

## Follow: Faith & Discipleship

Mark 9:14-29

How important is faith to our lives as disciples? Well, it's quite important. Listen to these words from Hebrews 11:6. If we would be in close relationship to God we must believe that he exists and that he is good. You cannot become a disciple of Jesus and you cannot continue as a disciple of Jesus without trust in His person and words.

So, we are going to talk about faith this morning, but here is the challenge of talking about faith. There is a danger that when we talk about faith we will begin focusing on our faith rather than the object of our faith. Let me show you what I mean. Look at this picture taken at the Royal wedding. People are so obsessed with capturing a cool, Instagram worthy picture of an event that they aren't focused on the event and they lose the enjoyment of the event. Every person here is attentive to his or her phone except this woman. I love the very satisfied, serene look on her face. She is focused on the object, not her experience of the object.

We need to talk about faith because this story is meant to teach us about faith, but faith always has an object and we want to remember that true faith is attentive to the object. Faith forgets about self.

Open in your Bibles to Mark 9:14-29. This is one of my favorite stories in the Gospel of Mark. It's beautifully told and it's right on the heels of the Transfiguration. Keep in mind at the Transfiguration the disciples are told, by God the Father to listen to Jesus. Here in this passage we have some very clearly teaching on faith. They are to believe Him. You cannot walk as a disciple without faith. I hope you are here this morning because at some level you have faith that what God's Word says is true to reality and beautifully important. So, this morning we are going to see **4 lessons concerning faith necessary for followers of Christ.**

- **Faith is Abnormal (vv. 14-19)**

What I mean by this is that faith in Jesus does not come naturally to us in our sinful condition. Let's get to the story in verse 14. So, Jesus, with Peter, James, and John have come down from the mountain of Transfiguration and maybe you

have been wondering what the other 9 disciples have been up to. We find out very quickly. Look at the rest of verse 14.

Having had this majestic experience on the mountain, Jesus and the 3 come back to reality very quickly and they come down the mountain to find a mess. I

remember one time being in Nepal and driving on very steep, very narrow mountain roads. Several cars in front of us a bus had taken a turn too sharply and a motorcycle driver had laid his bike down and damaged it as he tried to avoid the bus. He was uninjured but he was particularly upset with the bus driver. The driver had stopped and the road was blocked, so, naturally, everyone got out of their cars and started getting involved in the dispute. It was quite a chaotic scene and I picture this argument taking place with a huge crowd gathered around and no one really in charge.

But when Jesus comes into view, someone notices, starts running toward him and soon the crowd shifts its attention to Jesus. Look at verse 15. Obviously, his reputation precedes him and they are excited to see him. Jesus asks the scribes about the argument in verse 16. If you are reading this for the first time you might be thinking this is another argument concerning interpretation of the OT, but a man from the crowd interjects to answer and we start to discover what the real issue is. Look at verses 17-18.

Clearly this man had heard Jesus was in the area and had brought his son, hoping to have him delivered by Jesus from this dark and awful state of slavery to this demon. The description is heartbreaking in these verses. It's like epilepsy, but it's quite clear its caused by this demon. He was hoping to find Jesus, but instead he encounters the "B" team and they are unable to help at all.

Jesus responds in verse 19. The issue here is that the **disciples** were unable to cast out this demon, so why does Jesus speak of a faithless **generation**? Well, the lack of faith shown by the disciples is symptomatic of people everywhere. This is not the first time a lack of faith in Jesus has led to the inability to see the work of Jesus. Remember Mark 6:5-6 when Jesus went to his home town? Lack of faith. Typical.

This is why our first point is that faith is abnormal and Jesus is done with it. You can almost hear the frustrated tone in his voice here. Humans were originally created in the garden to depend on God and trust His word. The fall has twisted

us to the point where we trust ourselves rather than God. So, what does Jesus do? Look at the end of verse 19. And that leads us to our second lesson.

- **Faith is Powerful (vv. 20-23)**

They brought the boy to him and the demon knows exactly who he is encountering. Some demons respond to Jesus by crying out in terror and this demon, who is apparently mute responds by tormenting his victim more in verse 20. Jesus asks for further clarification on the boys condition in verse 21 and the Father's response is heartbreaking. Look at verse 22.

I hate to see my kids get hurt. There's a feeling of helplessness and fear when you hear a kid screaming and know something is causing physical pain. This Father has watched his little son be tormented by this demon for years. There's great joy in watching your children grow and develop. First steps, first time running, talking using more and more words, beginning to understand complex issues and have deeper conversations. All of this has been taken from this Father by the powers of darkness. We don't know how this happened but he begs Jesus for compassion.

Jesus's response is fascinating and instructive. First, he mildly rebukes this father for even suggesting that he may not be able to deliver this boy from a demon. Look at the beginning of verse 23. The man was probably hesitant because of the earlier failure of the disciples. But Jesus wants to make it very clear that this will be no problem for him. Then he says something that we need to talk about at the end of verse 23.

After rebuking the man Jesus exhorts him to exercise faith because of the power of faith. Some people take these words of Jesus to mean that if you simply believe firmly enough you will get what you want. But that misses the entire point of faith. Faith is a focus on the object, not on what I want, even if what I want is a good thing, like a child being delivered.

This promise does not mean we can get whatever we want through faith. It means that faith connects us to the power and heart of almighty God and puts us in a position where we trust His purposes and plans. Faith becomes powerful because God works in and through people who trust Him.

If you read Hebrews 11 closely you will discover that those whom the Bible honors for demonstrating faith very rarely received what they wanted in this life.

Faith is not a means to prosperity. Take Moses for example in Hebrews 11:24-27. Where was his faith focused? On the unseen God and His plans. Therefore, faith become the powerful reality in his life that enabled him to endure adversity and be God's instrument to lead His people out of Egypt.

And I think that is what Jesus is getting at in verse 23. Faith puts us in a position to see the sovereign God of the universe do His work. And that brings us to our 3<sup>rd</sup> lesson.

- **Faith is Fixated (vv. 24-27)**

We have already talked about this some, but faith is fixated on Jesus. I'm not sure I can find a clearer example of true faith in Scripture than verse 24. The essence of faith here is turning from self and fixing attention on Christ. What does this man do? He expresses his desire to believe, but also knows he is too weak on his own for this. He does not even trust his own belief. Instead, he knows where help is to be found.

*"True faith is always aware how small and inadequate it is. The father becomes a believer not when he amasses a sufficient quantum of faith but when he risks everything on what little faith he has, when he yields his insufficiency to the true sufficiency of Jesus."* – James Edwards

There are several lessons we can learn here. First, faith starts where you are and looks at Jesus. Faith is not concerned with self. If you turn your attention toward your level of faith you are no longer fixated on the object of faith. The man's cry here is faith because he addresses it to Jesus.

Second, faith, in the biblical sense, is in a person. So, what does it mean to exercise faith in a person? People are very fond of saying, "it's all about a relationship with Jesus" but what does that emphasis on his person mean for faith?

We tend to think of faith as mental assent to a series of propositions. In other words, we read a list of statements; Jesus is God, Jesus died on the cross, Jesus rose from the grave, and we respond by saying, Yes, those statements are true.

But that reduces Jesus to a series of statements. So, what does it mean to trust a person? What does it mean for me to trust Bethany, my wife?

Because faith is personal it must involve the whole person; mind, will and actions. So, there are truths about Jesus to be believed, they are the good news spoken of in Mark 1. But faith's response to those truths is to not just know them and affirm them but to be inclined toward them with your desires. To recognize them as GOOD news. Faith means to be attracted to Jesus and what he has done. To be persuaded or convicted of those truths.

When you are persuaded of the trustworthiness of a person you will also act out of that conviction. When I was drawn to Bethany I acted on that movement of my mind and will and performed actions in line with that relationship. I came to trust her, believe her words, and act out of my relationship with her.

This man throws himself and his hopes for the future completely on Jesus. Faith says, if you do not do this for me, it will not happen and I cannot do it on my own.

Third and finally concerning the fixation of our faith, faith is always a gift. Notice that the man cries out to Jesus for help. He believes Jesus is a person who is both able to give help and willing to give help. He trusts His character and so he acts based on that trust. All of this is faith and Jesus loves to give good gifts. Look what happens in verses 25-27. This helps us to turn our attention to Him and expect to receive from him, because we know that all is a gift and we can trust Him to give good gifts.

Here's where this is hard for us in every day life. This man saw his son healed immediately. We don't always get what we desire immediately or ever. But faith looks to God and says, I trust you as a person who is both sovereign and good. Therefore, I trust you to bring about what I need most in my life, even if that thing is uncomfortable in the moment or for the next 10 years. But I know you are loving and gracious and so I can trust you to oversee every detail of my life.

Regardless of circumstances, faith stays fixated on the character of the giver. But faith that is fixated will always be faith that is demonstrated.

- **Faith is Demonstrated (vv. 28-29)**

Here we see something that has happened before. The disciples ask for clarification once they are away from the crowd. Look at verse 28.

It makes a lot of sense that they would ask this because these very same disciples have cast out demons before. Remember back in 6:7-13 when Jesus sends them out in pairs and they carry his authority?

So, what is the difference this time? Apparently they had lacked true faith and had been focused on self. How had they shown their lack of faith? Look at verse 29.

It's one thing to claim that we have faith, it's another thing to put that faith into action by prayer. What is prayer? Prayer is when we look to God and His character and ask him to do what we can't do. Prayer is the demonstration of faith.

*"Prayer is the focusing and directing of faith in specific requests to God. Both faith and prayer testify that spiritual power is not in oneself but in God alone, and both wait in trust upon his promise to save."* – James Edwards

It seems that the difference between chapter 6, when they could cast out demons, and chapter 9, when they couldn't was a reliance on the power and authority of Jesus. Jesus says that reliance is shown by a commitment to prayer.

I have to be honest with you this morning. When I do not have time to pray in my day or when I feel as though spending 30 minutes in prayer is time lost that could be spent accomplishing my to do list; when I feel that way I am showing a profound lack of faith. I feel that way because I don't genuinely believe that I need God to be at work in my life. Instead, I am dependent on self and so prayer seems to be a waste of time that could be spent fixing the universe.

But, when I set aside the time to come humbly before God, put my smart phone away, and be in His presence for a while, I am demonstrating faith in His sovereign and good care of the universe. I am aligning my feelings and perspective with the truth of His goodness.

So, these are 4 lessons concerning faith that the disciples needed to learn. You cannot walk on this road of discipleship without faith in Jesus. But keep in mind the warning concerning our discussion of faith. We had the opportunity at the camp ground yesterday to do a little archery. It's challenging and fun. When you shoot an arrow from a bow at a target, you must keep your eyes on the target. If you only look at the arrow on the bowstring, you won't be a very good shot. Stay focused on the target.