

Help My Unbelief

Harmony M.B.C., August 12, 2012

Robert P. Myers

Brief introduction to the situation in which the crowd is involved with Jesus' disciples who had tried to cast out a deaf and dumb spirit in a young man, and the couldn't. Jesus has told the young man's dad to bring the victim to him.

Mark 9:20 And they brought him unto him: and when he saw him, straightway the spirit tare him; and he fell on the ground, and wallowed foaming.

Mark 9:21 And he asked his father, How long is it ago since this came unto him? And he said, Of a child.

Mark 9:22 And ofttimes it hath cast him into the fire, and into the waters, to destroy him: but if thou canst do any thing, have compassion on us, and help us.

Mark 9:23 Jesus said unto him, If thou canst believe, all things *are* possible to him that believeth.

Mark 9:24 And straightway the father of the child cried out, and said with tears, Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief.

Because almost 2,000 years lays between us, our generation, and this event, I believe that a lot about this account and what it can teach us has dropped out of lessons being given. Preachers and congregations alike tend to bypass the real lesson in such an account and talk about the awesomeness of Jesus being able to cure a hopeless condition with a word. That is awesome stuff, but there is more to be had than amazement when we read of these works of our Lord. I'm convinced that He has a life-lesson for every one of His people interwoven in the fabric of such an event. I hope we can take a look at the ineffectiveness of the disciple's efforts to do something about this boy; take a look at the pitiful condition of the boy and the pitiful condition of the dad; take a look at what Jesus offered...and gave in this situation, and leave with a better understanding about our own belief...and unbelief, concerning the power and willingness of the Lord to act.

I. This dad teaches us that some life-challenges are beyond our spiritual or emotional strength to deal with

- There are crises in our lives, that are like having a child with what appears to be epileptic or grand mal seizures; They are crises which we cannot solve, problems which we can't do anything about; and that may overwhelm us; crises that we can't cope with
 - ▶ In the U.S., this past year, over \$22 billion in annual sales of medications prescribed for depression, anxiety, panic attacks, social phobias or other mood swings.
 - ▶ In 2009, it has been reported that there were at least 27 million Americans on mood altering prescription drugs. This does not count the more than 20 million people that were using mind-altering drugs illegally. This is an indication of the level (and duration) of crises or stresses that people in the U.S. are not able to cope with.
 - ▶ Jesus brings out the reality of this dad's long-term inability to resolve his crisis by having him tell how long the boy had been this way;
 - We sometimes live a long time with problems we have no solutions for, because we

never find the belief of the kind Christ teaches us about here.

- Intellectually testifying that we can do all things through Christ who strengthens us is one thing; having the strength of belief to do the all things (or even some of them) is another
- How far we miss the mark sometimes overwhelms us by itself, and we tend to faint concerning our belief that the Lord is willing to act on our behalf.
 - ▶ Illustrate: We are sometimes like the train locomotives in the rail yard in the story about the Little Engine That Could. Remember, that those larger engines were asked by a heavily loaded train if they could pull it over the mountain, and they all said “I can’t, the grade is too steep.”

II. Not gaining the spiritual high ground is not a sign that you have no faith at all

- This dad’s cry “Lord I believe” is the true and honest cry of the weakest believer
 - ▶ It is the weak and faltering belief of the dad that Jesus had the power of God which causes him to ask Jesus for help. Not enough belief to make it happen, but nevertheless, it was belief..it was a measure of faith. This dad had a problem that we all are afflicted with. We look at the size of our faith, our belief, and we realize how small, how ineffective it is by our own yard stick...and by that very way of looking at it, we limit God. It’s all about perspective...all about how we are looking at it...all about how we are comparing it to what we perceive as strong, powerful faith.
 - Illustrate: A young boy was fishing with two of his friends at the boat dock one day. After he watched them jump into the water and swim across the wide pond and swim back, the friends urged him to jump in and have fun with them. He told them “I can’t swim.” Later that day, he got too near the edge of the dock, slipped and fell in. The water was over his head. He quickly dog-paddled to the dock and climbed out of the water. His friends told him, “I thought you couldn’t swim.” The boy said, “You guys swim, I just flounder around to stay afloat! Swimming is what you guys do when you go across the pond!”
- Notice that the condition of the dad regarding not having that level of faith that he wished for was also suffered by the apostles (see **Mark 9:18** And wheresoever he taketh him, he teareth him: and he foameth, and gnasheth with his teeth, and pineth away: and I spake to thy disciples that they should cast him out; and **they could not**). Now, Jesus tells them (when they ask about this) in **v. 29** that this kind of dumb and deaf spirit would not be purged but by prayer and fasting. Now this seems to provide an excuse for them, but think a moment. These advanced disciples, had they had the measure of faith for fully believing, would have understood this and that measure of faith would have driven them to prayer and fasting which would have brought results). As if to highlight this very problem that they had concerning belief also, Matthew recorded that in this situation, He says in **Mat. 17:20**, (when they ask why they couldn’t cast out the spirit) “Because of your unbelief...”
- So, whatever level of belief we have, there is room for growth for every one of us

III. This dad gives us the key for how to overcome our own weakness of faith (“...help thou mine unbelief.”)

- We have no power of our own against our persistent unbelief
 - ▶ “...without me ye can do nothing.” (**John 15:5**)
 - ▶ We are like the man with the 38 year-old infirmity at the pool of Bethesda (Jn. 5). When

left to ourselves, we cannot seize on the opportunity to deal with our unbelief.

- This unbelief has to do with lack of conviction about the willingness of God to act on our request
- I'm convinced that this lack of conviction usually comes from one of two things:
 - ▶ 1) our own awareness of our unworthiness;
 - which really has nothing to do with whether God will or won't (because every single thing we get from God is clothed in grace anyway),
 - ✓ but only hinders us in asking
 - ▶ 2) or, our lack of understanding about how and when God will act
 - God will act when the act will glorify His Son
 - Which is when the act can point back to the power and prerogative of His Son
- It is always proper, and necessary, to call on the Lord for the help to combat this
- When we ask for that help, it is essential that we truly believe he will give it.
 - ▶ There is something essentially pure and certain about the behavior of the woman with the issue of blood when she came to Christ with this thought in mind (**Mat 9:21**) "If I may but touch his garment, I shall be whole."
 - ▶ And there is something about what Jesus said to her that should empower us all to do as she did and think as she thought (**Mat. 9:22**), "Daughter, be of good comfort; thy faith hath made thee whole."
 - ▶ More than that, there is something that scripture (same verse) says following that which should give us confidence when there is no other place to turn, no other thing to have confidence in: "And the woman was made whole from that hour."
- A big problem with the Lord's people is being in a condition where we will NOT ask for help with unbelief.
 - ▶ This is the greatest obstruction to our growth in faith
 - ▶ And can be overcome by simply following the instructions of holy scripture: (**Heb. 4:15-16**) "For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as *we are*, yet without sin. **16** Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and **find grace to help in time of need.**"