

# A Faith that Moves Mountains

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*Mark*

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Please turn with me in your Bibles to Mark 9. We did finish our series in Nehemiah last Sunday after some attempts to finish it previously and before we move into our next series, I wanted to spend some time going through some passages that have been on my heart or have been specially on my mind. This is one that in our men's Bible study on Friday mornings that we looked at some time ago. We've been looking at the subject of faith and what saving faith is, the assurance of faith in a study of the book, "The Gospel Mystery of Sanctification," by Walter Marshall, and this passage was one that has come up a couple of times and just really ministered to me. We're looking at chapter 9, verse 14 of Mark through verse 29, these 16 verses in the gospel of Mark and the subject really is, the point of this passage is faith. It's a portrait, this passage presents us with a portrait of the faith that moves mountains, it's a portrait of mighty faith here in this passage, and that we'll see that there's a contrast between the disciples' lack of faith and this mighty faith that moves mountains, and what is astonishing is when you really look carefully at the portrait of this mighty faith, it's not that impressive and there's really encouragement in that because we need more faith. We need to exercise our faith, that is, we need to act on it and we're going to see a man who does that in this passage and who experiences the wonderful power of God to transform his circumstances and the circumstances of his son.

So a portrait of the faith that moves mountains is the subject and we're going to look at a passage that describes for us just in a very profound way the presence and power of evil that is still at work in this world. We're going to look at a boy who is in the grip of demonic possession, see his helplessness, the utter helplessness of his father, the despair that is caused by this prolonged suffering, this unbreakable bondage, his helplessness and hopelessness, inability of the disciples to deal with this difficulty and the profound sadness that the presence and power of evil bring into our lives and we see the reality of life in a fallen world. There's a real contrast and we're going to look at this more clearly as we move along through the passage but in the providence of God, the disciples, three of the disciples have been with Jesus up on the mountaintop and have witnessed the transfiguration of the Son of God, that is, the unveiling of the glory of God. They have been on the mountaintop, they come down from the mountain and they encounter this grizzly scene. Three of the disciples were with him, Peter, James and John, so the four, Jesus, Peter, James and John, up on the mountain, the glory of God, they come down from the mountain and they encounter the reality of life in a fallen world in all of its

ugliness, in all of its helpless and hopeless despair, and in this we're reminded that when we find ourselves in the reality of what it is to live in this fallen world as born-again Christians, those of us who have come to faith, saving faith in Jesus Christ, we have been transformed in our innermost being and yet we still live in a world that is racked with sin, that is under the dominion of the evil one, as John says in 1 John 5, the whole world lies in the power of the evil one. After the cross, after the resurrection, this is still a reality and though we very rarely see demonic possession expressed like this, Satan's common, more common path is to be covert, hidden, not to be overt and open, as we see in this passage, but his presence and his dominion and his power are just as ugly even when not seen. The power of sin for a believer, we're set free from the reign of Satan, Satan cannot control a believer and yet he still deceives, he still tries to devour. Then we have a sin nature that finds affinity with the wickedness of this world and we find ourselves at times in a sense of helplessness and hopelessness. Can I never overcome this sin? Will I ever change? Why can't I?

Those that we love, that we try to help, that we see the power of bondage in this world and this passage has great hope for us. It gives us, in a very real sense, the key. That's not meaning that it's something that you take and apply one time and everything is changed forever. No, this is a call to a lifestyle but it is the key element and the key element is faith, and not just a faith that knows and believes but a faith that acts on what it knows and believes.

Faith biblically is not like the world thinks, the world says you just have to have faith, you've just got to believe. They talk a lot about faith but to the world faith is basically positive thinking, that is, you name it, you claim it. You declare what you want and you believe that you're going to have it and you get it. It kind of makes you God, if you really look at it. And a lot of Christians, supposed Christians talk like that. That is anything but Christian. I'm not saying that the people who are deceived in that are definitely not Christians. No, some of them are and they've just missed, they haven't read their Bible very carefully, but faith in the Bible is something that is a response to the word of God. It's not originating as something that originates in the heart, that we determine what we want. No, God tells us what we can have. God tells us what he has done and we trust in his word. Faith is believing the word of God and trusting in the word of God. Faith is not something we originate but it's the response to the word of God, to the promise of God, and it's a reliance upon the character of God, the person of God, and this passage tells us that faith is the key, that is, to knowing what God really has said in his word and relying on that promise in faith and acting on it, that's where, that is what moves mountains.

And I mentioned moving mountains because it doesn't come up in this passage so much but it comes up in the parallel passage. This story of this demon-possessed little boy is recounted for us also in Matthew's gospel, chapter 17, and Luke's gospel, chapter 9. And in Matthew 17, you'll see that Jesus basically says, "If you have faith as a mustard seed, you can move mountains," in response to the disciples' question, "Why could we not cast out this demon?" Jesus says, "You didn't have enough faith and you didn't exercise the faith that you have."

But what is super-encouraging is the man, the hero of the story other than Jesus, Jesus is always the hero, but the human example to us of one who lays hold of Christ and his power is a man whose earnest cry is, "Lord, I believe, help my unbelief." That is the man who lays hold of the power of God and moves mountains in this passage. Our God is a God who loves to show his power in the hearts of those who know they have no power of their own and who rely upon him in complete trust and surrender to give us what he thinks is best for us. It's not that we determine what we want and we lay hold of it. No, God tells us what we need and if we're willing to realign ourselves and see what we really need, is what God knows we need, not what we think we need. Isn't that just common sense? Do you think you know better what you need than God? We do a lot but it's really foolish, isn't it?

So we see in this a portrait of mountain-moving faith, faith that overcomes. Look with me at verse 14, Mark 9.

14 When they came back to the disciples, they saw a large crowd around them, and some scribes arguing with them.

Now this "they," the four people in the "they" is Jesus, James, John and Peter. When they came back to the other nine disciples, 12 disciples, three were on the mountain with Jesus, nine are still down in the valley. When they come down from the mountain to the disciples, they saw a large crowd around them and some scribes arguing with them.

15 Immediately, when the entire crowd saw Him, they were amazed and began running up to greet Him. 16 And He asked them, "What are you discussing with them?" 17 And one of the crowd answered Him, "Teacher, I brought You my son, possessed with a spirit which makes him mute; 18 and whenever it seizes him, it slams him to the ground and he foams at the mouth, and grinds his teeth and stiffens out. I told Your disciples to cast it out, and they could not do it." 19 And He answered them and said, "O unbelieving generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring him to Me!" 20 They brought the boy to Him. When he saw Him, immediately the spirit threw him into a convulsion, and falling to the ground, he began rolling around and foaming at the mouth. 21 And He asked his father, "How long has this been happening to him?" And he said, "From childhood. 22 It has often thrown him both into the fire and into the water to destroy him. But if You can do anything, take pity on us and help us!" 23 And Jesus said to him, "'If You can?' All things are possible to him who believes." 24 Immediately the boy's father cried out and said, "I do believe; help my unbelief." 25 When Jesus saw that a crowd was rapidly gathering, He rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, "You deaf and mute spirit, I command you, come out of him and do not enter him again." 26 After crying out and throwing him into terrible convulsions, it came out; and the boy became so much like a corpse that most of them said, "He is dead!" 27 But Jesus took him by the hand and raised him; and he got up. 28 When He came into the house, His disciples

began questioning Him privately, "Why could we not drive it out?" 29  
And He said to them, "This kind cannot come out by anything but prayer."

Let us pray.

*Father, we come asking just now as we just read, Lord, that we know we need to pray. We always need to pray and not to faint, and prayer is our expression of dependence upon You. It is the expression and the exercise of faith. We come asking You to bless us with Your word this morning. We come knowing, Lord, that we are so much like the disciples and like these people in the story that Jesus said, an unbelieving generation. We have little faith and we don't exercise our faith. Help us, Lord. Show us a more excellent way. Show us how to walk in it that we might be pleasing to You, that we might know You more and love You more and become more like You. Be glorified in our lives. We pray in Your name, Lord Jesus. Amen.*

Portrait of a faith that moves mountains. I want to consider this under four points this morning to kind of help us look at this. The first point is just a chaotic scene. A chaotic scene. I mentioned there's this, they're coming from the mountain of transfiguration and in the providence of God, God allowed this to be what they encountered when they came down from the mountain and you have this, Mark is, the way Mark writes and we believe that Mark being an associate of Peter, that he's really giving us Peter's perspective. This is, in a sense, almost like Peter's gospel, the Apostle Peter. In fact, we have a Sunday morning Bible study on this book, thankfully they're not quite in chapter 9, they're a ways from that. Todd Guthrie is teaching it and he moves a little bit more like me than some people do as far as not quite rushing through a book. Is that the right way to say that? I don't rush through the books, do I? Anyway, so he's not yet here but he's teaching about, this is one of the things he's talked about in previous lessons is that Mark loves to use the word "immediately," and three times in the passage he says immediately and there's this movement in the book of Mark. And Jesus comes down from the mountain with the disciples and immediately there's this sense of movement and this chaotic scene. There's a large crowd around the disciples. They come back down to find the other nine disciples and there's a large crowd that has gathered and there's an argument going on.

So you can almost hear the noise. This argument is going on and this crowd has formed, and what we find out is that the crowd is formed because there is this chaotic scene unfolding where there is a demon-possessed boy who has been brought to the disciples, they've not been able to help him, and so all of this is, and he's experiencing violent seizures. Now what we see here, clearly many people have seizures, most people have seizures because of natural brain issues, and here the demon is actually acting somehow on the young man's brain partly through violently throwing him down over time and so one of the things that manifested is these seizures. So you see, they come down to a situation where a boy's had seizures by this demonic activity, foaming at the mouth. The disciples have been unable to help him. There's an argument going on. There's a crowd that has formed. It is a chaotic scene.

Secondly, this chaotic scene is because of a massive problem. The second point is: a massive problem. These first three points are pretty quick, the last point we're going to spend a little more time on. A massive problem. The problem is the demonic possession, the spiritual bondage, the tyrannical and malicious power of Satan, the enemy of our souls.

This problem is seen and described in verses 16 to 18. Jesus asked the question, he asked the question, "What are you discussing with them? What are you arguing about?" Probably asking his disciples. They're the ones having the argument. The scribes are arguing with the disciples but the disciples don't answer, the scribes don't answer, someone from the crowd actually answers the question and the someone from the crowd is the boy's father. He answers the question that Jesus asked, "What are you discussing with them?" He says in verse 17, "Teacher, I brought You my son, possessed with a spirit which makes him mute; and whenever it seizes him, it slams him to the ground and he foams at the mouth, and grinds his teeth and stiffens out. I told Your disciples to cast it out, and they could not do it."

After Jesus expresses his consternation at their unbelief, in verse 19 he says, "Bring him to Me." And we're told that they brought the boy to him. "When he saw Him," it's not clear in the text what who is "he" and who is "Him." The NASB that I'm reading takes it as when the boy saw Jesus, immediately the spirit threw him into a convulsion and falling to the ground he began rolling around and foaming at the mouth. I mean, think about that. Even the fact that God allowed this to happen again. I mean, Jesus is on the scene. Why is this happening a second time? Why is it happening right now? Doesn't the spirit know better than to do this? Now you see the violent power of evil. This is a massive problem, a deep bondage.

He asks his father in verse 21, "How long has this been happening to him?" I mean, again, just as you read the text of Scripture, you stop and you think about this. My tendency if I were Jesus and I had the power to deliver this young boy from, I mean this boy from this bondage, I would want to get right to it. I mean, this is an embarrassing scene. This is something awful. Evil is on display, the power of evil, and the anguish and just the humiliation for this boy and the father and the despair that is there but Jesus takes time to ask a question, "How long has this been happening to him?" God has a way of not doing what you expect him to do continually. He defies our expectations because our expectations are almost always wrong. We just want the wrong things. We want the right things at the wrong time. We want the deliverance to happen more quickly than it needs to. Sometimes God is doing something in the heart that is deeper. He could have quickly just come in as soon as he sees the boy, he didn't need to ask the question, "What are you guys arguing about?" He knows. He's God. He asked so that the disciples, he's asking them, "What are you arguing about?" Because the real focus is, one of the real focuses of this passage is their unbelief contrasted with the belief of this man, the father. This is a humbling passage and circumstance for the 12 that have been with him for three years at this point.

So Jesus asked the question when he first came up, "What are you discussing with them?" And they don't answer. They're silent and this boy's father cries out, "Teacher, I brought You my son, possessed with a spirit." This is what they're arguing about is the scribes are apparently mocking them and just telling them, "You're not from God. Jesus is not from God." Whatever. There is this violent discussion going on so Jesus asked that question, the man tells him what's going on. He says, "Bring him to Me." When he brings him to him, he allows the spirit to continue this work in him where he throws him down right in front of him, he's rolling around, foaming at the mouth. Jesus doesn't heal him quickly like I wish he would. It's an uncomfortable situation. You know, when you see something uncomfortable, you want it to stop quickly. Let's hide that. This doesn't need to be on display. Jesus is here now. Fix this. But he doesn't fix it immediately. In fact, I mean, think about this, the man is with Jesus, they bring the boy to him, he falls right in front of him doing exactly what the father said and Jesus turns from the boy and says, "How long has this been happening to him?"

You know, when God doesn't do what you want, it's because he does what is best for you and, of course, for his glory, but it's what's best for you. I think there's a couple of reasons he does this. The first is, Jesus is showing you and showing this man that he cares about his suffering. He's not just here to fix the problem quickly, he's here to meet this man and understand. He's saying, "How long have you been going through this?" He is a compassionate Savior. He is a sympathetic High Priest, the author of Hebrews says. He comes and he feels what we feel and think about what that means. If you've been going through something and somebody cares enough just to, "Listen, tell me what you've been going through. How long have you been dealing with this?"

That's the first reason, I think he's meeting him because, you see, we don't come to God just to receive his power and God just dispenses his power. No, we come to a person who wants a relationship with you. It's the relational heart of God. "I care about you and what you...I care about him too but I care about you and what you've been going through." Think about what this man had been going through. He talks about, he says, "From childhood. It has often thrown him both into the fire and into the water to destroy him." He's probably actually not a little boy, he's probably a little older but he's still his son and he's still apparently not a man and this father has spent his life dealing with this issue and at times it seems the spirit that has been attacking him has been wanting to kill him. It's thrown him into the fire. At this time in history, fires were everywhere because everybody is cooking on an open fire outside, everybody is warming themselves by fires or they're cooking by fire inside but a lot of times there's fires outside everywhere. And so this demonic spirit has thrown this boy into the fire again and again, and the father has had to go and grab him out of the fire, put him out. It's thrown him into the water trying to drown him and the father has had to rescue him. He's basically spent his life in anguish trying to keep his son alive, longing for his son to be delivered from this affliction.

Jesus cares, but there's a second reason I think he asks that question, he wants him to see the full weight of the problem. He wants him to consider just how massive this problem is. He wants him to be mindful of it so that he can fairly, he can honestly face the magnitude of his problem. God has a way of doing that. He wants us to see just how

massive the problem is so that we will stop trusting in ourselves completely. "How long has this been happening to him?" He's thinking back over all the years and all the anguish and all the desire to see him, and he's coming to terms with his utter helplessness. He's seeing, "I have no resources." You see, the place that faith operates is at the place where you know you have nothing, you have nothing, God must do it. So part of what God is doing in many of our lives, is he's trying to bring us to the point where you know you have nothing, and if you keep thinking you have something to contribute, you've got to do it, you've got to try harder, you've got to make something happen, you've got a lot farther to go.

Jesus wants him to see how massive the problem is because the problem is there whether you know how massive it is or not. It's there and it's as massive. It's not getting worse by Jesus asking him this, it's already that massive, he's just helping him to see it. It's like, you know, you go to the doctor for a CAT scan or an MRI and they're trying to find something that's already there. It doesn't make you sick when you do that, it exposes it, right? And so then they can deal with it hopefully. And God's business is to expose the brokenness, the twistedness that sin has done in our lives, the areas of bondage that are there. He wants to let us see them fully and clearly so that we can turn from them and rest in his great power.

So we see a chaotic scene, a massive problem, and there is this interesting, thirdly, third point, a series of contrasts. A series of contrasts. Verse 14, "When they came back to the disciples," really reminds us that where were they, and I've already talked about that briefly. They were on the mountain. They were on the mount of transfiguration. Look at verse 2 of this chapter, chapter 9. We'll read verse 1 also, chapter 9, verse 1, "And Jesus was saying to them, 'Truly I say to you, there are some of those who are standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God after it has come with power.'" Then when it says in the next verse, "Six days later," what he's talking about, he was prophesying that those who were with him would see the kingdom of God coming with power, they were going to see the transfiguration which happened six days later. And what they see, then, is the kingdom of God and its power fully unveiled.

Look what it says next, "Six days later," verse 2, "Jesus took with Him Peter and James and John, and brought them up on a high mountain by themselves. And He was transfigured before them." His appearance was radically changed. The word is metamorphoo, it is metamorphosis is to experience a complete outward transformation. His appearance was radically altered and he tells us about it and, again, this is Mark writing from Peter's viewpoint who was there on the mountain.

He was transfigured before them, verse 2, verse 3, "and His garments became radiant and exceedingly white, as no launderer on earth can whiten them." There is light shining out from him. The light is so bright and so powerful that his clothes, no matter what color they were, now are white with the brilliance of the light emanating out from him. This is the Shekinah glory of God emanating out from the man Christ Jesus. They were looking at a man one moment, and the next moment they see this man revealed and unveiled for who he truly is, God himself. This is what John was talking about when he said, "The

Word became flesh and dwelt among us and we beheld His glory." This is the supreme expression of that that John experienced along with Peter and James. They're seeing that the man, Christ Jesus, is God. He is the omnipotent one. He has all power. He is the omniscient one. He has all knowledge. He is the omnipresent one. He is present everywhere. Though he is the man Christ Jesus, truly fully man, he is also fully God.

It says, verse 4, "Elijah appeared to them along with Moses; and they were talking with Jesus." Elijah and Moses appear. They're able to tell these men who now appear before them, long since gone to heaven, appear and they are telling, they're talking with Jesus. What's that? Moses is the writer of the law, Elijah is the first prophet, the beginning of the prophetic ministry. The law and the prophets testifying to the one, "This is the one we were talking about. This is the one we have been waiting for. He is the one."

Peter said to Jesus, "Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three tabernacles, one for You, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah. For he did not know what to answer; for they became terrified." This is Peter telling you in his own, really in his own, "Hey, listen, I didn't know what to say. We were all scared to death because we know that to see God, to see God and live is impossible, that God has said, 'No man can see Me and live,'" and yet the Lord in his grace is allowing them to see and he's going to let them stay alive. But Peter's not sure at the moment that that's going to happen. He thinks they're doomed.

So when he says, "It's good for us. Hey, Lord, it's okay for us to be here. It's not a bad thing. Let's make three tabernacles, one for You, one for Moses and Elijah. We recognize, yes, now we understand that You are one of the big three." Jesus doesn't answer but the Father does, "Then a cloud formed, overshadowing them, and a voice came out of the cloud, 'This is My beloved Son, listen to Him!'" God answers Peter and he says, in a sense he says, relatively speaking, "Forget about Moses, forget about Elijah, this is My Son. This is the one. Listen to Him."

So they have just been shown that he is God, he is the fulfillment, the final word of God. Moses and Elijah were important but now the shadow is gone, the substance is here, everything we need is here, the kingdom of God has come, the reign and rule of God is here in the man Christ Jesus. But they're still processing and they haven't figure this all out, as we see as we continue reading through the gospel.

"All at once they looked around," verse 8, "and saw no one with them anymore, except Jesus alone." They have a discussion about Elijah and then right after that as they're walking down the mountain he says, "Don't tell anybody about this," because it is not his point at this moment to continue showing the world his glory. He's moved past the miracle, the display of his miracles, the phase of his ministry where he displayed his miracles in all of their glory to confirm what he's saying. Now he's moved past the miracle working time to the teaching time. That's one of the reasons if you notice, you might have had the question when Jesus says in verse 25, "When Jesus saw that a crowd was rapidly gathering, He rebuked the unclean spirit." Why does Mark say that? Because he doesn't want a huge commotion of all these people seeing this display of power because that's not the point now. "The point is what I am teaching, and the point is what

I'm going to demonstrate in going to the cross. I can't have anymore of the fervor of the messianic expectation."

In fact, when you read on down in verses 30 and 31, he's telling his disciples, "Listen," he didn't want anybody to know about this miracle because the people are all confused about what Messiah is. They think that the Messiah will come just to deliver them from their earthly bondage. They want an earthly liberator. They want someone to overthrow Rome and to bring in like David's kingdom again. But that's not why Jesus has come. He hasn't come to deal with our problems the way we think we need them dealt with. This is the whole problem with that whole name-it, claim-it thing. I mean, it's unbiblical but it's even so illogical, to think that you and I know what we need. We have no idea. We need God to tell us what we need and then when we understand that, we say, "Yes, this is what I really needed. I thought I needed that but that's the farthest thing I needed. I needed what You say." And what Jesus has come is not to deliver from earthly tyranny, Rome is still going to be in charge after he has resurrected and ascends to heaven, Roman oppression will still be a reality. He's come to deliver from spiritual oppression, the tyranny of sin and the certain end of all sinners' hell. He's come to remove that from those who would believe.

So you have the scene on the mountain and the reality in the valley. That reality in the valley is look at the commotion, look at the chaos, this contrast between the mount, the glory on the mountain and the ugliness in the valley. And the Christian life is really a movement between those two things, isn't it? Moments when you experience the beauty and glory of God and maybe a special time reading your Bible or praying and you just really commune with the Lord, fellowshiping with other believers in a worship service where the Lord really ministers to you and you're thrilled to follow Christ. Then Monday comes or sometimes Sunday afternoon comes. The reality of sinful people still haven't been fully set free from all of our struggles. We live in a world which is opposed to God.

So you have this contrast that you come back down from the mountain into the midst of the mundane. The second, this is number three, a series of contrasts. That was the first contrast, the mountain and the valley. That's A, 3A. 3B would be another contrast is the inability of the disciples' versus Jesus' ability. One of the things that's emphasized in the passage is the disciples' inability. The man says in verse 18, "I told Your disciples to cast it out, and they could not do it." The chapter ends, I mean, this story ends in verse 28 with the disciples privately asking Jesus, questioning him, "Why could we not drive it out?"

So you have a contrast between their inability and Jesus' ability and it's really something too when you think about that if you just turn a couple chapters over back to Mark 6, when he sent the 12 out on a mission, he sends them out by twos and he says in verse 7 of Mark 6, "He summoned the twelve and began to send them out in pairs, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits." He gave them authority over the unclean spirits. Look at verse 12, "They went out and preached that men should repent." Verse 13, Mark 6, "And they were casting out many demons and were anointing with oil many sick people and healing them."

So they went out and Christ had given them authority over unclean spirits and they were going out casting out demons but here they come to one they can't cast out and so the question is why? Why not now? Jesus says to them in our account here and what you have when you have these various gospel accounts is you have men who were there giving an account of what happened and the Spirit inspiring them to remember different parts of the conversation as you would have anytime you have eyewitnesses tell you what they saw. They see different things from different perspective, yet the substance is the same. It's interesting when they ask in verse 28, "Why could we not drive it out?" Jesus said to them, "This kind cannot come out by anything but prayer." When you read Matthew 17:19-20, they ask the same question and he says, "It's because you need faith, you need faith of a mustard seed." Well, is it faith or is it prayer? Yes. Prayer is basically the expression of faith. Prayer is faith in action. Faith believes that God is able and prayer is the laying hold of God in faith. Faith prays.

So you have the inability of the disciples' versus Jesus' ability that really gives way to a third contrast, the most important contrast, the inability of the disciples' versus the ability of the boy's father. That's what's really going on here is Jesus is teaching them about the smallness of their faith and the easiness with which they, the ease with which they don't exercise their faith because it's the father of the boy, it's the father's faith that overcomes. So that's the series of contrasts and that brings us to the final point because the final point of the message this morning, a portrait of a mountain-moving faith, so let's look at this mountain-moving faith. It's the faith of the father.

It's the faith of the father, really two main attributes of this faith, and the first is really surprising. The first attribute of his faith that moves mountains, it is very small. It is very small. Look what he says. Now it's faith and faith, what we're going to see is going to Jesus, and this man has got that right. He brought his son to Jesus. When there was a commotion and the crowd, there's this argument going on, Jesus comes down and he asked a question, he's talking to his disciples, the man interjects and says, "I brought my son." He's saying again, "Jesus, help me." And then he finally says, "Jesus, help me."

But it's a small faith because when Jesus asks him, "How long has he been like this," verse 21, and he answers him, he says, "From childhood. It has often thrown him both into the fire and into the water to destroy him." He says this, "But if You can do anything." Think about that. If you can do anything. That is a tiny little bit of faith. In fact, Jesus calls it out right away. He answers him, "If You can?" He confronts his lack of faith but he's saying, but he's still there asking Jesus. There's a kind of faith that thinks he could do it theoretically but never asks. That's not faith. Real faith acts. It moves.

The second thing about it is, this man's faith acts. It's small but it acts. He does go to Jesus in the first place. He does speak up when the crowd, they're surrounding him and he's talking to the disciples. And he does ask Jesus to help him. Even though he says, "If You can do anything, take pity on us and help us." This word "help" is a strong word. It pictures someone who is in great distress crying out for need and aid from someone. It's an emergency situation. "Please come, I have nothing I can do! Help me!"

"Take pity on us and help us." But it is a small faith. Jesus exposes the small faith by saying, "If You can?" All things are possible to him who believes." What he's saying is that God will do anything that he promises to do, everything that he's promised to do if you believe God will do. Not everything that you want, everything he has promised to do he will do if you believe.

"All things are possible to him who believes." The man, think about how he would hear that. All these years of suffering, all these years of disappointed hope, all these years hoping he's going to get over this, hoping something is going to happen, taking him to synagogue, taking him to the Pharisees, to the scribes, and now bringing him to the disciples hoping to find Jesus, not finding Jesus but finding nine out of 12 disciples, that's pretty good. "Surely they can do something. I know they've been around, I've heard they've been delivering people from demonic bondage."

Jesus says, "If You can?" All things are possible to him who believes." The boy's father realizes he's calling him to trust, he's calling him to express his faith and he says, "I do believe; help my unbelief. I do believe but I've got so much doubt," is what he's saying. "I believe that You're able but I have doubt." And the reality is that the greatest among us who has the greatest faith, there's still doubt. There's no perfect faith in this world. Some of us have different measures of faith, some of us have more faith than others, but the reality is all of us have doubt and there are times where every believer struggles with doubt and in the truest sense, even in the moments of greatest faith, there's some doubt still mingled in.

"I do believe; help my unbelief." But do you know what's amazing here is that is a more amazing expression of faith than at first meets the eye. What is he saying? He's saying, "I do believe. I've got doubt." But the key thing he says is, "Help my unbelief." He's saying, "I believe that You are able to heal my son but I'm struggling with doubt, but I believe that You can help me with my doubt." He casts himself completely, honestly and transparently upon the Son of God and one of the things that is holding some of you back is that you are not honest with God about your unbelief. You're pretending. You're thinking that God doesn't see your unbelief and you're pretending that you don't wrestle with doubt, you're pretending that things are better than they are, and as long as you're doing that, you're a dissembler, you're a hypocrite, and you're exalting yourself in pride because you're not acknowledging how weak and little your faith is. You're acting like it's something that it's not. God resists the proud but he gives grace to the humble and when you say, "I believe; help my unbelief," you're acknowledging, "My faith is so small but I believe You can help me." You're casting yourself on the goodness of God, the promises of God, that he, as he shows in his word over and over and over again, he loves to help those who cannot help themselves. You're not to gin up more faith. No, you don't do that. You have no power to do that. Faith is a gift and yet what you have, God commands us to believe and so he calls us as we see his word, "Lord, I know I'm supposed to believe. I know that this is true yet I'm struggling to believe. Help me." That is a prayer God will always answer. When that's really from your heart and you're honestly transparently baring your soul to God, he will not turn you away.

I was reading Psalm 136 this morning and it basically is a series of phrases that talks about the creation, then it talks about the salvation of the Jews. It's like God created the heavens for his lovingkindness is everlasting. He created the earth for his lovingkindness is everlasting. He created the sun and the moon for his lovingkindness is everlasting. He created all living things for his lovingkindness is everlasting. Then he goes on to talk about he delivered Israel from Egypt for his lovingkindness is everlasting. He brought the plagues upon Pharaoh for his lovingkindness is everlasting. The one thing that you have in those 36, I don't know how many verses, chapter 136, it's about 30, every single verse ends with that "for His lovingkindness is everlasting."

That word "lovingkindness" in the New American Standard, I think it's the best translation of that word, by the way, the ESV translates it "steadfast love," I think it's better "lovingkindness." Because what it means is it's chesed, it's the Hebrew word chesed, one of the key words of the Old Testament, and the chesed of God is his attribute of seeing another person in need, in anguish, in despair, and the heart of God is moved with kindness, moved with compassion to address and to help. It's God's nature to want to help and the emphasis is on that. That's why I say it's better "lovingkindness" than "steadfast love." His love is steadfast but it's not because of his covenant promises, it's actually, that's what the idea of steadfast love I think is saying. It's because of his character that led to his covenant promises. Which came first, the chicken or the egg? In this case, the character of God. He is a God of chesed, lovingkindness. He sees you in your misery. He cares as a father has compassion, chesed, or that's actually another word for compassion on his children. So the Lord has compassion on those who hear him. His lovingkindness reaches to the heavens, Psalm 103.

This man casts himself on the chesed of God. "I believe; help my unbelief." The same word "help" is the word he said earlier in verse 22, "If You can do anything, take pity on us and help us." That is, "I'm in distress. I'm crying out for help." He says exactly the same word after he says, "'If You can?'" All things are possible to him who believes." Jesus says that, the boy's father says, "I do believe; help my unbelief. I was asking You before to run to our aid for my son, now I'm asking You to run to my aid for my doubt. Run to my aid." And Jesus responds and heals him. How good God is.

And you see, faith, the essence of faith is the dependence on God. You depend on his character, his power, his promise, and you bank everything on that. You may be struggling to find assurance of your salvation, one of the key things that you have to do that's a very common common experience, the most common actually, some people never struggle with assurance but you're in the minority, but some people never struggle over assurance because they don't understand salvation. Easy believism and all of that. In fact, I've had people say when I came to a Reformed understanding of things, I started doubting my salvation and that happens because you start looking at the Bible more carefully and the Bible says things in certain places like they're warnings, that those who think they're saved that are not saved. They are serious warnings. Jesus said, "Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name? Did we not cast out demons in Your name?' And I will say to them, 'Depart from Me, you who work lawlessness. I never knew you.'" He's saying that they had convinced themselves that

they were Christians but they never were. Earlier in that passage he says, "You'll know them by their fruits." 2 Corinthians 13 says that we are to test ourselves, to examine ourselves to see if we're in the household of faith. Is there evidence of real faith in me?

So you may have learned to look at your life and so as you look at your life, you lament the fact that there's not love, that there's not joy, that there's not peace, that there's not patience, that there's not kindness, you're not seeing growth in holiness like you wish and you look for the fruit. What are you to do? What this passage tells you is, yes, you look at that and you deal with that honestly but the thing you must do as you look at your fruit is go to the root, go to Christ. You can't keep looking at yourself. Look at yourself for a moment and look at Jesus for 10 moments. Look at yourself for a moment, look at Jesus for 10 more times and keep looking at Jesus and keep looking at Jesus and go to him and say, "Lord, I don't see love but You are all loving and You can love through me. Love through me. Lord, I don't see joy but You are the One who brings joy. You are the One who walked in joy. Even as You were a man of sorrows acquainted with grief, You were a man of great joy because Your delight was to do the will of Your Father. It was more precious than Your food. You always were enjoying God every moment of Your life. You are my righteousness."

And so you look to him and you honestly assess your soul but you cast yourself upon Christ. That is the essence of saving faith, to cast yourself upon Jesus and to keep casting yourself upon Jesus, and to keep honestly facing all the deficiency in me. Everything that is in me is no good, nothing profitable that can commend me to God. But Jesus is everything necessary to make you and me right with God. His perfect life, tempted in every way yet without sin. A perfect record of righteousness. Then bearing in his body our sins, becoming sin on the cross, having our sins imputed to him and our guilt and the wrath of God poured out upon him on the cross. He drank the cup of God's wrath to the full and he says those wondrous victorious words, "It is finished!" before he died. He's taken all of our sin out of the way. He gives us his righteousness and if you understand the poverty of your own soul and you reach out to him in faith, you will be saved. And it's not about how much you believe, it's about the one in whom you believe. It's not about the power of your faith, it's about the power of the one in whom your faith is resting. It's not the magnitude of it.

I love this. Turn over to Mark 17. I told you this is the parallel passage, the same event. I'm sorry, Matthew 17. There is no Mark 17. It's always helpful when you make a mistake like that. Everybody knows it's definitely not Mark 17.

Matthew 17:19, same story. "The disciples came to Jesus privately and said, 'Why could we not drive it out?'" So this, what you have, the reason you have this, you know, it's not like we're getting every single word that was ever said. Of course not. If you just take the words and you read the gospel of Matthew, you can read it in a couple of hours. What you have is summaries of larger conversations, Spirit-inspired summaries that are essence of what was said and they're absolutely true. But here you have that question came and he says, obviously he says pray like we saw in Mark, but he also says this, "The reason that you were not able to drive it out is because of the littleness of your faith; for truly I say to

you, if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible to you."

Mustard seed faith, that's all you need. The mustard seed was the smallest seed in the agriculture of Israel. The seeds that they planted, wheat, barley, all the other seeds that they had, the smallest seed anybody planted was the mustard seed. Tiny, tiny seed. This is how much faith you need, Jesus says. Mustard seed faith is what anybody that's saved has and the issue is, I mean, you could have more because we do have larger measures of faith and your faith does grow and we are called to grow in faith, yes, we are. But it's so good to know that you don't have to have it all, you know, you don't have to act like you believe so much more than you do. No, you just have a mustard seed of faith and a mustard seed of faith that is expressed in trust to Christ moves mountains. That's what he says. If you have the faith of a mustard seed, you can move a mountain.

Now he's not talking about the silliness of topography and moving a real physical mountain, he's talking about something much more amazing than that, he's talking about casting out a demon and delivering a boy who had been in bondage his whole life. He's talking about overcoming a drug problem, or overcoming sexual bondage to pornography. He's talking about a habitual pattern of anger and abusive language coming out of your mouth. He's talking about things like that that have been ingrained and entrenched and are so massive that there's no hope for you to overcome it, the things that lead to despair and an awareness and asking how and somebody can come to you and say, "How long has it been this way?" From childhood.

God loves to deliver us from those kinds of problems but, listen, the way he does it is through faith and the first part of it is believing that he wants it done, believing that he'll do it in his own time and he won't do it exactly the way we want it. We want it done yesterday and a lot of times we want it done yesterday because for the wrong reasons. The reasons I want to overcome my sin a lot of times is because it embarrasses me. Think about that. That's not a godly motivation. It's inconvenient. It's bad earthly consequences to sin. I want to be delivered from this now. "You've got more to learn, Ty. You've got to come to hate your sin the way I hate it." You've got to see it for what it really is and you've got to see your complete lack of resources and you've got to rest in Jesus, and a little bit of faith in a mighty Savior is all that's necessary.

So you keep expressing that and one of the ways you do it is you pray. Back to our gospel account. These come out by prayer and it doesn't mean one prayer, it means you pray and you pray and you pray and you pray, and you believe that God is a God who is a God of lovingkindness, "And though You've not yet brought the deliverance that I want, You will in Your time, and somehow You're even changing me through the process of me getting up off the ground and trusting You and resting in You again, and preaching the gospel to myself when I sin and realizing that Jesus has died for me and, Lord, You can deliver me." And that faith and that faith, the faith of a mustard seed will move mountains. That's the reality of the gospel.

And we're to help each other. We're to pray for each other. We ought to pray. If we believe what we say we believe, we ought to pray. God help us to do that and may we because we begin to pray more and we trust more and we exercise our little faith no matter how small it is, may we see the Lord move mountains. That's what he wants. If our hearts are right, he gets all the glory and we get to see the wonder of his power.

Let's go to the Lord in prayer.

*Father, we thank You for the glory of the gospel, that Jesus Christ has done everything necessary to save sinners like us, that there is no bondage that is too deep, no sinfulness and wickedness that is too great, that Jesus is able to save to the uttermost the one who comes to Him. He is a mighty Savior and His might is still available and is intended to be continually delivering us more and more and more, those of us who come to faith in saving faith in Christ. He wants to keep delivering us. Lord, help us. We pray this in His wonderful name. Amen.*

As we close this morning, we're going to sing in honor again of those who have served our nation or are serving our nation. Hymn #880, "Eternal Father, Strong to Save." Will you stand with me as we will sing these four verses as we close. Keep in mind that these are ones who do not say, "I have good skills." They are the one who says, "God is sovereign. I continually ask Him to protect me and for Him to save me." And that is what this hymn does in every verse. Let's sing this together.

"Eternal Father, strong to save,  
Whose arm hath bound the restless wave,  
Who bidd'st the mighty ocean deep  
Its own appointed limits keep:  
O hear us when we cry to Thee  
For those in peril on the sea.

O Christ, the Lord of hill and plain  
O'er which our traffic runs amain  
By mountain pass or valley low;  
Wherever, Lord, our brethren go,  
Protect them by Thy guarding hand  
From every peril on the land.

O Spirit, whom the Father sent  
To spread abroad the firmament;  
O Wind of heaven, by Thy might  
Save all who dare the eagle's flight;  
And keep them by Thy watchful care  
From every peril in the air.

O Trinity of love and pow'r,  
Our brethren shield in danger's hour;  
From rock and tempest, fire and foe,  
Protect them wheresoe'er they go;  
Thus evermore shall rise to Thee  
Glad praise from air and land and sea."

Please be seated for just a minute. One of the things that at Providence that we want to do, we just want to tell you this, that when folks unite with our fellowship, what a joy it is, we see that as such a great blessing God brings believers and unbelievers to become believers and become part of the church, and then at times the Lord sends them other places, and when that happens, it's a bittersweet moment. We always hate to say goodbye in this world of those that have become a part of our family, but at the same time it's a time of excitement and so we like to send off members with our blessing and with everyone knowing what's happening. So if you need to leave, you're moving to another place and you want to let us know, we'd like to know before you go, not just tell us, "Hey, I'm in California now. I wanted to let you know." That would be better than nothing, us wondering where did they go, but it would be better to tell us ahead of time so we can send you off.

Well, we want to take a few moments today to talk about a young man that has meant a lot to our church, Dryden Joss, if you'll come up to the front now, I'm going to make you come up here and stand and afterwards if you want to come by and see him. Dryden has been in our church for a couple of years. He's a wonderful young man who loves the Lord, loves the truth. He joined our church recently and he's finding his way in life. No, but he joined recently. He told me awhile back he was going to be moving and he had wanted to join but he said he thought maybe it's too late. I said, "No, go ahead and join the church before you go because it would be good for us to be able to send you off as a part of our body and that will help when you go and find a church in Lynchburg. He's moving to Lynchburg, Virginia to be closer to his family and to pursue a Master's degree in theological studies at Liberty. He's really feels like he's on mission to spread the word of God to Generation Z through online videos and he's been working on those already and has some videos that are online. If you'd like to be able to see those, you can email him or contact him and in a few years he'd like to be making these videos fulltime and travel and try to minister to young people who are wrestling with the issues of faith.

So what an exciting thing. I mean, we're just thrilled that this is his heart. We're proud of him. Like I said, he loves the Lord, loves the word, and his parents are here. Would you guys stand up for a moment to let us see you? I won't keep you standing. That's his mom and dad and a great blessing to have you guys with us and thank you for sharing Dryden with us for these last years and we just want you to know we're praying for you, brother. So everybody now knows what's happening in your life. Feel free to reach out to him and encourage him in any way you can, and keep in touch with us, please, too. That's the other thing you're now responsible to do. Everybody has seen you do this so you've got to do that, stay in touch with us.

Let's stand now. We're going to pray for Dryden in our benediction and then he's going to stay at the front and you come speak a word of encouragement to him before you leave.

Let's pray.

*Father, how grateful we are for Your faithfulness in our lives. We're thankful that when You begin a good work in us, You will complete it to the day of Christ Jesus. We thank You for the work that You're doing in Dryden's life and for just the grace that we see in him, at work in him. We pray that You would continue to increase his faith, help him as we talked about today to walk in faith. And Lord, in this next step in his life, to make him a more fit instrument in Your hands. We pray that You would give him wisdom and help him grow in his knowledge of the Scriptures, make him a man mighty in the word of God and use him for Your glory.*

*Father, we do commit ourselves all to pursue the Lord Jesus Christ with deeper and more active faith. Make us men and women of prayer. Make us people who though we have little faith are honest with You, transparent and always casting ourselves upon Christ. We're so glad, Lord, we're so amazed that Your invitation is always, "Come. Come unto Me you who are weary and heavy-laden. I will give you rest." We praise You, Lord Jesus. Be magnified in the lives of Your people this week we pray for Your glory. Amen.*