust in his life in the presence of Christ I believe in I power I believe in I love I believe in I Christ I believe in I presence I believe in myself but I know that there is something in me that wants to distrust thee me now before I close here tonight let me just try briefly to illustrate how this works in the life of an individual there are many subjects concerning which which as

[36 : 06] William J put it a Christian is frequently compelled to express himself in these words Lord I believe but take away from me my unbelief in this matter you see when you believe in Jesus Christ as Saviour there is this at the heart of your faith you believe in the existence of God and you believe all that the Bible says about God you believe all that the Bible says about God you believe in his greatness in his being you believe that he's infinite eternal and he's so great so far above each one of us then there are times no doubt when you begin to ask questions have you found yourself like this where is God who is God and because you cannot grasp the greatness of this

God it's as though a flash of unbelief comes across your mind and how do you react how can you overcome how can you counter it only one way Lord I believe help thou my unbelief take something else that the believer must believe in and that is the word of God you see you cannot believe in God without believing in the word of God because it's through the word that the Lord particularly reveals himself this is where we have a revelation of God you believe all that Bible says you believe it's emphasis it's trust you believe that it is his word then you begin to ask questions at least questions that pose from time to time is it really his word where did it come from how do I know it is true how do I know this is the infallible word of God is it relevant today it was

John Bunyan who left this on record all through life he said a thought would sometimes rush through my mind perhaps the scriptures are of falsehood and what a shock that is to your system when the thought crosses your mind is the Bible really true and how do you counter it Lord I believe help thou my unbelief strengthen me to believe and take away this element of distress let me mention something yes if you're a believer in Jesus Christ you believe that God is in control of this world and you believe that he's in control of your providence and you believe that all things work together for good to them that love God yes you believe that but then how often do you find yourself questioning

God dealing things with yourself how often do you find yourself wondering if all things are really working together for my good how often do you find yourself wondering how can this possibly be for my good when your spirit is crushed the whole environment seems to be in darkness what do you say then there's only one thing you can say Lord if thou said it I believe help thou my unbelief take away this element of distrust another thing you must believe in if you're a Christian here tonight you believe in the promise of God you believe that God will fulfill all his promises there isn't a promise in the Bible that God will leave unfulfilled you believe that with all your heart if you believe anything you believe that that whatever else will happen God will fulfill his word but another side to that page who has

God given the promises to he has given them to you and do you now believe that God will fulfill all these promises how often do you find yourself wondering how often do you find yourself an element of distrust in your heart with reference to the promises of God what do you say then Lord I believe thou will fulfill take away from me this element of unbelief it's the same with many other things same with prayer God answers prayer same with the burdens that your shoulder in this life the promises that God will take your burdens and your cares and your problems but then you see my friend you see how distrust comes in how you tend to take these problems on your own shoulder look at you here tonight perhaps with anxieties crowding in upon your mind but difficult that you're not able to cope with a bird that seems to be growing in your life you know full well where the answer is where the answer lies you know full well who your only help is but you see you haven't come you haven't come and maybe if you do believe if you do hard by the hope that you have come you feel that your faith is so weak you think that you have committed your way to him but it seems to be so weak in the face of all the opposition that you're aware of and there's only one way of there's only one place

[42 : 02] Lord help me and take away this unbelief Lord said John Newton Lord give me faith he hears what grace is this dry up thy tears my soul and cease to grieve he shows me what he did and who he is I must I can I will I do believe and that is as someone put it these things are like these days they're like they're like rungs in a ladder I must believe and this is what the gospel throws this is what it closes every one of us in we must believe because without faith there is no salvation but then someone says I can't but then you see this is where the power and the grace of Jesus comes to the fore I can do all things through him strengthens me and if I must believe to be saved then I can because he has given me the promise of his grace to enable and knowing that I can

I will therefore believe and nothing is going to hold me back from believing I know that there are oppositions and difficulties but I will and I made the confession I do believe I do believe because you see my friend there is no other hope for you and for me there is no one in this church tonight but a person who's got his own difficulties and her own difficulties her own problems no one there is no one who's a stranger to distrust and to unbelief we all know to our cost what that is and there is no one in this whole church tonight who has the latent power or ability to believe in Christ in his own strength not a soul not even the most spiritual person here tonight not even the person who has been a believer for the past 60 years has the ability in himself to believe in Jesus right now as the saviour of his soul

I'll go further the most spiritually minded person here tonight and the most advanced Christian is the person from whose heart this cry emanates more strongly than from any other heart help me Lord to believe do you know who the strong Christian is the person who commits himself and all that he is to Jesus that he may help him and that's what you need and that's what I need tonight that he may help us that he may deliver us from the power of our sin and from all these difficulties that we have there is only one place to go to only one person to cry to and only one plea that we have Lord help thou my unbelief is that your cry tonight as a believer in

Christ let us pray in thy mercy hear us and help us to come to thee help us to believe that thou art near and help us oh Lord to put our trust in thyself oh how often we have to cry to thee and we don't cry as often as we ought help me oh Lord help me undertake for us now and part us with thy blessing for giving our sins and holy things for Jesus sake Amen