

## ~ Faith Perfected by God ~

**Text:** Mark 9:14-29

**Theme:** We must all approach God with a measure of faith if we are to obtain anything from Him. Although we may falter in our faith, God is able to perfect our faith so that we might have greater confidence in Him, and better please Him.

### **Introduction:**

1. The opening verses of this chapter describe the occasion when the Lord was transfigured in the mountain before the eyes of Peter, James, and John.
  - i. The rest of the disciples were waiting at the bottom of the mountain and were accosted by the scribes who were looking to pick a fight with the disciples in Jesus' absence.
2. The account in Mark chapter 9 begins with a spiritual problem that even the disciples of the Lord Jesus could not resolve. This spiritual problem prompted a desperate father to go to Jesus and plead for his mercy.
  - i. There are two crises of faith in the passage:
    - Firstly the powerless disciples who could not cast out the demon.
    - Secondly the seeking father who had not fully trusted Christ yet.
3. In our study, we will see that faith is essential to obtaining favour from God and that faith and doubting are not mutually exclusive.
  - i. One may have enough faith to seek God while still a measure of doubt whether they will obtain help from God.
  - ii. Often the seeking sinner believes in God and knows they are a sinner in need of God's mercy and yet they wonder if God could really save someone as sinful as they are.
4. We study the passage taking the following points as our guide for the study.
  - I. The Disciples' Lack of Faith (Vs 14-19)
  - II. The Lord's Command for Faith (Vs 20-23)
  - III. The Father's Imperfect Faith (Vs 24-29)

### **Main:**

- I. **The Disciples' Lack of Faith (Vs 14-19)**
  - A. The problem that tested their faith (Vs 14-8)
    1. The Lord Jesus had been up in the mount of Transfiguration and had not been present when the problem was first presented to the disciples.
      - a. Note: There were three disciples who were not present at the outset either and they are Peter, James, and John who were with the Lord in the Mount of Transfiguration.

- b. In verse 14, the Lord Jesus came to the other nine disciples while they were in the middle of a sticky situation. Verse 15 indicates that his appearance was sudden and unexpected, since they were greatly amazed.
2. There were two problems that the disciples were facing.
    - a. The questioning by the scribes.
      - i. The first thing the Lord Jesus addressed when he arrived on the scene was the question, "What question ye with them?" The Lord Jesus wanted to know why the scribes were harassing his disciples.
        - What were they causing a fuss over? The scribes, Pharisees, and Sadducees had often made it their job to be the most savage critics of the Lord work and now they saw an opportunity to criticize the Lord through his disciples.
      - ii. The disciples had previously cast out demons as seen in Mark 6:7 & Mark 6:13.
        - If they had suddenly been unable to cast out a demon then the natural assumption would be that they had reached the end of their authority over the demonic realm and, by extension, the end of the Lord Jesus' authority. If that were the case, then his claims to being God in human flesh would be proven to be bogus.
      - iii. A man in the crowd presented himself with his son, who was possessed by a demonic spirit which prevented the boy from speaking and forced him into convulsions and self-harm.
        - The fact that this man spoke up immediately when the Lord asked what the scribes were questioning the disciples over indicates that their questioning was indeed related to the problem of the demon possessed boy.
    - b. Their inability to cast out the demon.
      - i. This was the second problem the disciples were facing when the Lord Jesus arrived on the scene. Although they had previously cast out devils in the name of the Lord Jesus, this case proved too much for them.
        - The questions to be asked are, "Why was this case different? Why couldn't they cast the demon out in Jesus' name? Did Jesus not have authority over these demons or did the issue lie with the disciples?"
        - This is also a reminder that yesterday's victories do not guarantee today's power.
- B. The problem of lack of faith (Vs 19)
    1. The disciples had begun to rely on themselves.

- a. The disciples seem to have assumed that because they had experienced success before, they could continue in their own strength.
  - i. This is the temptation that every Christian faces; the temptation to try and make it through the Christian life in our own strength. So, we begin to take our eyes off the Saviour and put the focus on ourselves.
  - ii. The Apostle Paul wrote and addressed this self-made Christianity saying, *“Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?”*  
**(Gal 3:3)**
- b. They had stopped trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ.
  - i. Mathew 17 records the same account for us and in response to the disciples’ question, “Why could not we cast him out?” the Lord replied, “Because of your unbelief.”
  - ii. Like Peter, who walked on the water until his eyes were turned from Christ and onto the circumstances, the disciples were able to cast out demons as long as they remained dependent upon Christ, but when their trust shifted from Christ onto themselves their authority shifted from Christ’s onto their own as well, and man has no authority over the devils demons.
- c. Faith must always be pointed in the right direction.
  - i. We put our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation, and it is in his own merit that we find acceptance with God.
  - ii. The same is true of the rest of the Christian life. Our faith is supposed to remain on the Lord Jesus so that we might obtain the divine help we need for holy Christian living. The minute our faith and trust shifts from God onto self, we lose the divine aid that is needed to overcome sin, and we become totally dependent upon ourselves, which leads to failure.

## II. The Lord’s Command for Faith (Vs 20-24)

### A. The question from the Lord (Vs 20-22)

- 1. The Lord Jesus asked the father to explain what the problem was and the solution he was asking for.
  - a. The same thing is needed for the sinner to be saved.
    - i. The father recognised that he had a problem which he could not solve. The demon that had possessed his son

- was not going to be dealt with by any human authority. He needed one with divine authority to deal with the problem.
- ii. Likewise, the sinner must recognise that they cannot solve their sin problem by any effort on their own part.
    - The sinner must seek the Saviour who has the divine authority to pardon sin and set the sinner free.
2. The father explained that the problem had persisted since the son was a child.
    - a. The demon had obviously entered the son while he was still very young, and nobody had been able to help them cast the demon out.
      - i. In similar fashion, we are born sinners in need of Salvation. We have a sin nature in us from the time of conception and no man is able to free us from it.
    - b. Notice the symptoms of the problem were severe.
      - i. The spirit rendered the son incapable of speaking, and it caused him to foam at the mouth and viciously grind his teeth (gnash), and to curl up in a ball and become paralysed. (pineth away)
        - These symptoms today would result in the individual being placed in an asylum for the insane and probably doped up on all kinds of drugs in the hope of bringing the body under control.
        - The problem is that the spirit cannot be controlled by drugging up the body.
      - ii. The symptoms of sin are even more severe, and they carry extremely dire consequences.
        - The world has attempted to dumb down the conscience of man and mitigate symptoms of sin, but its destructive effects cannot be avoided simply through visiting a psychiatrist and getting high on antidepressants.
        - I'm not saying that there is no such thing as a genuine mental disorder that needs to be treated medically, but far too many people are seeking medical help for a spiritual problem.

Even the Father in the account we've been reading didn't realise that he had spiritual problem that the Lord Jesus wanted to address before he came to resolving the physical symptoms that were evident in the son.
- B. The challenge from the Lord (Vs 23-24)
    1. The Lord Jesus challenged the father's faith
      - a. Look at the way that the Lord responded to this father's request for help.

- i. This man's son had a spiritual problem, and he came to Jesus seeking help. In verse 22 we find the man requesting help from the Lord saying, "if thou canst do any thing... help us."
  - His initial statement reflects the fact that he recognised the hopelessness of this situation, at least from the perspective of a man.
  - The Lord Jesus reassured him in verse 23 saying, "If thou canst believe, all things are possible..." The Lord Jesus turned it back on the seeker saying, "I can help you, but do you truly believe in me?"
  - Notice that this father was at the point of complete desperation, knowing that Jesus was his only hope, and so he cried out, "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief." This was really the cry of a man who had faith already, but whose faith needed to be strengthened by the divine power of the Lord Jesus Christ. We could rephrase this and say, Lord, I believe; strengthen my faith.
- b. Speaking of the Lord response to this father, Albert Barnes notes:
  - i. "His design here is to show the man that the difficulty in the case was not in the want of *power* on his part, but in the want of *faith* in the man; in other words, to rebuke him for having *doubted* at all whether he *could* heal him. So, he demands faith of every sinner that comes to him, and none that come without *confidence* in him can obtain the blessing."<sup>1</sup>
  - ii. **Hebrews 11:6** "*But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.*"
  - iii. **James 1:6** "*But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed.*"
    - If we are to obtain what desire from God, then we must ask in faith without doubting God.

### III. The Lord Responds to Faith (Vs 25-29)

#### A. The Lord Jesus delivered the son

1. The Lord Jesus commanded the demon to come out of the boy.

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<sup>1</sup> Albert Barnes, [Notes on the New Testament: Matthew & Mark](#), ed. Robert Frew (London: Blackie & Son, 1884–1885), 363.

- a. As the crowd began to become more fully aware of the Lord Jesus' presence, they ran toward him to see what he would do.
  - i. It is interesting that the Lord Jesus didn't wait for the crowd to gather so he could put on a show of his power over the demonic realm, but he immediately responded to the faith of the pleading father and delivered his son from this torment.
  - ii. This demonstrates that the Lord Jesus was more interested in meeting personal needs than making a public show of his power.
    - People today, especially politicians and media personalities, love to put on a public performance to gain popularity and fame by any means, because they love to be loved.
    - The Lord Jesus wanted people to follow him, not because of the miracles that he performed but, because of the truth he preached.
2. The deliverance Jesus gave was permanent
  - a. The Lord Jesus commanded the devil to come out and to enter him no more.
    - i. The Lord Jesus described elsewhere that it was possible for a person to be delivered from demonic possession and yet find themselves in the same predicament later on.
      - **Mathew 13:43-45** *When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places, seeking rest, and findeth none. <sup>44</sup> Then he saith, I will return into my house from whence I came out; and when he is come, he findeth it empty, swept, and garnished. <sup>45</sup> Then goeth he, and taketh with himself seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter in and dwell there: and the last state of that man is worse than the first. Even so shall it be also unto this wicked generation.<sup>2</sup>*
    - ii. This seems to be what happened with King Saul.
      - **I Samuel 16:23** tells us that *"it came to pass... an evil spirit... was upon Saul, that David took an harp, and played with his hand; so Saul was refreshed, and was well, and the evil spirit departed from him."*
      - However, jump forward two chapters and we find in **I Samuel 16:23** *"that an evil spirit... came upon Saul, and*

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<sup>2</sup> [The Holy Bible: King James Version](#), Electronic Edition of the 1900 Authorized Version. (Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 2009), Mt 12:43–45.

*he prophesied in the midst of the house: and David played with his hand as at other times: and there was a javelin in Saul's hand."*

- iii. It is possible for an individual to receive deliverance from demonic possession but then, if they do not receive the Lord Jesus Christ and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, the evil spirit may return, and the condition of the demonic oppression becomes even worse than it was before.
  - b. The Lord commanded the spirit to come out of him and enter now more into him.
    - i. When the Lord Jesus delivered the young man from the demonic possession he was cured for all time.
    - ii. This the same is true of the sinner who casts himself upon the Lord Jesus Christ in saving faith. The Lord saves him and then keeps him safe for all eternity. As he broke the power of darkness in this young man's life, he breaks the power of sin the lives of all who know him as the Lord and Saviour.
- B. The Lord Jesus instructed the disciples
- 1. Lastly, we note the biblical approach to dealing with demonic possession.
    - a. Many people today, particularly within the charismatic movement, have declared themselves apostles and prophets of God and claim to have authority over demons.
      - i. Firstly, nobody alive today is an apostle of Jesus Christ, since you had to be an eyewitness of the risen Saviour in order to be an apostle.
      - ii. Secondly, nowhere in the New Testament did the Lord Jesus command his church to go and cast out demons. That is something that the Lord Jesus has the authority to do but he did not expressly give that authority to everyone who followed him.
        - In fact, Mathew 7:22 tells us that, in the judgement, there will even be lost people who cast out devils in the Lord's name. Clearly the authority comes from Christ, but it is not guaranteed to his people.
    - b. The correct approach is to commit yourself to prayer and fasting and trust the Lord to do the work of deliverance.
      - i. While we don't understand it all together, there is something particularly effectual when prayer is coupled with fasting.

- It is a scriptural thing for Christians to deny the appetites of the body in order to more effectively intercede in the realm of the spiritual.
- ii. Don't be fooled by the charismatics who line their pockets with other people's wealth and fill themselves with the pleasures of the world and then claim to have great spiritual power.
  - In reality, their preoccupation with temporal things belies their claim to spiritual power.
- iii. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.
- c. So, we have seen how both the seeking father and the powerless disciples had a crisis of faith which the Lord had to address before he could do a great spiritual work through them.
  - i. We must become people of faith before we will see God do great things in our midst.

### Conclusion:

1. As the Lord Jesus pointed out, God is able to do great works, but we are often so weak in our faith that we miss out on seeing great things done.
  - a. **Mathew 9:29** *"Then touched he their eyes, saying, According to your faith be it unto you."*
2. Your faithfulness in prayer is a good reflection on your faith in God, because the greater your faith in God and dependence upon him, the more important your prayer life will become to you.