

THE FAITH TO BELIEVE (Mk. 9:14-29)

Saving faith is the product of the Holy Spirit. Instead of using our own means which would never meet God's requirements, He gives us the capacity to believe in Jesus, and the ability to live by that faith, (II Cor. 5:7). That means when we cannot understand what God is doing in our lives, or what He is allowing to be done, we remain confident in believing He has a purpose in what He is doing, as Paul wrote, **Rom. 8:28** *And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.*

And that explains how we trust in a God we cannot see. We believe in the Gospel, even though it is contrary to human notions. We believe in the Holy Spirit Who lives inside us. We believe we are the children of God because Christ has died for us and risen again. We believe we are going to be with Him when this present life is over.

These are fundamental pillars of our faith ... straight from the Word of God. How do we accept them though? We accept them because they are what the Bible teaches, and the Bible is God's Word ... and with the Holy Spirit living inside us, we are confident to live by faith in what it says.

Very much, though, the disciples lived by sight ... That is how it was for them because they could actually *see* the miracles Jesus performed, and it is much easier to believe in something when you can actually *see* it. However, when you can *see* a thing, you do not have to exercise the same measure of faith.

They so easily believed in the power of Jesus to heal a blind man, a deaf man, a leper, a demon-possessed, the lame, etc because they *saw* it happening. They *saw* Jesus actually, - visibly, - carrying out these miracles. It did not involve faith, for they did not have to exercise faith to know Jesus could do these things because they literally *saw* Him doing them. ... They lived by sight.

It wasn't always going to be like that though, for Jesus would soon leave them to continue the work themselves ... How were they going to manage, without Jesus being there? How were they going to access the power when He would be gone?

Jesus is on His way to Jerusalem. He has been teaching His disciples for approaching three years. They have always been used to Him doing the miracles ... Yes, they have performed some too, but they always had Him to

‘fall back on’ if they didn’t work right! So, they have to learn the lesson on faith ... and that is what Jesus is teaching them in this passage.

Both Matthew and Luke also record this incident. Matthew covers it in eight verses (Mt. 17:14-21), and Luke deals with it in six verses (Lk. 9:37-42). Mark, however, spends more time on it in these sixteen verses. Very possibly, the reason is because of Peter, Mark’s source for his Gospel ... and Peter needed every lesson he could get on faith! That is probably why so much time is spent on it here. In fact, *all* the disciples needed to grasp this subject of faith, for as we can see from the Gospels, it was very much a work in progress.

In this particular incident which involved the young boy, he had been taken over and possessed by a demon. Is such a thing possible? ... Let’s look at it two ways ... Firstly, to be a Christian the Holy Spirit comes and dwells inside you, - you are the ‘temple’ of the Holy Spirit, and He possesses you. That is how you are a Christian. ... On the other side, in Scripture we often see how Satan tries to mimic God, - he tried to get Jesus to bow before him on the mountain (Mt. 4:9) ... and he will try to mimic the Trinity in his attempt with himself, the antichrist, and the false prophet in the last days. One of the ways he presently works is disguised as an angel of light (II Cor. 11:14), - he tries to seduce believers into believing what he presents ... and often he presents it in a way not immediately dissimilar to God ... but when you ‘scratch the surface and look underneath’ you see what he ‘is up to’ in his deceiving ways.

There are also occasions, - even nowadays, - when there is no other explanation for a person’s evil behaviour apart from demon-possession ... but in the times of Jesus demon-possession was very common. The reason for this is most probably because of Jesus being on the earth ... and the legions of demons, - like never before, - were released to, - as it were, - ‘throw everything at Him’!

Jesus, Peter, James, and John had come down from the mountain where the transfiguration had occurred, - back to the disciples, - and immediately the scribes, - who were harassing the disciples, - set upon interrogating Jesus. He was their target ... and by the way, since we represent Him, we should expect to be the target also.

Altogether, since there was a crowd, this was an opportunity the scribes saw to discredit Jesus, and make Him look like a fraud. After all, they were educated

... and He was nothing more than a carpenter. They would have come from the surrounding regions to keep a hold on their people, in case they were 'taken in' by Jesus.

While Jesus was up the mountain of transfiguration a problem had developed ... a problem the disciples were unable to deal with. And *immediately* when the crowds saw Jesus coming they rushed over to Him, ... and they were *greatly amazed* (v.15), ἐκθαμβέω ... 'head over heels' amazed! ... Jesus was the healer, the miracle-worker, and the crowds ran to Him as quickly as their legs would take them, and *saluted him* ... They greeted Him with such excitement because He was the Man to meet their problem. ... The disciples could not do it, but the people were convinced of the reputation of Jesus that He *could!*

And Jesus addressed the scribes who had been arguing with the disciples (v.14), and He asked them what they were arguing about. ... It was probably about some theological issue, for that is what the scribes were prone to do.

Well, the scribes said nothing when Jesus asked the question, - there would have been such authority in His tone ... it would have put them in their place! They were 'big boys' in front of the people and in front of the disciples, but they were 'minnows' in front of Jesus. They said nothing. They kept quiet. ... And then a father from out of the crowd shouts in deep distress, **17** Master, I have brought unto thee my son, which hath a dumb spirit; **18** And wheresoever he taketh him, he teareth him: and he foameth, and gnasheth with his teeth, and pineth away [*he dries up, and become rigid and stiff all over*]. Here is a distraught father, and all the scribes could do was to argue about something which had no relevance to the situation. ... And the disciples must have been embarrassed too at what the father claimed about them, and I spake to thy disciples [*talmidim*] that they should cast him out; and they could not. ... Utterly useless!

Matthew tells us this father is on his knees, and he is begging, **Mt. 17:15** Lord, have mercy on my son ... He is pleading with Jesus ... Every one can see and hear him, - Luke says he cried out (9:38), - he was making such a noise, but he didn't care because his son needed the attention of the Saviour, and this man believed Jesus could heal his son. ... My son is possessed of a demon and Lord (Mt. 17:15), Master (Mk, 9:17; Lk. 9:38)) ... Lord and Master, **I beseech thee, look upon my son** [*υἱός*]: for he is mine only child [*μονογενής*] (Lk. 9:38).

The demon inside this father's only child had caused him to be dumb, he couldn't speak a word. He would have made frightening noises when he fell into this state ... but he couldn't speak a word because a demon had entered him. ... Get away with you, it's not a demon, it's something else ... And that is probably what many people thought, including the father, at the beginning. Matthew uses the word 'lunatick' (σεληνιαζομαι) which indeed *does* mean 'lunatic' ... but it is also the medical word that was used for a condition similar to epilepsy or some form of brain damage. ... This was a wise father because he looked for the ordinary before he considered the extraordinary ... but he had no choice but to conclude and confess this was a demonic spirit who had possessed his son, **Mk. 9:17** Master, I have brought unto thee my son, which hath a dumb spirit; **18** And wheresoever he taketh him, he teareth him: and he foameth, and gnasheth with his teeth, and pineth away

And Luke, - the doctor, - would have been very careful and very particular concerning what the father said, and he diagnosed this young boy's condition as nothing physical or mental, but spiritual and demonic because he recorded, **Lk. 9:39** And, lo, a spirit taketh him, and he suddenly crieth out; and it teareth him that he foameth again, and bruising him hardly departeth from him.

The demon gets inside the boy, takes him over completely, seizes him and throws him around violently ... he batters him against the walls and the door and everything, - he *crushes* and *mauls* (συντριβω) him ... he is torn in spasmodic contractions (σπαράσσω) ... my son gets a strength which is not his, - I can't contain him or control him or hold him ... he is in convulsions and he wrecks the place ... the foam sprays out of his mouth ... and he rolls around grinding his teeth ... and he gets bruised all over, ... and he's exhausted when the evil spirit finally leaves him. ... But the evil spirit comes back again and again ... and I don't know what to do, and that's why I need Your help, Lord.

The man had already tried the disciples, **Mk. 9:18** ... and I spake to thy disciples that they should cast him out; and they could not. Why not? They were able to cast out demons back in chapter 6:13 **And they cast out many devils.** ... What was the problem now though? ... Jesus quickly identified the problem, and he replied to the man, **Mk. 9:19** He answereth him, and saith, O faithless generation, how long shall I be with you? how long shall I suffer you? bring him unto me. ... *That* was their problem. That included the disciples, in fact, the disciples were the main target of Jesus when He said these words for more than anyone else, they had seen His glory and power ... and they ought to have been able to utilise their

faith in Him to exorcise the demons from this young boy. They had been specifically called and chosen and given the ability to do these things ... Casting out demons should have been no problem to them.

All this hurt Jesus. His trust in them was dented. I have been with you for nigh on three years, and I have been teaching you these things ... and it is as if I'm not much further forward with you for you have learned very little.

How frustrating it must have been for the Saviour to time and again 'pull these disciples out of a hole of unbelief'? ... I know He is God, but He is also man ... and it must have discouraged Him, especially when we bear in mind how He had taken on the form of a servant, as Paul described Him (Phil. 2:7), and He was serving these disciples in obedience to His Father ... *but it was desperately hard sometimes!*

Mk. 9:19 O faithless generation, He called them ... Both Matthew and Luke add, O faithless and perverse generation, (Mt. 17:17; Lk. 9:41) ... And all three Gospel writers reported He said, **Mk. 9:19** how long shall I be with you? how long shall I suffer you? (Mt. 17:17; Lk. 9:41). ... They trusted before, but why not now?! It must have seemed to Jesus as if it was 'one step forward, and three steps back'!

What really had happened to the disciples? It's simple. While Jesus was with them, they managed well for it was easy to believe when He was there, - everything was successful because He was *with them*. Then, when He was not with them, - even for a short time ... when He was up the mountain, - their faith 'flagged', - it 'took a tumble'. ... But that was no good! That was not acceptable in the Lord's service, - a weak faith indicates weak servants. ... He had told them He was going to suffer, be rejected, and killed (Mk. 8:31), - in other words, there was coming a time when He would no longer be with them. He repeated this in Jn. 14:2 In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. ³ And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also. ⁴ And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know. ⁵ Thomas saith unto him, Lord, we know not whither thou goest; and how can we know the way? ... The panic had set in again, - Jesus is leaving us and what are we going to do?! How are we going to cope?! ... Basically, they were struggling to believe ... they were struggling to have faith.

And it is very understandable how Jesus responded to them, **Mk. 9:19** *how long shall I be with you? how long shall I suffer you?* ... Bear in mind, He had very recently been in the Heavenly presence with Moses and Elijah ... and Jesus could have hankered after Heaven ... There is a hint of that in the opening words of His High Priestly prayer, **Jn. 17:5** *O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was.* ... We ought to appreciate the sacrifice Jesus made in coming to this earth to be our Redeemer, with all it required.

And Jesus told the boy's father, **Mk. 9:19** ... *bring him unto me.* **20** *And they brought him unto him: and when he [the boy with the evil spirit] saw him [Jesus], straightway the spirit tare [convulsed] him; and he fell on the ground, and wallowed [implication = wallowing in mud and dirt] foaming.* ... Have you ever seen anyone in an epileptic fit? It can be frightening. The only time I experienced it was at a meeting in Portrush, and it was my turn to go up to the pulpit ... and *just* as I was taking my place a young girl went into an epileptic fit. ... It really 'throws' you! ... But this was more than an epileptic fit for this was demonic possession. This was wicked. This was evil.

However, it did not 'faze' Jesus for calmly he asked the boy's father, **21** *How long is it ago since this came unto him?* Now, of course Jesus knew for He knows all things but He wanted the father to see not a power, but a *Person*. There was nothing 'cold' about Jesus, and He was showing this concerned father he cared for him. This young boy was not another 'number', just another case for Jesus to attend to ... for Jesus attends personally and compassionately to every single individual who comes to Him.

I cannot remember everybody I have met, and it is embarrassing when they know my name and I can't remember there's. I can't remember the names of people I have married or buried ... It's awful to admit that ... but every person Jesus met, He knows all about them and forgets nothing. And I have no doubts whatsoever that *that* evening Jesus remembered that man and his son when He came before His Father in prayer. ... Jesus was touched with the feelings of this young boy's infirmities (Heb. 4:15).

And the father replied how it had been like this since childhood. It has been that way his whole life, and the father has had to contend with it. ... The demons had tried to kill this young boy for why else would they *thump* him to the ground (v.18)? ... Why else would they be so wicked to him? ... Why else

would they cast him into the fire, and into the waters (v.22)? It was obvious they were trying to destroy him. ... But here is what is so absolutely beautiful ... That young boy was kept from destroying himself until he met Jesus. The devil can only go as far as God allows him, and no further ... for example, he was not permitted to take the life of Job ... and he was not permitted to take the life of this young boy either ... for this young boy was to meet with Jesus.

We have to say the father doesn't really sound completely convinced Jesus *will* perfectly free his son because part of his request included the word 'if', **Mk. 9:22** *if thou canst do any thing* – there is a vagueness there, but nevertheless Jesus is his only hope, and he pleads ... *have compassion on us, and help us*. ... Jesus had healed others in a similar state, so the father knew Jesus *could* heal the young boy ... but *would* He? ... And notice how Jesus replied ... He replied also with an 'if', **23** *Jesus said unto him, If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth*. ... Faith is to the fore, and it is not a blind faith but a faith in Christ. ... The *power* is available, but do you believe in the *Person*?!

And the father saw what Jesus was saying ... he understood for **24** *straightway the father of the child cried out, and said with tears, Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief*. ... The young boy is rolling about in an awful state, and causing himself all types of harm ... and the father is hanging on every word of Jesus ...the tears are rolling down his face, and he cries earnestly from the heart, *Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief*. ... *There* is honesty ... Lord, I believe ... and I want to believe, but Lord, where I have doubt, help me to overcome it ... He is honest. ... When you became a Christian, did you afterwards think to yourself ... am I really saved? Did you have any doubts? Am I truly born again? Is Jesus my Saviour? Has Jesus taken away my sins? Has He done that for me? Has it really happened? ... As the hymn writer says, "It is a thing most wonderful, Almost *too* wonderful to be, That God's own Son should come from Heaven, And die to save a child like me". ... Why would God do that for me?!

Is it not true that our faith is often less than perfect ... that it sometimes, - no matter how we try to the contrary, - our faith is not what it ought to be? ... And that is simply what this man was acknowledging, *Lord, I believe* ... but please ... *help thou mine unbelief*.

As Jesus was having this conversation with the father, and as the spectacle of the young boy rolling about the ground was going on, the crowds grew. They

ran to see what all the commotion was about, ²⁵ When Jesus saw that the people came running together, he rebuked the foul spirit, saying unto him, Thou *dumb and deaf* spirit, - Jesus saw the *full* complexity of the problem ... more than the boy's father had realised, - I charge thee, come out of him, and enter no more into him. ... The demon did not want to though, and he put up a struggle ²⁶ And the spirit cried, and rent him sore, and came out of him ... "Jesus, the Name high over all, In Hell or earth or sky; Angels and men before Him fall, And devils fear and fly" ... and he [*the young boy*] was as one dead; insomuch that many said, He is dead. ... To the crowd, it looked as if it the boy was dead, and Jesus was as unsuccessful as His disciples. ... And the scribes would have been happy!

However, Jesus knelt down and took the hand of the young boy in His, ²⁷ ... and lifted him up; and he arose [*Jesus stood him up upon his feet*]. ... He stood up with Jesus! There was no wrecking around, no foaming at the mouth, no violence for the demons had gone, never to return. Jesus made a brand new person out of this young boy ... and a brand new person out of the father also.

I wonder what the young boy's first words were. I wonder what his father said to Jesus ... But, we are not told because at this point, our attention is drawn again to the disciples, **Mk. 9:28** And when he [*Jesus*] was come into the house, his disciples asked him privately, - so this is now only in the company of Jesus and His disciples, His disciples asked - Why could not we cast him out? ²⁹ And he said unto them, This kind can come forth by nothing, but by prayer and fasting. ... Jesus was telling them, you daren't do My work on your own, - not in your own strength ... but instead, you petition the Father and He gives you the power to achieve for Him what He sends you to do.

How, though, do you access the power of God? Well, Matthew fills out the rest of the conversation for us, **Mt. 17:20** And Jesus said unto them, Because of your unbelief: for verily I say unto you, If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you. ... He is obviously not talking literally about moving literal mountains but He is simply saying, when you put your whole faith in God, when you believe in Him totally, and trust in Him without reservation ... then He will answer. ... Instead of allowing your human inhibitions to determine your faith, - and tell you such-and-such won't work, - come to Him immediately, knowing and being convinced of what He can do.

This was an important lesson for them, - the power of prayer. Indeed, when Jesus returned to Glory, His disciples met to pray because, - by that time, - they had become convinced of the power of prayer. ... And not simply the power of prayer, but the power that lies in the hands of the One to Whom they pray.

Many Christians lose out on this privilege because they are not convinced of God's ability or willingness to answer prayer. They say, Oh, I have prayed for such-and-such for many years and God has never answered. What they need to do then is to examine what they are praying and how they are praying ... for God *does* answer prayer ... but He doesn't answer the prayer of the Christian who prays, "*my* will be done" ... Instead, He *does* answer the prayer of the Christian who prays, "*Thy* will be done".

And, sadly, there are also many Christians who don't pray all that much, - it's as if they don't seem to see the need ... What can we say except how it is not right and not natural not to speak to someone you say you love, - if you love the Saviour, you will want to talk with Him and depend upon Him ...

Prayer is the soul's sincere desire,
Unuttered or expressed ...
Prayer is the Christian's vital breath,
The Christian's native air,

This lesson Jesus taught His disciples was not about casting out demons ... but it was about daily dependence upon God, and trusting Him, confiding in Him, and exercising our God-given faith to believe in His power to bring about His purposes. ... Let's exercise that power to a greater capacity, for His glory and for our good. Amen.