

June 21, 2015  
Sunday Evening Service  
Fathers' Day  
Community Baptist Church  
643 S. Suber Road  
Greer, SC 29650  
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*To Ponder . . .*

Questions to ponder as you prepare to hear from Mark 9:14-29.

1. What would you have done if you were the father whose son was demon possessed?
2. List some characteristics of your faith.
3. What do you think it would take to get you to the place where this father found himself so that he cried, "Help my unbelief!"?
4. Do you submit to Jesus' commands 1) better than, 2) the same as, or 3) less than, the demon did?

### **I BELIEVE; HELP MY UNBELIEF!**

#### **Mark 9:14-27**

On Mother's Day I hypothetically asked what our moms received on that special day. I will ask the same about fathers. What did you get for Father's Day? Of course we all expect that dads get something because this is the day when we honor fathers. What better way is there to honor a father than to buy him some useless trinket that will break or be sold at a yard sale next year? It doesn't take much deep thought to realize there are many things a father could receive for Father's Day that would be very valuable to him. For example, many fathers would love to receive the loving loyalty of their wives. Some long for the respect of their children. Then there are the fathers who would just love to receive a couple of days without physical or emotional pain.

What about faith? "Faith?" you ask. What kind of a dad would like to receive faith on Father's Day? Or we might narrow the gift down to increased faith. That is to conclude that the father in question is already born again but would like to live in closer fellowship with God the loving heavenly Father.

Again we wonder, "What kind of father would like to receive increased faith?" A humble father would. A humble father recognizes his deficiencies, his inabilities, his need to know and trust God better. The disciples, for the most part, were guys like that. In Luke 17, we read the account of when Jesus warned the disciples to guard against doing anything that would cause a child to sin (17:1-2). Then Jesus went on to teach the disciples that even if a brother sinned against them seven times in one day, and seven times asked for forgiveness, they were required to forgive (17:3-4).

We are not surprised that the disciples as a whole responded to the Lord with this request: "Increase our faith!" (17:5). They realized that the responsibility of not causing children to sin and forgiving offenders required more faith than they had. Notice that they did not ask for faith. They already had that gift. God the Son and Father were already the object of their faith. The disciples truly did believe. But if they were going to live in a way that brings glory to God, they humbly acknowledged that they needed growing faith.

In response to the disciples' request, Jesus told them that they needed to have faith that grew exponentially like a mustard seed does. That little microscopic seed can grow into a bush ten feet tall. Jesus illustrated hypothetically that such growing faith can command a mulberry tree to be uprooted and cast into the sea. Again, that was not literal but a hyperbolic illustration of a great ability to trust God to answer prayer.

There was another man, a father to be exact, who expressed a similar humble desire for increased faith. His son was demon possessed and no one could help. He taught us how to come to grips with the reality of our need and how to ask for help—which self-sufficient, independent dads are not prone to do.

#### **The Problem (vv.14-19).**

This story illustrates for us how inability in any particular area or problem often results in arguments (vv.14-16). In this case, it was Jesus' followers who were unable to meet a need. When Jesus and the three special disciples showed up after coming down from the mountain, an argument was ensuing. *And when they came to the disciples, they saw a great crowd around them, and scribes arguing with them (v.14).*

We know from the following verses that a father had brought his demon-possessed son to the disciples. They were not able to cast out the demon. The problem existed in spite of the fact that Jesus had previously given them the power to cast out demons (Mat. 10:8). That was a problem in and of itself. But that might not have been the root problem. The fact that the religious teachers, the experts in the law, were arguing hints that the topic was Jesus' power and authority over spiritual powers.

So there was a smaller group gathered around a distraught father and a wide-eyed, wondering son arguing. The next thing we read is that the crowd was suddenly surprised by Jesus' unexpected appearance. *And immediately all the crowd, when they saw him, were greatly amazed and ran up to him and greeted him (v.15).* Being intently engaged in the argument, no one noticed Jesus approaching. They must have responded like kids who get caught with their hands in the cookie jar. The people, including those who were arguing, were greatly surprised to see Jesus.

How odd that the only One who could offer the solution to the problem caused surprise. That is too often how it is for dads. We want to be good leaders. We want to win our family's respect by giving good advice and making good decisions. But when a serious problem arises, we are very slow to turn to Jesus. In fact, we might be surprised and even agitated if someone suggests, "What would Jesus do?"

That there was a problem was too obvious to ignore. Jesus asked about the problem. *And he asked them, "What are you arguing about with them?" (v.16).* Does that mean that Jesus was unaware of the topic of argument? Not at all, because while Jesus laid aside His heavenly glory to come to earth, while He was here, He maintained some of His divine glory. At the same time, it seems plain that it would not have required supernatural omniscience to realize what

was transpiring. Even human common sense would have been able to quickly perceive what the problem was.

As we see Jesus in this picture asking what the problem was, we are reminded that our Lord Jesus still allows us to go to Him and acknowledge the problem. An important trait of humility is being able to admit need. The first step in our Lord solving our problem is for us to admit we have one.

We live in an age of make believe. Everyone has grown up in the pretend world of Hollywood, video games, and the internet which allows a person to present himself or herself according to imagination, not truth. By now we are quite familiar with the Rachel Dolezal story. She is the former head of the Spokane NAACP. She was dismissed from her position when it was learned that she was really not African-American as she pretended to be but is in reality fully Caucasian. In an interview on NBC's *Today Show* she insisted that though the facts prove that she is indeed white, she identifies as black.

In America, we have the freedom to pretend to be many different things or kinds of people. Men are allowed to pretend to be women and women are allowed to pretend to be men. But pretending to be a saint doesn't make Dad a saint. The first step in acknowledging our need is to quit pretending that we don't have one.

Jesus was on earth to glorify God. Here He taught the important lesson that in order to glorify God we must have faith (vv.17-29). The obvious problem is stated in verses seventeen and eighteen. A father's son was demon possessed. *(17) And someone from the crowd answered him, "Teacher, I brought my son to you, for he has a spirit that makes him mute. (18a) And whenever it seizes him, it throws him down, and he foams and grinds his teeth and becomes rigid."*

Someone from the crowd answered Jesus' question about the point of the argument. That "Someone from the crowd" was a father in a crisis. He confessed that he had brought his son to Jesus because he was possessed by a spirit. This reveals that the father knew something about Jesus. His response reveals that he believed to some extent that Jesus would be able to do something. He made a choice to bring the boy to Jesus based on a certain level of faith. No doubt the man had reached the end of his resources. What could he lose by

“trying Jesus”? That is a fair conclusion, but the father still had some belief based on his knowledge about Jesus’ past actions.

If we were experienced with such strong demon activity, we could be more sympathetic with the father. Demons are the agents of Satan. It is likely that they are the angels who fell when they allied themselves with Satan’s rebellion (Revelation 12:9). They might be the “sons of God” [elohiem] mentioned in Genesis 6:4. There are multitudes of them roaming the earth and often inhabiting willing individuals. The story of Jesus’ ministry reveals many confrontations with demons who indwelt people.

In our modern day of enlightenment, some people conclude that demonic activity was more intense in Jesus’ day because He was the presence of God. But there is plenty of demonic activity in cultures around the world, some more intense than others. One example of strong demonic influence might be Mexico. Arguing that abortion, divorce, and same-sex marriage is a sign that Satan had taken over the entire nation of Mexico, the Archbishop of San Luis Potosi, a former Archbishop, and a priest famous for his abilities in exorcism, performed an exorcism for the nation at Metropolitan Cathedral in San Luis Potosi on May 20.

In the story before us, we see that the father was willing to get help from the servants of Messiah. “*So I asked your disciples to cast it out, and they were not able*” (v.18b). The father was willing to make do with Jesus’ associates. Maybe he had heard that Jesus had also given them authority over Satan and demons (Mt. 10:8). Maybe he assumed that because these disciples were in continual fellowship with Jesus, they would have learned to do what He does.

Maybe fathers and people in general think the same kind of thing about us. Is it fair for people to assume that because God is holy, people who claim to be His children should exhibit the same kind of traits? Is it possible that if our neighbors, co-workers, or family members wanted to find God they would come to us who claim to know Him? Does anyone ever ask you to pray for them? Why do they do that? Maybe they assume that because we are “in touch” with the Master, we should be able to do the work of the Master.

***They were not able.*** Those are very disturbing words. How sad and disappointing this reality was to the needy father. What was the

problem? While the problem about the argument was stated in verses seventeen and eighteen, the deeper problem is stated in verse nineteen. *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”* (v.19).

The problem was a lack of faith. This almost certainly points out the fact that some people in the crowd had no faith at all. But at the same time, Jesus’ words seem to be directed at the nine failing disciples. They were unable to trust fully in God even though Jesus had taught how and why they should trust through many examples. The mulberry tree wasn’t budging (Luke 17:6).

In fact, the wording of Jesus’ response indicates weariness on His part. He wondered how long it was going to take to prepare these *little faith* guys to take over His ministry? This is a good reminder that serving Christ effectively with great faith is not a matter of human wisdom, strength, or ability. We all need divine help in the “faith” department.

### **The Solution (vv.20-27).**

Sin causes fathers to understand their need (vv.20-24). And sin becomes most obvious when Satan displays his power (vv.20-22a). As we read about this demon-possessed boy, we need to remember that demon possession was common and commonly displayed in that day. *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* (v.20).

Who is the *they* who brought the boy to Jesus? It really doesn’t matter. But it makes for a good story if the disciples who had failed were *they* who brought the boy to Jesus. They had enough faith in Jesus to obey His command to bring the child to Him.

When the spirit saw Jesus, it rebelled. They exist in continual rebellion against the authority of God. This was an unavoidable demonstration that God the Son possesses the same authority as God the Father. No doubt most of the people missed the demonstration. The picture is common in Jesus’ ministry. Demons, knowing that Jesus was about to command them to leave their victims, often lashed

out in rage against their victims. Demons hate humans because we are made in the image of God for the glory of God.

In response to the demon making a scene, Jesus gave the father of the boy an opportunity to express his concern. Again, Jesus was not looking for information when He *asked his father, "How long has this been happening to him?"* (v.21a). Rather, Jesus' question gave the father an opportunity to rehearse the problem. Rehearsing the problem would bring the need to the surface. There is no way that the father was going to review the long history of this problem and conclude that it was no big deal.

It wasn't that the father doubted the need. This poor father was convinced there was a great need. He described to Jesus that *"it has often cast him into fire and into water, to destroy him"* (v.22b). In short, the father told Jesus that bad stuff happened to his dear son. It was obvious the demon was bent on destroying the boy. Satanic work is always bent on the destruction of God's creation. The devil really does prowl around like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour (1 Peter 5:8). The frightening part is that Satan presents himself as enlightenment and his destructive work as freedom and liberty from restraints. Peter wrote, *They promise them freedom, but they themselves are slaves of corruption. For whatever overcomes a person, to that he is enslaved* (2 Peter 2:19).

Evidence of Satan's power reveals our need (vv.22b-24). Would Jesus not help if He could? The father cried out to Jesus, *"But if you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us"* (v.22b). We must acknowledge that the father had some faith or he would not have been talking to Jesus. Surly somewhere he had heard that Jesus was compassionate. Maybe he had heard how Jesus had healed scores of people, fed 5,000 and 4,000, and raised children from the dead. At any rate, the father believed Jesus could help "us." Yes, his son was the one with a problem. Loyal fathers know that when the son has a problem, the dad has a problem.

What to do about the problem was the issue. The father had enough faith to bring the boy to Jesus. But his faith was like the faith of many fathers who believe certain things about Jesus. They have a certain level of faith in religion, the church, the Bible and all that. That kind of faith is not sufficient for regeneration of the sinful heart.

That kind of faith might teach your kids to be religious, but it will never bring them face-to-face with the Savior.

Real faith, deep faith never wonders "if." *And Jesus said to him, "If you can! All things are possible for one who believes"* (v.23). Yes, it is true and right that we pray for God to respond in a particular way, "if" it is His will. Even while we pray like that, we have complete and absolute confidence that God is able. This man's faith was different than that. He doubted Jesus' ability to do the necessary work. Therefore, Jesus reminded the father that all things are possible where there is true faith. The man did not, nor do we, make requests of a limited God. True faith places no limits on God.

At the same time, true faith, complete and full dependance on God, is first submissive to the will of God. We do not wish to ask God for anything that is contrary to His will for us. We certainly do not desire for God to change His mind and do for us that which is not best for us in bringing us into conformity to His will and character.

Expanding faith requires and accepts help. *Immediately the father of the child cried out and said, "I believe; help my unbelief!"* (v.24). Crying out is a good sign. It indicates the needy person has come to the end of himself. We cry out for help when we realize that we are in deep trouble and there is no resource within ourselves to solve the problem. We cry out when we realize, like David did, the pit we are in is a pit of destruction. He sang, *I waited patiently for the LORD; he inclined to me and heard my cry. He drew me up from the pit of destruction, out of the miry bog, and set my feet upon a rock, making my steps secure* (Psalm 40:1-2).

Recognizing our need for greater faith is also a good sign. We who are born again certainly have faith in God. But trying to live for God's glory will cause us to see that we need increased faith. We really do not depend on God so seriously that we can say, "Without Him I am hopeless." Generally, our attitude is that we can make it on our own; and if things get too tough, we can always turn to God. We need to learn that praying "Give us this day our daily bread," is about more than food. Great faith is happy to depend wholly on God for daily, yea, moment-by-moment existence. When you reach this point and realize that your faith is weak and shallow, that you are like the disciples, a "little faith," cry out with this father, "Lord I believe, help my unbelief."

God's work increases a father's faith (vv.25-27). Jesus spoke a command and things happened. *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" (v.25).* The crowd came running because they expected something big was going to happen. It did. Jesus commanded the demon to depart once and for all and it had to obey.

Any time our Master gives a command, it should be considered something big. Generally, it is not. Jesus commands fathers to love Him, but do we obey? Jesus commands fathers to feed on His word, but do we obey? Jesus commands fathers to pray, but do we obey? Jesus commands fathers to love their wives, but do we obey? Jesus commands fathers to love their children and to teach them about Himself, but do we obey?

The Gospel accounts prove over and over that because He is gracious and compassionate, Jesus restores the broken and the sinful for the glory of God the Father (vv.26-27). But in the process, it sometimes looks as though Jesus' work of restoration makes things worse. *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" (v.26).* In essence, we could say that in this case the demon "slammed the door on the way out." Often when God moves our hearts to greater purity, when we confess and forsake sins, the enemy takes a parting shot at us.

Always Jesus gives new life. *But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up, and he arose (v.27).* Jesus could have commanded the boy, but He showed this bit of compassion instead. Do you suppose the father's faith was increased? Surely every time this father looked at his son, he was thankful for the lesson of faith Jesus taught him. When Jesus gives light, He gives newness of life. We are in good company to pray for that light through the increase of our faith.