

Faith Among the Faithless

Mark 9:14-29

One of the most common titles for us (people like you and me) is believers. Right? We say “Christians” a lot. We understand that. That’s a follower of Christ, one who has set their life after Him. But another term that you really see a lot in the Scripture as well is this term of the one who has faith, a believer - and then those that do not choose to follow Christ as unbelievers, those who are committed to their own ways instead, those who do not have faith. They’re filled with unbelief so to speak. These terms are just all throughout the New Testament. As you go, you see over and over this description of even “the faith” as far as what our religion you could even say is called in the New Testament, “the faith,” committed to “the faith.” We “Fight the good fight of the faith.” It’s described in words that we just saw in our singing that’s also found in Scripture, that we “...walk by faith, not by sight.” This concept of all of Hebrews 11 - by faith were the saints of old able to follow after God and do His will, and by faith you and I not only identify with Christ but continue to walk like He walked - “the faith,” this concept of faith and belief so fundamental, so foundational and crucial to our salvation, and it’s the only proper way to respond to Jesus and who He is.

It’s exactly that concept of faith and belief that we get to see Jesus unpack a little bit as Mark records this account in Mark 9. Today we see how he highlights this concept of faith throughout our text. So, let’s look at it right now, Mark 9:14-29, to focus on this concept, this practice of faith. Mark 9:14-29; “And when they came to the disciples, they saw a great crowd around them, and scribes arguing with them. And immediately all the crowd, when they saw him, were greatly amazed and ran up to him and greeted him. And he asked them, ‘What are you arguing about with them?’ And someone from the crowd answered him, ‘Teacher, I brought my son to you, for he has a spirit that makes him mute. And whenever it seizes him, it throws him down, and he foams and grinds his teeth and becomes rigid. So I asked your disciples to cast it out, and they were not able.’ And he answered them, ‘O faithless generation, how long am I to be with you? How long am I to bear with you? Bring him to me.’ And they brought the boy to him. And when the spirit saw him, immediately it convulsed the boy, and he fell on the ground and rolled about, foaming at the mouth. And Jesus asked his father, ‘How long has this been happening to him?’ And he said, ‘From childhood. And it

has often cast him into fire and into water, to destroy him. But if you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us.’ And Jesus said to him, ‘If you can!’ ‘All things are possible for one who believes.’ Immediately the father of the child cried out and said, ‘I believe; help my unbelief!’ And when Jesus saw that a crowd came running together, he rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, ‘You mute and deaf spirit, I command you, come out of him and never enter him again.’ And after crying out and convulsing him terribly, it came out, and the boy was like a corpse, so that most of them said, ‘He is dead.’ But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up, and he arose. And when he had entered the house, his disciples asked him privately, ‘Why could we not cast it out?’ And he said to them, ‘This kind cannot be driven out by anything but prayer.’ ”

Our text this morning highlighting as I’ve said this concept of faith, and if you’ll look back at it, just scan through it quickly, you see how this does come up, just even beginning in verse 19 when Jesus in His disappointment says, “O faithless generation...” ... “...faithless generation...” Then zooming down a little bit further into our text into verse 23 when He says, “All things are possible for one who believes.” – the concept of faith. In verse 24, the response of the father; “I believe; help my unbelief!” And finally, at the very end of our passage where we have this concept of prayer and how that is a manifestation and a picture of faith - this whole passage surrounding around a response; how to respond to Jesus. And it really fits well in the gospel of Mark and how he’s recorded things because the first half of his gospel has really just highlighted this portrait of Jesus. He’s painted this beautiful, vivid picture of Christ and who He is, and his showing this over and over again through His authority over demons, over nature, over illness and any kind of sickness that’s brought to Him, showing that Jesus truly is the Messiah, and there’s no denying that. It’s a very clear portrait of Jesus and who He is.

But now we’re kind of just tipped over the midway point of this gospel, and we’re now on the second half of the life of Christ here as far as Mark records it, and what we start to see now is this picture not just of who Jesus is, but what He must do, His mission that He must go to the cross, that He must suffer, that He must die. And so, the question is outstanding. So what? What do you do with that? You’ve got this story, you’ve got this picture of the authoritative Messiah, and then His mission to suffer and die. And how does one respond to this? And this is where we see this response necessary, the

response of faith, complete all out faith in Christ, and that's what this scene highlights. While, no doubt, you might be tempted to approach a passage like this and think, umm, sounds like a lot of stuff we've talked about already. I get it. Jesus is strong. Can we move on? I know that's tempting, but while that is highlighted, while that is seen that Jesus is powerful, and He does have ability over supernatural forces, really, there's a different emphasis here; and the emphasis is all on the response. And that's what we need to see today, this development of the concept of faith and how it looks not only here in our text, but even applied to our very lives.

So, with that, let's jump into our text here starting in verses 14-15. This is where we find the crowd's disturbance - the crowd's disturbance. It's in verses 14-15. You'll be reminded that we basically left off with a more, kind of, smaller crowd, a smaller group of characters. The last two times we've been in Mark, it's just been Jesus and the inner three - Peter, James, and John. That's it. At the beginning of chapter 9, they were so privileged to go up onto the mountain with Him. The transfiguration took place; they saw Jesus in His glory. They heard the voice of God the Father giving affirmation to Him as the Son of God. They saw Moses and Elijah there as witnesses to this momentous occasion. It's just a real highpoint for their life to be convinced, certain, that Jesus really is the Messiah, because they were there on that mountain, and they had that experience, but immediately afterwards (what we covered last time) was their trip down the mountain, still only the four of them, Jesus and the inner three. And as they're walking down the mountain, the discussion changes drastically from glory and brilliance and the kingdom to suffering. As Jesus declares to them, if John the Baptist came, and they didn't receive him, and he suffered and died, what do you think's going to happen to Me? Jesus too will follow in those footsteps as He must go to the cross - He must suffer and die - just polar opposites of the glorious mountain top experience and then the reality of what is to come for Christ and the cross.

So, it's after this conversation that we finally have Jesus and the inner three reuniting with the rest of the gang, and this is what we find in verses 14-15; "And when they came to the disciples, they saw a great crowd around them, and scribes arguing with them. And immediately all the crowd, when they saw him, were greatly amazed and ran up to him and greeted him." They come back to this debate, this argumentative scene. Alright? We have more than just the nine disciples that were left at the bottom of the mountain - it's

not just the nine hanging out there waiting for Jesus and the three to come back - it's now grown and increased to this large crowd that is there, in addition to some scribes that are also there, these experts, these lawyers, these people that knew the Old Testament well and were even known not just for their intellect, but living it out and deciding how it ought to be lived out. All these people there arguing with each other, arguing, this argument that they come back to, a turmoil type of scene. So, things are out of hand.

And the entire tone changes we notice though in verse 15 when they notice Jesus - the entrance of Jesus; "And immediately..." Mark likes to use that word in verse 15; "...all the crowd, when they saw him, were greatly amazed..." Normally when we see that phrase, they were amazed or astonished, it's always at the end of an account. It's always after Jesus has done something incredible. It's after He's healed someone. It's after He's actually encountered some demonic force and conquered it. Or, it's after He's fed thousands of people. But this time, it's at the very beginning. He just steps into the scene and people are amazed just as a testimony to who He was and what people are thinking about Him. He had done enough ministry up to this point, He had been well-known, clearly, that He could just enter into the scene and everyone knew who He was, recognized Him, perhaps even experienced already being ministered to by Him in their own life, touching their own family, their own friends. So, Jesus shows up, and there's this hush that comes, and the crowd essentially swarms Jesus to run up to him and greet him. What happens with the scribes and the disciples? We have no idea, but perhaps they're having too much fun arguing. They needed to continue doing that. We're not sure, but nonetheless, Jesus comes on the scene and, finally, you have people hushing and realizing maybe this can settle things; maybe this can solve our disagreement, our argument that is taking place.

So, what could've caused this argument? That's what we find in verses 16-18. The father's dilemma - the father's dilemma in verses 16-18 which sparked this entire discussion and argument in verse 16-18; "And he asked them, 'What are you arguing about with them?' And someone from the crowd answered him, 'Teacher, I brought my son to you, for he has a spirit that makes him mute. And whenever it seizes him, it throws him down, and he foams and grinds his teeth and becomes rigid. So I asked your disciples to cast it out, and they were not able.'" This father speaking up, people not sure who's going to give this account, and the father quickly jumps into action to

answer His question, the question in verse 16 that Jesus poses while probably already knowing what's taking place as He often did in the life and ministry of Christ, however, still asking the obvious to get it all on the table for everyone to see and observe and how it will move forward.

The question then is answered from the father. We see that not only is he talking about His demon possessed son, but in Luke 9:38, he says, "Teacher, I beg you to look at my son, for he is my only child." Just in this difficult spot that this man had not only been burdened with this possessed son, but it was his only child. The son was possessed with a spirit that would make him mute. He couldn't speak, but on top of that, it wasn't just that he was quiet, he would be violently thrown into seizures, thrown on the ground, causing him to foam at the mouth, grind his teeth even, and become rigid in almost this stiff paralysis that would come upon him. And there's a temptation for people to read accounts like this, and other accounts in the gospel that talk about demon possession, and say, well, that's just their primitive description of what was taking place. Now, we call that epilepsy, and that's all it is. It's just a, you know, it's kind of this disease that we kind of treat, we give medication for. And so, that's what Jesus was dealing with, and that's how Mark had to describe it. It must've been some supernatural thing. Well, that's not right. That's not good. It kind of takes away from the whole actual elements of what's taking place. And in fact, it's not just Mark that describes it as an unclean spirit or a demon possession. You go to Matthew's account and you go to Luke's account (and Luke's a doctor by the way), and he and they all call it demon possession. That's what this is. Alright? Don't settle it and try and make it not as impressive as it really is. This isn't just some medical condition - this is demon possession, destructive demon possession on this child. This is what then caused this scene to erupt.

So, the father thinking, I've heard of Jesus - I'm aware of what He's done - he does a natural thing. Let me go find Jesus. Perhaps, He can help with this situation. He comes and he only finds the nine disciples instead of Jesus and the inner three who are up on the mountain. Nonetheless, he asks the disciples, and you can imagine the disciples, the nine that are there are thinking we got this, yeah, I think we got this. Right? If you think back to Mark 6, earlier in their ministry, and Jesus working with them, He sends them out. He empowers them. He says go. It's time for you to go and preach the gospel of the kingdom, and you'll have authority. What kind of

authority? Specifically, He says, "...authority to cast out demons." (Mark 3:15) So, here they have a father with his demon possessed son - they go, bring it on. Nine of us, we've got this. Right? Well, to no avail, absolute failure, they're not able to cast this demon out. They're not able to help this father, and what happens? You already have a crowd that's drawing around, and they're saying, what's going on here? How come it's not working? What's happening? And more people are coming around, and you can only imagine the scribes love to jump on this, the ones that are so against Jesus in the first place and against all the popularity that He's stealing from them, and so, they love to rise up and go, look at this. How about that? There's a weakness, and we want to point it out and highlight it for everyone to see. And thus, you have this argument, this scene that erupts.

So, this is how it all comes about, this father's dilemma with his demon possessed son, but we don't just get the words of the father, we actually get a display of it in verses 19-22. This is where we see the demonic display - the demonic display. First, just looking at verse 19; "And he answered them, 'O faithless generation, how long am I to be with you? How long am I to bear with you? Bring him to me.'" You can just read that and sense it right away. You can sense how Jesus feels. You can sense what's going through His mind. He's just disappointed, just disappointed that He has to encounter this yet again. In all of His ministry, in all of His ability, in all of His demonstration of who He is and what He's able to do and the authority He has, He now encounters another instance of no faith, calling this people a "...faithless generation..." He'd just been on the mountain top showing His glory that He clearly has the authority to bring in the kingdom, and then, He described to Peter, James, and John that He must suffer and die. That is His outcome. And He comes down to say this is the reason why, this "...faithless generation..." They wouldn't accept John the Baptist, but instead put him to death, and here they are still as faithless as ever, a faithless people in front of Me. How long do I have to deal with this? How much longer do I have to go through this? Day after day after day - these people - and they have no faith.

And you think, well, okay, who's He calling faithless here? Is this just one of those times where He's just kind of throwing a shot out at the generic crowd there? Possibly. You have the crowd and how we've seen this over and over again, the crowd is excited to follow Jesus. What is He going to do next? Kind of enraptured by His abilities and maybe even the free meals that they get out of it, but then you also have scribes there too, and clearly, their

lack of faith, even though they knew the Scriptures so well, they couldn't put it together that Jesus is the Messiah, but then you also have the disciples and how He had to deal with them day after day after day and how He often had to tell them, "...you of little faith..." More than likely, you kind of have Jesus saying, "O faithless generation..." to everyone in front of Him, everyone who's been slow to learn and understand who He is and what He's come to do. Really, what He's saying - this is a pretty strong phrase to say, "O faithless generation..." - He's comparing them to the unfaithful generations of the past. He's comparing them to what you had in the Old Testament with the Israelites and how they failed to be faithful to God, how they failed in their relationship to God. If you remember Deuteronomy 32:20, "And He said, 'I will hide My face from them; I will see what their end will be, for they are a perverse generation, children in whom is no faithfulness.'"

This is what happened. There they were, witnesses to the brilliant and supernatural events of the Exodus, witnesses to God's own presence filling the Tent of Meeting right in the middle of them and then later the temple and the holy of holies, witnesses to this and yet faithless, rebellious, not willing to go up and seize the Promised Land like God told them, and thus, paying the price for it, forty years of wandering in the wilderness until God raises up a new generation, killing off the faithless generation. Psalm 95:7-10 reminds us of this; "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts, as at Meribah, as on the day at Massah in the wilderness, when your fathers put me to the test and put me to the proof, though they had seen my work. For forty years I loathed that generation and said, "They are a people who go astray in their heart, and they have not known my ways." This is what Jesus is doing. He's looking at this scene, this dilemma, this father, the crowd, the scribes, His own disciples, and He's just saying, "...faithless generation..." So, privileged to see so much, to see what the prophets longed to see in the person of Christ, and yet, lacking faith; "...faithless generation..." They have no faith, just like the Old Testament Israelites so too is this generation that Jesus is ministering to.

And it's easy for us. Once again, as often when we look at Scripture, and we read narrative, we can throw stones at the people in the narrative and say how dare they have such a terrible time and slow learning ability when it comes to Jesus and God's plan, but yet all our problems are summarized in the same issue. We lack faith. Any difficulty we're experiencing, the ability

to walk through whatever trial God has put before us and the times when we want to give up and say we're done, we lack faith. We're a faithless generation too. It can happen to us as well.

Perhaps you're here this morning because you want to give Jesus a try. You want to give this whole religion thing a shot, and you're thinking, well, everything else is pretty much fine in my life, but I hear people talk about this so I'll give it a shot. I'll show up. I'll see what it's like. But that kind of approach to God is not quite the approach of faith that the Bible talks about. Really, that's no better than the Old Testament Israelites or the enthusiastic followers so to speak in the gospels. They go my life's fine, but what's Jesus up to. Oh, that's interesting. I want to see what's happening. I want to hear the latest. I want to be a witness of it actually. That's not quite faith.

Or, perhaps you're committed to following Jesus but your life is still marked by some recurring particular sins that come up, and you think, ahh, everything else is fine, just these few things just keep coming at me, and I struggle, and I fail. Why is that? Is it a particular area or does it really just come down to a lack of faith, unbelief. Don't be slow to trust God for all the help you need to fight sin. He's offered it. He's granted it. He's promised it. It's there, available to you, and if you're not making good on it and utilizing it, then you will continue to fail because you don't have faith in God's promises. You will continue to fight sin on your own, and you will continue to fail on your own because you have not trusted and put full faith into God.

Perhaps, you're all in to follow Jesus, but when it comes to other people you say I'm done. I have my relationship with God. I have my relationship with Christ. I'm good. And everyone else can kind of figure it out on their own. It's not realistic to help people because people are people, and you can't teach an old dog new tricks, and they get set in their ways, and if I want to help them, nothing happens. Well, that's not really the attitude of... you think, well, I'm a realist. That's actually a defeatist. That's someone that's actually risen up to the level of judge to say, God, You can't help this person. They're done. They're stuck in their ways. They have no hope. That kind of approach to ministering to others is a lack of faith. You lack the faith in God to work in all people at all times in all ways for His glorious presence and purposes. God's promises for salvation, for sanctification, for ministering to other people, they're all over Scripture, and if you're struggling with any of those things, you simply lack the faith to trust the

promises that are already there. God is good on His part, but are we faithful on our part?

After Jesus' words of disappointment to this "...faithless generation...", He calls for the boy to be brought to Himself, and in verse 20, we start to see this demonic display before us; "And they brought the boy to him. And when the spirit saw him, immediately it convulsed the boy, and he fell on the ground and rolled about, foaming at the mouth." Not only had the father talked about what happened to his son, now we see it displayed, and notice it says, "And when the spirit saw him..." It's when this demon inside of this boy saw Jesus that this kind of melt down took place, this convulsing took place. It's just another testimony to the spiritual battle, and even greater, the testimony of who Jesus is that even demons see Him, and they're terrified; they're fearful.

Jesus actually does a very compassionate thing in verse 21; "And Jesus asked his father, 'How long has this been happening to him?' " In the midst of this episode, " 'How long has this been happening to him?' And he said, 'From childhood. And it has often cast him into fire and into water, to destroy him.' " The father responds with the difficulty that it has caused. This has been an ongoing thing for this father. Can you imagine his burden, trying to take care of this son, not just having this inability to communicate, being mute, but having this tendency to potentially go and commit suicide at any moment? They don't have bodies of water and open fires, maybe, marked off like we do now days. It would be very easy to stumble into some open body of water or some fire, since they don't have electricity, and you have more fires. So, you have to not just care for this son in the way that he communicates, but you have to watch after him so that he doesn't hurt himself at every moment. Think of the burden for this father, and here's Jesus in His compassion saying, "How long has it been [this way]?" ... "How long has this been happening to him?" Jesus cares, and even more so, Jesus is highlighting how hopeless this has been. This is not something that the father has kind of managed from time to time, this is something that has burdened him greatly, and he has no hope. He has no solution. There is no doctor that can cure this. This is demon possession.

The desire of the father comes out in the second half of verse 22. He responds after giving Jesus a brief synopsis and background of dealing with

this. He says, “But if you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us.” ... “But if you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us.” He makes this plea for the compassion of Christ. You think about this, and you can almost sense it in the father’s tone. He’s not just talking about the situation and how it’s hopeless, but he almost just sounds hopeless; “...if you can...” ... “...if you can... ..help us.” He’s been dealing with this for a great portion of his life, and now he’s come to the nine disciples that are there, that have been able to do the work of Jesus, and they’ve been unsuccessful. They haven’t been able to help him, and so now that Jesus has showed up, how does he know that Jesus can actually do it? The disciples were unsuccessful. He has this hesitancy; “...if you can do anything...”

And Jesus uses this request as a time to launch in and speak more about faith, to talk about faith. And that’s what we find in verses 23-24, the principle defined - the principle defined. First, in verse 23; “And Jesus said to him, ‘If you can! All things are possible for one who believes.’ ” We see this faith defined, this principle defined by Jesus here. He quotes the father’s words back to him. The father has just said but if you can, and Jesus says, “‘If you can!’ ” Is that what you think? Maybe? Is it a possibility with Me? Is that how things are? Maybe a slight possibility? A potentiality? Maybe? It’s almost as if Jesus is insulted by those words. After all His work in ministry, if I can? Have you seen what I’ve done? Have you heard any of it? And we think, yeah, come on. Trust Him. Jesus is totally worth it. He can do it.

But it’s funny how we can often approach God with this kind of “...if you can...” prayer “...if you can...” mentality when we come to God ourselves, and you think how does God feel when you have this way of talking to Him “...if you can...” God, here’s this, and “...if you can...”, here’s this other area. I mean just imagine it. God, I’ve been trying hard in my studies for school and putting in lots of hours, but, you know, if You can help that would be nice. That’d be helpful. I’ve been working hard to share the gospel at work, and I’ve been talking to several co-workers, and it’s been going well, but, I don’t know, if You’re able God, it’d be nice. I’d appreciate some help there. Or, I’m trying to be a loving husband and a father that brings up my children in the discipline and instruction of You, but if there’s any way You could spare some time and help us out in this whole parenting thing, that’d be great. Or, God, I’ve been trying to put off my sin and walk in righteousness. I’ve even been reading and studying and memorizing Your Word, but, you know, if You don’t mind, maybe a little bit of help if you can

help; "...if you can..." ... "...if you can..." Is that the way to talk to God Almighty? "...if you can..." That's pathetic. You think that's what God wants to hear? "...if you can..."

First of all, we're not dummies. We know that God is more than able to help in anything that we're going through. That is clear throughout Scripture. He is God Almighty. He is all powerful. He owns all things. He has all resources. He actually does love and care, but also add to it this - really, when it comes down to it, God's our only chance of doing anything. Without God, we've got nothing. We are hopeless. When we try things on our own, it is pathetic, and it does not accomplish the result that pleases God. We fall way short. It'd be like me saying, hey, I'm going to bless you all now with an "a cappella" solo, if this mike's on over here or something like that. Right? And then, if I were to say, you know, Nathan Fogde, if you're out there, if you want to you can kind of come up and help if you want. You know. First of all, ain't no way I'm going to be able to get this song done, not on my own. I'm not going to carry some tune that's going to bless you. Alright? I need help, and Nathan's more than willing to help. He's more than qualified, and he could come up here and he could actually make sure it actually finishes and gets to the end of the song. And yet, in our prayer life, we do this. We kind of have these ideas. We have these things and we are working really hard at them on our own. We're trying them on our own, and then as an afterthought, we say, oh, and God, if You wouldn't mind blessing that. That'd be nice; "...if you can..." help in this way. That'd be helpful. That'd be good. And God says, you know I can do way more than you're asking Me right now; and on top of that, you try to do it on your own? It's just laughable. It reminds us of Jesus' clear words, "...apart from me you can do nothing." (John 15:5) We need Him. We need Him desperately.

In our verse here, we go on to see this most certain and comforting truth that Jesus makes known after this kind of shocking response. He says, "All things are possible for one who believes." ... "All things are possible for one who believes." What does this mean exactly because it's a phrase that gets thrown out there often, and sometimes people take it in different directions. Does this mean all your dreams will come true if you believe? Does this mean there will be miracles all the time if you believe? We all know that that's absurd. God is not our own personal genie or vending machine that we access. Faith is not some magical formula to get whatever we want out of it. It's not how it works; rather, what Jesus is saying here is

that faith is the entry point, the entry point by which we have access to the health and power of God almighty. One commentator stated it this way, “The point is not of course that with enough faith you can do anything, it is rather that God has the power to do anything.” Another person states it this way, “This affirmation does not mean that faith can accomplish anything, but that those who have faith will set no limits to the power of God.” This is to highlight God. This is to highlight His ability, His power, His strength. It’s not to try and say, hey, now’s that time you can finally get everything you ever wanted. You just have to trick God and do it in faith.

That’s not what’s being stated here. Through faith, in our passage here, the father would have confidence in the power of God over all difficulties, over all trials, including his demon possessed son. And the same is true for us - that we need to recognize what God’s abilities really are and how faith is the entry point to God’s abilities and His power and His strength in all situations at all times for His glory. One of the most obvious ways, I think, this comes out is we just are so quick to recruit God’s help for small things. We kind of think of the things that sound like, you know, that sounds like something God will do, and we kind of repeat these things: Help us have a good day. God bless this food to our bodies (that’s something You would do). Or, be with us now. We kind of have these typical phrases that we come back to about who God is and what He can do for us and pray these things. And you just can’t help but take a step back and say that is small potatoes. That is nothing. Do you realize who God is. Have we thought about who God is and His power, His ability, what He can do? And that’s what you want to ask for? Help me to have a generically good day? Right? Well, what is that? What kind of approach to God is that? What does that demonstrate about your view of God?

Those things are all well and good, but I think we might have some bigger requests that we can bring before God. I think He’s more than able to handle those requests. Try the salvation of souls, people that are spiritually dead that need to be brought back to life, people that are blinded by Satan, walking according to the course of the world. That’s a desperate condition. We need help. We need help to save these people. Guess what? God’s ready, and He’s willing, and He’s able to do it. How about our own personal sanctification? We fight, and we struggle against sin. We hit walls at times, and we feel like failures as we try and be holy, and then we try harder, and we come back to ourselves, and we make better plans, and we think we’re

going to really tackle this thing once and for all, and yet we haven't come to God the One who's powerful, who's given us the Holy Spirit to actually conquer these things, to fight against them, who's given us His Word? How about the spiritual health of our church? Our church being unified, being one, not divided, being holy, not tolerating any sin, being loving, actually reflecting this love for one another that the world can even examine and see. This is a big thing. That's a big request. Guess what? It's a big God we're talking to. He loves to hear these things. He's excited to help. He's able to help, and we have no chance of doing any of those things without Him. You don't save anyone. You don't sanctify yourself. You don't make our church a more loving church, God does that. So, ask Him for help. Ask Him. Recruit His help in this. Don't just settle for the everyday mundane moment of talking to God. Ramp it up a notch. There's big things that we need to bring to our big God.

I love that our passage gives us this picture of the faith in verse 24. After Jesus gives the principle of verse 24, "Immediately the father of the child cried out and said, 'I believe; help my unbelief!'" What a great response, a wonderful response to the words of Jesus. Clearly, the father did not take Jesus' words, His principle, as some genie-wish-granting-formula. Clearly, he doesn't think, aw, great. That's all it takes? Cool. Wow! I'm glad someone told me this. He asserts his belief in Jesus, yet at the same time, he acknowledges his own shortcomings, He falls short. He's expressing that he knows that there is no problem at all with Jesus' ability at this point. If there is any problem, it's on him. If there is any shortcoming, it's on him not on Jesus. This here is a positive example of true faith. You see, true faith does this thing where it accurately assesses our situation and recognizes that whatever the task is before us, we can't do it on our own. True faith recognizes that, and then takes the step of declaring to God, help, I can't do this in front of me without You, and if I try, I will fail. True faith recognizes our shortcoming in that and cries out to God. That's exactly what this father has done; "I believe; help my unbelief!" Help the areas and the ways that I am still holding back. Help the shortcomings that I have that I'm not even aware of. Help! He's crying out to God.

I mean, what a difference this would make if we actually did start every task of our day, actually when we do wake up, when we get into the car, when we step into the office, when we step into the classroom, when we step back into the house, when we interact with the family, when we talk with

neighbors. What if we started every single one of those tasks and we admitted at the start of every one of those tasks, God, I can't do this. I cannot do this. I cannot perform. I cannot go to work. I cannot serve my family. I cannot reach out to this coworker. I can't do any of these things on my own. I fall short, but You can. Help me, God. Help me. Please. That is faith. Does such a faith characterize your life? Do you seek and recruit God's help at every moment for every task that is set before you? If not, you are trusting in yourself and you lack faith. Your faith is not in God. It's somewhere else.

We see how Jesus responds in verses 25-27 with the Messiah's demand - the Messiah's demand "And when Jesus saw that a crowd came running together, he rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, 'You mute and deaf spirit, I command you, come out of him and never enter him again.' And after crying out and convulsing him terribly, it came out, and the boy was like a corpse, so that most of them said, 'He is dead.' But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up, and he arose." Jesus recognizes that this crowd is growing and that pushes Him, that pushes Him to deal with this issue sooner than later. This is not Jesus' way of doing things. He doesn't like the people to come. He doesn't like the crowd to get bigger. He doesn't like all the attention. He's trying to keep it low-key. He's trying to be humble, and so recognizing the situation, He steps into action, and He rebukes the spirit. As we've seen before, the demon doesn't give up without a fight, throwing down the boy, causing him to have these terrible convulsions, so much so that the people are actually thinking that is a lifeless child on the ground; "He is dead." Some commentators have actually gone so far as to say when Jesus does reach out and help him up, it's the same wording that is used when He raises Jairus' daughter from the dead earlier in this gospel. Potentially, he could've died and Jesus resurrected him. Either way, Jesus not only drives out the demon to "...never enter him again.", but He restores this child and his health. Jesus steps into action after giving the highlight to this man's faith and showing and teaching about faith. He then steps in and cares and shows His authority as He's often done.

This story has an interesting ending; it comes in verses 28-29 which is the disciples' discovery, and if you notice that when we were reading our passage after Jesus does this amazing miracle, do you get any clue of how the crowd thought about this, what the father was thinking, what the scribes were saying, even the disciples in the moment? You get nothing, nothing about how people responded. You don't get people looking around and

being amazed as they are shocked at what had just happened. Instead, Mark jumps. He jumps to another scene later on, a private scene; “And when he had entered the house, his disciples asked him privately, ‘Why could we not cast it out?’ And he said to them, ‘This kind cannot be driven out by anything but prayer.’ ” Mark jumps because he wants to stay on this highlight of faith. He wants you to see this and how it plays through the entire passage. In fact, when Jesus responds in Matthew’s account, he actually says something more along the lines of little faith that you have. It’s still highlighting faith, the faith necessary. The disciples thinking, we were casting out demons before, why couldn’t we do it now? And Jesus brings it right back to faith. Were you depending upon God? Were you in prayer?

You want a great barometer of faith? You want a great way to measure or see what faith can look like? It’s in prayer. It’s in prayer, absolute dependence upon God. When you bring items before God and ask for His help, that’s faith; that’s a great picture of faith; that’s a great manifestation of faith. Prayer is so much more than just communicating with God, it’s acknowledging one’s dependence upon Him for all of our needs; faith in action is prayer. And that’s where this story has to end, with this continued highlight on faith and how it can be seen in prayer and how you and I can take a step back and think about this and think about our own faith. We are believers, as Scripture so often uses this term. What is a great sign and indicator of your belief in God? What is a great demonstration of your faith? It’s your dependence upon Him, and what a great way to show that through prayer. Talk about something that you can’t just doctor up, you can’t just kind of show or try and convince other people, it’s completely personal between you and God. Only God knows your dependence upon Him through prayer. Only God knows your actual faith that you put in Him through prayer. It’s between you and Him, and if you have faith in God, oh, you will be praying! You need His help. You want His help whenever you can, but if you don’t have faith in God, why pray? That seems like a silly thing to do, talk to some person out there. That’s the point. True faith that recognizes your own shortcomings, that recognizes your own sin, that recognizes God’s ability to solve that, that recognizes God’s promises and His power to drive you forward to accomplish His purposes, that will all be manifested in prayer, talking to God, coming to Him, crying out for help just like this father in regards to his son in our passage.

What is the right way to respond to Jesus, the Messiah, the Savior? What is the right way to respond to Him? It's faith; it's true faith. Acknowledge that you have nothing in and of yourself, that Christ has everything that you need, and come to God in faith.