

Beloved congregation, when the Lord Jesus walked on this earth 2000 years ago, He met hundreds of people. Normal people, like you and me. People who came to the Lord Jesus with all sorts of questions, and problems, and burdens. Some were very ill, others were possessed by demons, others were blind or deaf, still others were burdened with their sins. They all had one thing in common: they all came to Jesus. And the other thing they had in common is that Jesus never turned a single one away. Sometimes it seemed there was no end to the people who came to Him and the issues they had.

After the Lord Jesus was on the Mount of Transfiguration, in the presence of God's glory, and hearing His Father confirming Him, "This is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased; hear Him".

Then Jesus, Peter, James, and John, come down the mount. On the way down, Jesus again tells them of His death and resurrection. When they get to the bottom of the mountain, back into the valley, they meet the other 9 disciples, whom they'd left there, and a large crowd. And there's a commotion happening: an argument has arisen between the nine disciples and the scribes.

Actually, this part of Bible history has two parts to it, because at the middle of this argument between the disciples and the scribes, is a man with a boy who has a huge problem. And the two parts are this: Jesus' interaction with His disciples, who were plagued with unbelief; *and* Jesus' interaction with this man, who's also plagued with unbelief. This morning we're going to listen to Jesus and this man.

Our text is Mark 9:17-24. Let me read to you the last part of verse 22, and then to the end of verse 24. The man says to Jesus, "But if thou canst do anything, have compassion on us, and help us. 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."

The theme from our text is: Faith Mixed With Unbelief.

First, the man with problems.

Secondly, the Saviour with the solution.

Thirdly, the prayer "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief."

1) First then, a man with problems. Jesus comes to the disciples and the scribes, and He asked the scribes "What question ye with them?" What are you debating with these men? Their reply is: total silence! They don't reply! Not one of those argumentative scribes dares to speak to Jesus! Just a moment ago there was lots of talk, and lots of debate, and lots of ridicule, and sarcasm for the disciples. But while they were so bold and brave with the disciples, when their Master gets there, it turns out they're cowards. They don't answer Jesus. It is just silent.

But that silence is broken by the man who was at the centre of the controversy. You see it in verse 17: "And one of the multitude answered and said." In the parallel passage in Matthew, we are told the man came kneeling before Jesus. You can picture this: the man comes out of the middle of the crowd and he kneels before Jesus. We don't even know his name, he was just one of the crowd. Sometimes in Scripture we're not given certain people's names. We should always take note when that happens, because that is a great encouragement for us. We can put our own name in there. Is that you this morning: one from this crowd, who wants to kneel before Jesus?

Why is this man coming to Jesus? Well listen to what he says, "Master, I have brought unto thee my son, which hath a dumb spirit; and wheresoever he taketh him, he teareth him,; and he foameth, and gnasheth with his teeth, and pineth away." In the man's mind this is the biggest problem he has: it's his son! Luke tells us it is his *only* son, and this man's only son is possessed with a demon, a

mute spirit. That demon has taken hold of this boy's vocal cords, and he can't speak. Not only that, but he can't hear either. How do we know that? Because when Jesus cast this demon out, later on in the chapter, He says "Thou dumb and deaf spirit, come out of him." And not only that, but he has terrible attacks from this demon. It's like this demon attacks him with with epileptic seizures. The demon would take him under his control, and he would, as it were, tear into him, and throw him down on the ground, and there he would be on the ground, foaming at the mouth, grinding his teeth together, and he became rigid like he was paralysed. The boy's father tells Jesus all the details of his problem. Parents, we can put ourselves there, can't we? He so loves his boy, and it grieves him that this demon has such power over his only son. But he believed that Jesus could help him.

Remember, Jesus simply asked the scribes a question: 'what are you arguing about?'. But they didn't answer him. And so this man with the problem took advantage of that opportunity. He seized the moment to tell Jesus what is troubling him, and he speaks these words 'I brought to Thee my son.' Very special isn't it, to say "Jesus, I bring my son to Thee." Parents, does Jesus hear you speak that way to Him often? Do you bring your sons or daughters to Him?

Well, this man wanted to bring his son to Jesus, only to find out that Jesus wasn't there, because he came when Jesus was up on the mountain! He only saw the disciples, and he talked with the disciples, and they tried to help him. Hear from his own mouth: "I spake to thy disciples that they should cast it out; and they could not." We can just imagine this man would have been so disappointed! He came to bring Jesus his son, and Jesus wasn't there. So he asks the disciples to cast out this demon, but they can't do it! The man tells Jesus all his problems. What an immensely huge blessing, isn't it, that we too may tell Jesus all the details of our burdens, all the details of our struggles, and our impossibilities. And Jesus will hear! Jesus will listen!

We know that He hears what the man says, because He replies in verse 19. But He answers him in a way that we would not expect. We might think, what does this have to do with the boy? "He answered him, and saith, O faithless generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I suffer you?" This is what he says to the man, but it includes everyone who was there present, because it speaks to a faithless generation. He says "how long shall I be with *you*?" The word *you* here is plural, so it's not just the man He's talking to. He's talking to the disciples who are there, the scribes who are there, the people in the crowd who are there, and to *us*, because we read it here this morning. It rings in our ears, "How long shall I bear with you, oh generation lacking faith?"

It implies that time is running out for these people who He addresses. He is only going to be there a few more weeks. We don't know how long Jesus is still going to bear with us. We don't know when the world will end. He says 'how long shall I be patient with you?' You can hear something in His words of the frustration in His human nature with people. 'Faithless generations, I am just bearing with you.' We hear something of His humanity here, but we also hear His words of love and grace, because the very next thing He says is, "Bring him unto me." He doesn't say 'Don't bother me.' No, He says 'Bring your boy to me.' What an encouragement for parents and grandparents in these words of Jesus. Jesus says, 'Bring your boys and girls to me.' In that command is such a rich promise.

Will he bring him to Jesus? The very next words tell us: "And *they* brought him unto him." So not just the father of the boy, but several others. That's what it took to bring this boy to Jesus. Again, what riches in a few words! Jesus says "Bring him to me", and the immediate response is, they bring the boy to Jesus. Now this demon-possessed boy is going to come face to face with the Son of God.

If this father thought he had problems before, it gets even worse! The text tells us when the boy saw Jesus, immediately the spirit convulsed him, and he fell on the ground and wallowed, foaming

at the mouth. What a terrifying scene; what awesome power that demon has. But Jesus is there! Surely He will help! Oh, He will, and He does, but in unexpected ways.

While the boy is in convulsions on the ground at Jesus' feet, Jesus turns away from the boy, and begins to talk to the father: 'How long has this been happening to him?' Children, do you think Jesus didn't know how long that had been happening? Jesus knows everything right? So He knew this, but He wanted the father to say it to Him, as an expression and confession of this father's helplessness. Put yourself in that father's place. Maybe you might have thought, 'Why are you asking me questions? Help my boy!'

But the man didn't say that. He answers Jesus question. He says "Of a child." From childhood, since he was a very little boy. Often the demon had thrown him into the fire and into the water to destroy him. He has burns all over his body, he has nearly drowned often. It had been an ongoing struggle just to keep him safe, and they probably had to tie him up with restraints, for his own safety. 'O Jesus, this demon is out to destroy my boy!' The way the father says it implies, 'I am helpless against this problem! My boy is under the power of something that is beyond me. It is greater than me, so I brought him to Thee, Jesus. I had hope in Thee, but Thou weren't there. That's why I asked Thy disciples to cast him out, and they couldn't do it. My hope was dashed. This problem of mine needs divine intervention. This needs the power of Almighty God!'

Maybe you recognise something in this history. Our souls, in their natural state, are under the power of demons. Our souls, by nature, are corrupt. The Bible tells us we are conceived and born in sin. The Apostle Paul writes that we are by nature the children of wrath. Jesus says that in our natural state, without the saving grace of God, we are of our father the devil, and we are helpless, in our own strength, to cast him out. We need divine intervention in our hearts and lives!

Maybe there is someone here this morning, and you have brought your problem to the Lord in your prayers, telling Him, 'Lord, I know the Bible says I must be born again. Will you do that for me? Cause me to be born again.' You are reading the Scriptures, and using the means of Grace, and studying your Bible, and asking other believers for their advice. Yet no one has been able to really help you, despite all the sermons you've heard and all the books you've read, and the Bible studies you've attended, and the prayer meetings you've gone to, and your talks with believers. Instead of being more hopeful, you feel more hopeless.

Maybe you're reduced to saying something like the man says to Jesus. The man doesn't say 'Lord, Thou can do anything, Thou can cast out this demon.' No, the man says something different. "But if thou canst do any anything, have compassion on us, and help us." You hear a note of unbelief and doubt in that statement. "But *if*." When we address the Lord with a "But *if*", then we have very small thoughts of God.

The man says to Jesus "But if thou canst do anything." But he didn't stop there, he adds something: "If thou canst do anything, have compassion on us, and help us." Notice a difference: he is no longer asking Jesus to only help his son, but 'help *us*!' Maybe he had read in the Old Testament in Psalm 79 "Help us, O God of our salvation, for the glory of thy name." 'Take pity on us, have compassion on us!'

We can understand this man being plagued with unbelief. Maybe you know of it in your own life, in your own soul. Maybe you don't often want to talk about it, you don't know where to go with it, but here we have a place to go with it. "If thou canst do anything, help us." He is plagued with unbelief: "If". He's not so sure. After all, Jesus' disciples were unable to help him. Even Jesus' true disciples didn't have power over this demon. And he knows they tried! He himself says "But they could not." It's no wonder then, that this man's hope is nearly gone. No wonder that his faith

is almost completely wiped out. And yet there is a spark of faith, a glimmer of hope, because even if he said “*If thou can do anything*”, notice who he says it to. He says that to Jesus. And whenever we come to Jesus, even with doubts in the back of our mind, Jesus responds. He replies.

How will Jesus respond to the man with the problems? Does Jesus have the solution to this man's problem? To ours too?

2) So our second thought is, the Saviour with the solution. Jesus said to him, “If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth.” Notice how Jesus turns things around, using the very words that the man uses. The man had said to Jesus, “If thou canst do anything.” Jesus says to the man, “If thou canst believe.” Jesus says, ‘It’s not a matter of my ability to do things. I can do all things. There’s no impossibilities for me. It’s your believing, and trusting my ability, that is deficient here. You are not believing and trusting that I can cast out this demon. And as long as you’re not believing and trusting me, I will not cast him out.’

‘By faith, anything you ask me to do, is possible.’ Possible to whom? Jesus says, possible to the one who is believing, who is trusting the Lord Jesus Christ, without any adding any ‘ifs’ or ‘buts’. If you are able to believe, *all things* are possible to the one who is believing. That’s what Jesus says! All things that we, by faith, entrust to the power of Christ Jesus, are possible. Active faith doesn’t ask wrong things of Jesus. Even if you don’t *feel* like your faith is strong enough, even if you don’t *feel* that you are trusting in God, even if you don’t *feel* your love for Jesus and for God, and your zeal for the Lord, and even if you don’t *feel* that courage to step out in faith.

The Bible teaches that you cannot *feel* what you do not believe. You will not feel peace in your soul if you don’t believe that it is Jesus who gives that peace. You will not feel saved if you don’t believe that Jesus saves you, according to His promise, the moment you repent and call on His Name. You will not feel forgiven if you don’t believe that Jesus forgives your sins when you confess them, and repent of them. “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” 1 John 1:9. He does that! You say, ‘Well, I want to feel it!’ You will never feel it unless you believe it. “If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth.”

Listen to the response of the man with the demon-possessed boy, the man with the problems. Verse 24: “And straightway the father of the child cried out, and said with tears, Lord, I believe, help thou mine unbelief.” ‘Lord, I *do* believe! Notice, now he calls Him *Lord*. Before he called Him *Master*, or Teacher, but now he calls Him Lord. Jesus, my Lord. It is a confession of faith. Here he acknowledges his faith in Christ, and in Christ's ability. ‘I do believe, Lord!’

But at the same time, he acknowledges the great weakness and deficiency in his faith. In fact, by contrast to what he knows it should be, he calls it unbelief. “Help mine unbelief.” He knows his faith is so imperfect, and beset with doubts and fears. He realises there is so much unbelief mixed in with his believing. Earlier he had said, “If thou canst do anything, *help* us.” Now he uses that same word, “*Help* my unbelief”, because he knows his faith is mixed with unbelief.

Here is how the Lord Jesus Christ helps trembling, feeble, weak believers. He helps us moment by moment, day by day, so that we may overcome our unbelief, and learn to look to Him again and again, and to live out of Him alone. In this boy's father we have an example, don't we? A real life example of faith mixed with unbelief, and yet it *is* faith! And faith always has a place to go for help, because it is faith *in Christ*. We can always go back to the Lord Jesus, and say, ‘O Lord Jesus, help me to overcome, to defeat, my unbelief.’

No believer ever has perfect faith. We all have defects in our faith. But our Lord Jesus Christ has the perfect solution. He shows compassion on those who are plagued by unbelief. Take it to the Lord Jesus, my friend. Confess what faith you have, and tell him, “Lord I *do* believe.” Come on your knees to His throne of Grace, even if you have to come praying, or whispering, “Lord, help my unbelief.”

Maybe this morning you say, ‘I *do* believe. I have no doubts that the Scripture is the Word of God. I believe what the Bible says about me. I believe what the Bible says about God, and about the Lord Jesus, and about sin, and about grace. I believe that Jesus Christ is able to save sinners; yes, that He can even save me. But I’m not so sure that He *has* saved me, or that he *will* save me. It seems so impossible for such a wretch like me!’ Jesus says, “If thou canst believe, all things are possible.” In John 3:16 He says, “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever *believeth* in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”

Maybe you see the Lord as an unapproachable God for a sinner like you. You think there’s no place at God’s holy throne for sinners like you. But you know something? At God’s throne of grace there is room *only* for sinners! Only sinners are welcome there! Sinners, who exclaim, “I *do* believe”, and yet those same sinners must often immediately add, “Help thou mine unbelief.”

In Scripture Jesus answers the objections that we have, our “ifs”. In the scripture He shows us “I have done everything. Believe me now, trust me now!” Jesus says the problem is not His inability, but it is your little faith. All things are possible to those who believe. In our prayers we reply to the Lord Jesus, “Lord I do believe, help me to overcome my unbelief.” I want to look at that briefly in our third thought:

3) The prayer, “Lord, I believe, help thou mine unbelief.” May the Holy Spirit apply it to each of our souls. We asked a few questions of our text this morning: what was the man’s greatest problem? Was it his demon-possessed son? Or was it his unbelief? His faith that was mixed with unbelief? He came to Jesus, he brought his demon-possessed boy to Jesus, and rightly so! But the boy was not his greatest problem. Jesus makes that clear: it was a faith problem.

And so too today. Believers, we often bring our burdens to Jesus, and rightly so! To whom else shall we go? He has the words of everlasting life! But what we need to learn, is that there is most often an underlying problem. What we think is our greatest problem, is not. There’s something underlying. Jesus points it out.

Parents, grandparents, Jesus says to us, “Bring him unto me.” Verse 19. I would encourage you, parents, to go to this chapter during your prayer time, and point out those words to the Lord. Put your finger on them: “Lord, you told us ‘Bring him unto me’; we bring him.” We bring our children to Jesus in our prayers. We love our children, we love their souls, we can’t stand the thought of even one of them going lost! So we bring them to Jesus, and we name them one by one. Especially the difficult ones.

If we as parents are not concerned about our children’s souls, if we just think that they’re automatically saved, and it’s all good, do we then really know our children? Beloved, they came from us: who can bring forth a clean thing out of an unclean? No one! They are conceived and born in sin. Maybe one, or more, of your children show by their attitudes that they really do not love the Lord God. By the words they use, by the rebellion they display, the blatant disobedience, their disrespect for the Word of God, and the God of the Word. Then bring them to the Lord, for the Lord to deal with them, for the Lord to intervene. We say, “Lord, if thou canst do anything, have

compassion on us, and help us.” That's my child! But what we really need, is for the Lord to deal with our unbelief.

The same is true for office bearers, and church members, or families, with extended family members. We are sometimes confronted with very difficult situations and difficult people in church life and in family life. And, like parents, we speak with them, we pray *with* them, we pray *for* them, and we admonish them, but sometimes it seems like it's just going nowhere. It seems to go from bad to worse. So we bring them to the Lord in our prayers, and rightly so, but in the back of our minds we are saying, “Lord, if thou canst do anything, have compassion on us, and help us.” We want the Lord to intervene in their lives, and to set them straight so they wouldn't be such a problem for us, but we have a greater problem. It's not that difficult family member, or that difficult church member, it is our unbelief. In our text, the Lord teaches us to be honest, and to come to Him and say, “Lord, I believe, help thou mine unbelief.”

The same thing happens in an individual Christians soul and life. Perhaps you are personally wrestling and struggling with a besetting sin, perhaps striving, fighting to overcome a certain addiction, when it is so powerful. So we bring it to the Lord, and we say “Lord, I have this addiction problem, and I'm at my wits end; I know it's wrong, and I know it's sinful, and I've tried so hard to stop, but I can't overcome this. Lord, if thou canst do anything, have compassion, and help me!” But that addiction is not our greatest problem. Our unbelief is! Jesus says, “If thou canst believe, *all things* are possible to him that believeth.” *Whatever* situation we find ourselves in, as believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, no matter how impossible we think it is, it is *not* impossible!

When we say to the Lord, “*If* thou canst do anything”, that's the language of doubt. Let's make a conscious effort to to erase that word “if” from our thoughts when we're thinking of God, and when we're praying to God. There's nothing lacking in Jesus' ability! As believers, Are we actively believing? Are we consciously believing, and trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ? If we are, we know all things are possible.

That doesn't mean that the Lord God will do exactly what we *think* is needed, or what we pray for, or the way we want Him to do it. But it will take away from us all thoughts of impossibility. Whatever you think is impossible, that is taken away.

Some of you think it's impossible for your soul to be saved, impossible for your sins to be forgiven, impossible for you to be reconciled with God. But what does Jesus say? “If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth.”

You think you have an impossible wayward child, or an impossible difficult church member, or an impossible difficult family member, or an impossible to overcome addiction. But Jesus says, when we believe, we will acknowledge, “Yes, with God all things are possible.”

Our need is to be led by the Holy Spirit, according to the Word of God, to come to this place where our statement “If thou canst do anything, have compassion on us, and help us”, that statement that shows our faith mixed with unbelief, and our very little tiny thoughts of God. When that statement is heard by God, we know what His response is going to be, because it's written in Mark chapter 9. His response will be, “If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth.” We hear that as a rebuke from the Lord: “You are doubting my abilities: I'm telling you, if you can believe, there's a promise there: all things are possible for him who believes.”

And when that reality sinks in, it will bring us to our knees in sorrow, sorrow before God, sorrow because of our distrust of this most trustworthy God and Saviour, as He has revealed Himself in His

holy Word. That will cause us to cry out with tears, “Lord, I believe, help thou mine unbelief.” You can’t skip over that little phrase, “with tears”. That man, the father of the child, cried out, and said *with tears*. If your unbelief has never caused you to cry with tears, then really you should consider whether you have faith at all. If you’ve never prayed “Lord, I believe, help thou mine unbelief”, you should wonder how far back-slidden you are, or if you were ever a believer at all.

Notice that Jesus doesn't reject the man. He helps him! He cast the demon out of the boy, he causes this man's faith to grow, and to stand firm, but He never praises his unbelief. He never, ever honours doubts and distrust. He just turns it around, and says, “If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth.” He helps this man, and He will help us too. He does the same thing for his disciples, where he says about what it means to overcome unbelief, when Jesus says “This kind can come forth by nothing, but by prayer and fasting.

Amen.