

From Amazement to Faith

Following Jesus to the Cross: Part 1
Mark 9:14-29 (Mt.17:14-23, Lk.9:37-45) 8/3/2019

The best thing that can ever happen to you is for something to strengthen your faith. Amazement is not the same thing as faith, but this message will show you how to turn amazement into faith when you see or read about marvelous things God has done.

Excerpt:

The next time you're amazed at something God did—some amazing person he created, some amazing thing he did in Scripture, something amazing in his creation; don't just be amazed. Take the next steps. First of all, make it personal. Have a little conversation with God about it. "God, I realize that came from your hand. It's amazing, which means you're amazing." Connect the dots in a relational way with the source of that amazing thing. And then ask one more question: "God, if you can do that, what else can you do?"

Introduction.....	2
Watershed	2
The Disciples' Failure.....	3
Jesus's Pain	5
The Father's Unbelief.....	5
The Spirit Reacts to Jesus	6
Wrong If	6
Grace is Limited Only by Unbelief.....	6
Help My Unbelief	7
Worse Problem: Unbelief	7
Jesus Tests and Builds Faith	7
The Miracle.....	8
The Training	8
Turn Amazement to Faith	9
Summary.....	10

Mark 9:14 When they came to the other disciples, they saw a large crowd around them and the teachers of the law arguing with them. **15** As soon as all the people saw Jesus, they were overwhelmed with wonder and ran to greet him. **16** "What are you arguing with them about?" he asked. **17** A man in the crowd answered, "Teacher, I brought you my son, who is possessed by a spirit that has robbed him of speech. **18** Whenever it seizes him, it throws him to the ground. He foams at the mouth, gnashes his teeth and becomes rigid. I asked your disciples to drive out the spirit, but they could not." **19** "O unbelieving generation," Jesus replied, "how long shall I stay with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring the boy to me."

20 So they brought him. When the spirit saw Jesus, it immediately threw the boy into a convulsion.¹ He fell to the ground and rolled around, foaming at the mouth. **21** Jesus asked the boy's father, "How long has he been like this?" "From childhood," he answered. **22** "It has often thrown him into fire or water to kill him. But if you can do anything, take pity on us and help us." **23** "If you

¹ This is the last time we see Jesus encountering a demon in Mark.

can'?" said Jesus. "Everything is possible for him who believes." 24 Immediately the boy's father exclaimed, "I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!"

25 When Jesus saw that a crowd was running to the scene, he rebuked the evil spirit. "You deaf and mute spirit," he said, "I command you, come out of him and never enter him again." 26 The spirit shrieked, convulsed him violently and came out. The boy looked so much like a corpse that many said, "He's dead." 27 But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him to his feet, and he stood up.

28 After Jesus had gone indoors, his disciples asked him privately, "Why couldn't we drive it out?" 29 He replied, "This kind can come out only by prayer."

Introduction

Watershed

We left off last time with Jesus, Peter, James, and John coming down the mountain after the Transfiguration. And descending that mountain is really a good picture of where we are in the whole structure of Mark. Remember, Mark has two parts, with the climax of the book in the center. We just finished studying that climax—Peter's great confession, then the great confusion, Jesus' words about suffering and following him, and the Transfiguration. That's the continental divide of the book—everything in the first half points forward to that and everything in the second half points back to that. The first half points to it by establishing who Jesus is: He's the Christ, the Messiah, the Son of God, the almighty miracle worker who has absolute authority—authority to forgive sins, authority over demons, over the creation, over people's hearts, over the Word of God, and over the kingdom of God. That's Mark part 1 and it comes to a climax in the middle of the book where Peter says, "You are the Christ," and God the Father speaks from the cloud and says, "This is my son whom I love" and sends Moses and Elijah to vouch for Jesus as the fulfillment of the entire OT. The second half of Mark is about what Jesus came to do—suffer, die, and rise again; and that's the path all his followers must take as well. So Mark part 2 is about the cross and what it means to follow Christ as he makes his way toward that cross. And we saw all that in the climax as well. The second half of the book all points back to that same climax where Jesus said the Son of Man must suffer and die and if anyone would follow me he must take up his cross and even his forerunner Elijah suffered and died, etc. So all that to say, these four men walking down that mountain is a great picture of how we have now crossed the continental divide of Mark, and from here on all currents flow in the direction of the cross. The whole rest of the book is the journey to Jerusalem and then the events of the cross and instruction for what it means to be a disciple and follow him.

And so now Jesus is mostly done with the crowds. The cross is looming, and there isn't much time left to get the disciples ready, so Jesus turns away from the crowds and all the big, public miracles, and really focuses in on training the disciples. And it starts right here where Jesus teaches them a crucial lesson about faith.

When they get down the mountain and catch up to the other 9 disciples, they walk right into the middle of a very dramatic and very evil scene. Jesus has just had the best day of his earthly life by far. He had just experienced the greatest, most glorious event in human history. And now he drops right into a scene so horrible that look what he says in v.19.

19 "O unbelieving generation! How long shall I stay with you? How long shall I put up with you?"

It's like he's saying, "I can't take this anymore!" Yesterday was his best day ever, and now he can hardly stand to continue another day on this planet. Why? Well, there is a display of horrific evil and heart-wrenching suffering, but neither of those are the worst part. The worst part is all the heartbreaking, discouraging unbelief. That's what this event is all about—unbelief.

19 "O unbelieving generation"

22 "... if you can do anything, take pity on us ..." 23 " 'If you can'?" said Jesus. "Everything is possible for him who believes."

24 "I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!"

29 "This kind can come out only by prayer." (implied, prayer of faith)

This passage is all about faith and unbelief.²

The Disciples' Failure

Mark picks up the story right in the middle of the action. He does that because he always has the camera trained on Jesus, and this incident started while Jesus wasn't there. But he gives us enough information to piece it together. Here's what happened. The nine disciples Jesus left behind when he went up on the mountain were down at the bottom as busy as always, carrying out their ministry—preaching repentance, healing people, and driving out demon after demon. The disciples were famous for being able to drive out demons, so people brought cases of demonization to them in droves. But then this guy shows up with his son who has a demon that is unlike any demon the disciples have ever encountered. All 9 of them try to drive it out and fail. The demon will not leave.

This is their first failure in driving out demons. They had been given authority over most demons, but not this kind of demon. They had never encountered a demon like this one.

And guess who happens to be there to witness this failure? The scribes (the NIV calls them the **teachers of the law**). They are the scholars, the top Jewish Bible experts, and the enemies of Jesus. They're the ones who decided way back in ch.3 that Jesus was satanic. They have been opposing Jesus throughout the gospel, and now they just happen to be there when Jesus' disciples have this major ministry failure.

And people like that love to see their opponents fail in ministry. They don't even care about all the heartbreak and suffering that is involved; they love to see the failure because it gives them ammo against to discredit the people they don't like. So they start laying in to the disciples. The word translated **arguing**, in this context, refers to a hostile questioning. It's the same word that was used back in ch.8 when the **Pharisees began to question Jesus, seeking from him a sign from heaven to test him (8:11)**. The word "argue" implies a back and forth, but this word doesn't require that. We don't know if the disciples are participating or not. We just know the scribes are capitalizing on the failure. "Why isn't it working? What happened to all the supposed power you claim is in Jesus' name? Can't you people see it's all a sham?"

Now, we don't know if the disciples responded or not, but if they had, they might have said, "If you geniuses know so much, why don't they just drive the demon out? I don't see you having any more success than we had." The scribes can't cast this demon out, so they attack the disciples instead. That's typically what happens where there's a problem no one can solve. If we can't fix the problem, so we focus on fixing blame.

Well, this skirmish attracts some attention. Verse 14 says there was a large crowd watching all this happen. It's quite the scene—this desperate father, this demonized, lunatic boy, the disciples trying and failing to drive it out, the scribes accosting the disciples. And right in the middle of all that pandemonium, here comes Jesus walking up. And the crowd gets even more worked up.

Mark 9:14 When they came to the other disciples, they saw a large crowd around them and the teachers of the law questioning them. 15 As soon as all the people saw Jesus, they were overwhelmed with wonder and ran to greet him.

² From here until Jesus gets to Jerusalem, he teaches a series of lessons, and the whole section is bracketed by a lesson on faith at the beginning and a lesson on faith at the end.

That phrase **overwhelmed with wonder** is a very strong word in the Greek. And it's a little odd, because Jesus hasn't even done anything yet. Usually there's a statement like this right after Jesus does a miracle. But here, they've seen so many of Jesus' miracles, they already know his power. Evidently their emotions were so hyped up by the conflict and everything else that was going on, throwing the arrival of Jesus into the mix sends this crowd into a frenzy.³

So they come running up to Jesus to greet him. But Jesus doesn't respond to their greeting. He goes straight to the scribes and *he* questions *them*.⁴ It's just like back in ch.2 when the scribes corner the disciples and question them: "Why does your master eat with tax collectors and sinners?" And Jesus walks up from behind and rescues the disciples and takes the scribes on himself. It's like an adult rescuing kids from a bully. Jesus says, "How about you guys pick on someone your own size?"

Can you imagine? Picture a non-Christian professor mocking some of his Christian students for their believe in Jesus, and suddenly Jesus himself shows up and gets in the professor's face and says, "What were you just saying?" Apparently the scribes are so stunned that they are speechless. They don't say anything.

And then scene gets even more dramatic. While the scribes are stammering and squirming to come up with an answer, a voice rises up from the crowd.

17 A man in the crowd answered, "Teacher, I brought you my son, who is possessed by a spirit that has robbed him of speech. 18 Whenever it seizes him, it throws him to the ground. He foams at the mouth, gnashes his teeth and becomes rigid.⁵ I asked your disciples to drive out the spirit, but they could not⁶."

That's the answer to Jesus' question. That's what the scribes were accosting the disciples about.

The Disciples' Unbelief This is such a chaotic scene. Throughout the first half of this account, no one gives a direct answer to anyone. The Scribes question the disciples, but instead of the disciples answering, the crowd runs to greet Jesus. And instead of responding to their greeting, Jesus questions the

³ Some have suggested that the amazement of the crowd was due to residual glory on Jesus' face like when Moses came down from Sinai. The problem with this theory is that Jesus had just made a big point of commanding the disciples not to tell anyone what happened. The glory of the Transfiguration was not to be seen by anyone else until the Second Coming.

⁴ It was the scribes who were said to be question in v.14. The NIV translation "arguing" implies two sides participating. But this word can mean questioning, ridiculing, needling. It doesn't necessarily imply the other party was arguing back (see Mark 8:11). See NIGTC p.364.

⁵ This is a grand mal seizure (also known as a tonic-clonic seizure). It's any seizure that has a tonic phase (convulsions) and a clonic stage (becoming rigid). It's almost comical how the modern critics think they have explained away the spiritual aspect just because they slap a medical word on it. They say, "It's clearly epilepsy, therefore it's not a demon." They think they have explained it because they came up with the term, "epilepsy." But if you look up the definition of epilepsy, you know what you find? It's not an identifiable disease. It's just a word that means you have repeated seizures. There can be multiple different causes or unknown causes. The word epilepsy is nothing but shorthand for describing symptoms. It's like if you developed a really bad cough, so you went to the doctor and he said, "Oh, I know exactly what the problem is. You have coughitus."

Seizures happen when the normal electrical rhythms suddenly become synchronized. They can be triggered by a xxx there isn't any obvious trigger and it keeps happening, they just call it epilepsy.

There is no reason to exclude demonic involvement in this case just because it's a known medical issue. First, as we saw in ch.1, the ancient people did not assume all mental problems were demonic. They distinguished between medical problems, insanity, and demonization. But in some cases, like this one, the person might have both a demon and a physical problem or insanity. This boy likely had all three. After years of being slammed to the ground violently by the demon, it's likely the boy would have had multiple concussions resulting in significant brain damage.

But to suggest that there could be no demonic involvement simply because there were physical problems flies in the face of the evidence. First, we have Jesus' direct testimony that it was a demon. Jesus was there. Do the modern critics think they know the situation better than one who was there and witnessed it? And who proved he had knowledge of the spirit world? And if it was merely normal epilepsy, why would it be triggered by seeing Jesus? And how could it be permanently cured by Jesus rebuking a spirit that didn't exist? And what would explain the frequent attempts at killing the boy with fire and water? The only reason to question the explanation we have here in the text is a strong bias against Jesus or against spiritual realities.

⁶ R.T. France argues that the choice of terms here implies more than just inability but could be translated "they were too weak." This is another example of the reliable historicity of the account. The Apostles would not have made up a story about their own ineptitude, nor the later church of the ineptitude of the leaders of the church.

scribes. But instead of the scribes answering, this guy in the crowd answers. And now, instead of replying to this man, Jesus turns to the disciples, who have been silent throughout this whole ordeal, and rebukes them for their unbelief. I believe he's talking to the disciples in v.19 because it's a direct response to the news that they failed to drive out the spirit.⁷

18 ... I asked your disciples to drive out the spirit, but they could not." 19 "O unbelieving generation," Jesus replied, "how long shall I stay with you? How long shall I put up with you?"

Jesus lumps the disciples in with the entire unbelieving generation. In the OT, when the prophets would condemn a whole generation of Israel, it was because they had gotten into idolatry. That wasn't the case for the generation of Jesus' day. They weren't succumbing to idolatry, but by using this language Jesus shows that their unfaithfulness to God was just as severe a sin as when past generations of Jews worshipped idols. You don't have to bow down to an idol to be unfaithful to God; all you have to do is fail to trust Jesus. Unbelief has a million faces—idolatry is one, but there are countless other versions of unbelief that can place us in this position of causing the Lord to feel this kind of pain.

19 "O unbelieving generation," Jesus replied, "how long shall I stay with you? How long shall I put up with you?"

Jesus's Pain

It sounds like an agonized cry, doesn't it? Any time someone starts repeating, "How long? How long?" you know that person feels like he's at the end of his rope. At the top of the mountain he radiated glory; at the bottom of the mountain he moaned and groaned. It reminds me of Paul in Philippians 1 when his suffering became so severe that he said he'd love to just die and go to heaven which would be better by far, but it was more necessary for the Philippians or him to stay on earth and so he would stay. It sounds like Jesus is ready to go back to heaven at this point. He'll stay as long as he needs to, but it really was hard. When we fail to trust him, it stabs his heart with pain.

All this talk lately from Jesus about suffering—just because he talked about it so decisively and talked about how necessary it was doesn't mean it was easy for him. Don't think that for a minute. I doubt any of us can appreciate just how sharply it pains the heart of God when we refuse to trust him. It's painful to me when people refuse to trust me, even though I'm not really all that trustworthy in many ways. Jesus is infinitely worthy of trust.

Refusal to trust God really amounts to a rejection of his love. He offers to shoulder the burden for us, and we let ourselves be crushed by it instead. When you express love to someone, the deeper and more intense your love, the sharper the pain when it is rejected. And none of us have ever loved anyone like God loves us.

And not only does it hurt when love is rejected, but it hurts even more when the rejection of that love harms the one you love. You can see that they are shooting themselves in the foot and ruining their life by rejecting your love. Jesus can see firsthand the agonies and miseries that exist in this world because of unbelief. And even more than all that is the pain of seeing God's name being dishonored, which is the most tragic and maddening part of unbelief.

The Father's Unbelief

Well, as usual, when the demon sees Jesus it freaks out.

⁷ Many argue that these words could not have been referring to the disciples because none of the other uses of the word "generation" in Mark include the disciples. I agree that this is a difficulty. However, it seems clear to me that Jesus' words are a reaction to what the man just said, which was that the disciples could not drive it out. All three accounts have Jesus' reaction immediately after the statement about the disciples' failure (Mt.17:16-17, Lk.9:40-41).

The Spirit Reacts to Jesus

19 ... "Bring the boy to me." 20 So they brought him. When the spirit saw Jesus, it immediately threw the boy into a convulsion. He fell to the ground and rolled around, foaming at the mouth. 21 Jesus asked the boy's father, "How long has he been like this?" "From childhood," he answered. 22 "It has often thrown him into fire or water to kill him. But if you can do anything, take pity on us and help us."

Wrong If

Jesus stops him right there. He's not going to let that pass.

23 " 'If you can?'" said Jesus.

Are you kidding? Obviously this man had heard about what Jesus had been doing to demons throughout his ministry, how can he say "if"? That's insanity. Jesus cast 2000 demons out of one man with a word. He has proved over and over that he has the power to do anything. And that's what he tells this guy.

Grace is Limited Only by Unbelief

23 " 'If you can'? Everything can be done⁸ for him who believes."

"You want to know what I *can* do? Everything! Every single thing. If you can think of something, I have the power to do it." There is no action that anyone could ever conceive of that Jesus lacks the power to do.⁹

So there's no limitation on Jesus' power, but there is a limitation.

23 ... "Everything can be done for him who believes."

Jesus is saying, "You've applied the word, 'if' to the wrong person. The question isn't whether I have the power; it's whether you have the faith. There is a limitation on what can be done, but it's not because of me; it's because of you."

That's so important for us to understand: the limits of the grace you receive from God are set by the limitations of your faith. *You receive as much from God as your faith can take.* Have you ever poured something from a big jug through a narrow funnel and you have to keep backing off because the funnel gets so narrow that it just backs up and spills out? That's a picture of God pouring out his grace on your life. Whatever grace you have received from God—there is so much more where that came from. There is so much more that will come as your faith increases. That's why the best thing that can ever happen to you is anything that builds or strengthens your faith.

Now, does that mean if you have enough faith you'll get whatever you ask for every time? No, because there's another factor involved—the will of God. We don't place the word "if" on Christ's power, but we do place it on God's will—like the leper in ch.1. He said, "If you are willing, I know you can make me clean." He got it right—I know you can; the only question is if you're willing. Jesus said, "I am willing. Be clean." That's the right way to pray. But to question Jesus' ability is blasphemous. Everything can be done for him who believes.

⁸ I've translated this word "can be done" instead of "is possible" for two reasons. First, it reflects that fact that Jesus used a form of the same word the man used for "can." "If you *can* (*duma*) ... everything *can be done* (*dunata*) ..." Secondly, we tend to use the word "possible" to refer to remote possibilities—things that could conceivably happen, however unlikely. But this word doesn't carry that nuance.

⁹ There are some things Jesus can't do (commit sin or violate his nature), but it's not because of lack of power; only lack of being evil.

Help My Unbelief

24 Immediately the boy's father exclaimed, "I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!"

Worse Problem: Unbelief

The word **exclaimed** describes a shout. He's shouting at this point. When he asks for help for his son, he's talking; when he asks help for his faith, he shouts. He came to Jesus with what he thought was the biggest problem ever—when your only child's life is about to be snuffed out and he suffering so horribly, you can't even imagine what could be a worse problem than that. But now he realizes there is something worse: unbelief. This guy realizes he is lacking the one thing he needs most—the one thing that is required to receive grace from God: faith.

So just like when the demon first saw Jesus, the situation gets worse before it gets better. Sometimes before Jesus can give us what we ask for, he has to show us that we are 10 times worse off than we thought. We go to the doctor with a broken arm and he has to give us the news that we are dying of cancer. But we need that so we can deal with the real problem.

The demon isn't the biggest problem. Jesus will cast him out without any struggle on his part. But there is a struggle. It's this man's struggle against his own unbelief. Are demons real? Yes. Are we at war with them? Yes. How do we win? Only one way—by winning the war against our own unbelief—that's our greatest struggle.

So this man begs Jesus to rescue him from his own unbelief. This is the same word for **help** he used back in v.22. It means to run and help, to rescue. In v.22 he was asking Jesus to run and help him from the obvious problem in his life—his poor, demonized son. But now he's saying, "Run to me and rescue me from my unbelief."

I love this guy because he's so honest about his own heart. He admits to the very sin that just got Jesus so exasperated with the entire generation. Jesus said, "**O, unbelieving generation. ... How long shall I put up with you?**" And this guy uses that very word, **unbelief**, to describe himself. He was admitting, "I'm guilty of being part of this unbelieving generation that's so upsetting to Jesus."

And yet he wisely sees that the solution is Jesus. Faith is something that is our responsibility to have, but it comes from Jesus. We must seek it from him. It's a gift from God.

Philippians 1:29 For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ ... to believe on him

James 1:17 Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights.

Faith is a gift from God so we join this man in this prayer: I believe; help my unbelief. That prayer has really found a home in my heart. I can't tell you how often I pray this—dozens of times per day some days. And it applies to more than just faith. It applies to everything. I'm worshipping God with the church on a Sunday morning and the passion and joy in my heart is so dull and weak. But on the other hand, I know I'm not like the wicked, who have no love for God at all. So I pray, "God, I love you, but help my lack of love." "I obey you, help my disobedience." "I hunger and thirst, help my lack of appetite." "I repent, help my lack of contrition and lack of resolve to change." "I hate sin, help me overcome my love for sin." Aren't you glad we can pray that way?

Jesus Tests and Builds Faith

Okay, so at this point we're starting to wonder, *Why is it taking Jesus so long to do this miracle?* Why not just walk up, see a boy in desperate need and horrible agony, a father in heartbroken grief, the disciples getting their hat handed to them by the scribes, and say, "Demon, go" and solve everything in one shot? Because it wouldn't have solved everything. It would have left the biggest problem unsolved. The boy's suffering was a problem, but not the biggest problem. The argument with the Scribes wasn't

the biggest problem. The biggest problem—the most urgent problem, was the lack of faith. Jesus can't just walk up and drive the demon out—something had to be done about all the unbelief. And curing the disease of unbelief almost always requires increased desperation. Faith emerges under pressure—pressure guided by instruction from Jesus. So that's what Jesus provides.

And by the way, that's a pattern in Jesus' miracles. Whenever you see Jesus dragging out a miracle, it's usually one of two reasons: to build someone's weak faith, or to expose someone's great faith. Here it's the former.

The Miracle

And I get the feeling Jesus would have dragged it out even further—spent even more time building this man's faith, if it hadn't been for what happened next.

25 When Jesus saw that a crowd was running to the scene, he rebuked the evil spirit.

It doesn't say he rebuked the spirit because of the man's faith. The thing that made Jesus pull the trigger on healing the boy was the approaching crowd. Remember, the time of the big, public miracles was over. That was Mark part 1. This side of the continental divide, you're not going to see much in the way of miracles anymore, especially not public ones.

25 When Jesus saw that a crowd was running to the scene, he rebuked the evil spirit. "You deaf and mute spirit," he said, "I command you, come out of him and never enter him again." 26 The spirit shrieked, convulsed him violently and came out.

Outgoing tenants have a tendency to do this—they trash the place on the way out. In this case he almost kills the kid.

26 ... The boy looked so much like a corpse that many said, "He's dead." 27 But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him to his feet, and he stood up.¹⁰

So Jesus comes off the mountain and brings grace to this boy. We can't stay on the mountaintop. This life takes place in the valley. But when they bring the boy to Jesus, what happens? Some of the glory of the mountaintop is brought right into the valley. Bringing a problem to Jesus in prayer has the effect of reaching forward into eternal glory and bringing a measure of that right into our fallen, broken, darkness—if we believe.

The Training

Well, Jesus built the father's faith, now it's time to work on the disciples' faith. In the final two verses there's yet another one of these moments when Jesus teaches his disciples privately in a house.

28 After Jesus had gone indoors, his disciples asked him privately, "Why couldn't we drive it out?" 29 He replied, "This kind can come out only by prayer."¹¹

¹⁰ The language here are words normally connected to resurrection ("he raised him" (egeiren; "he lifted him to his feet" and "he was raised" aneste "he stood up"). Some have concluded that the boy died and Jesus raised him. I don't agree. If the boy had died the gospel writers would have said it. However I do think the language is intentionally painting a picture of Jesus giving this boy new life.

¹¹ Most manuscripts add "and fasting," but none of the modern translations include it because it's not included in the best manuscripts and because copyists had a strong tendency to add hasting into verses about prayer, such as Mt.17:21, Acts 10:30, and 1 Cor 7:5. (A.T. France, however, still believes it should probably be included.) Also, this was an incident that arose suddenly. The man brought his son and asked for healing. It doesn't seem like there would have been time to fast. And the reference wouldn't be to a regular discipline of fasting because Jesus had already spoken of the inappropriateness of such a discipline while he was still with them (2:18-22). NICNT.

Turn Amazement to Faith

There's one verse in this account that seems out of place. It's verse 15. Time after time in Mark we see Jesus perform a miracle, then the final verse in the story says something about how everyone was so amazed. In this story, the statement about their amazement is at the beginning, before Jesus even does the miracle. No doubt they were even more amazed after the miracle, but Mark doesn't focus on that because this is Mark part 2. In the first half of Mark, there was a big focus on the amazement after each miracle because the purpose was to show Christ's messiahship. In the second half of Mark the focus isn't on messiahship, but rather discipleship. So Mark closes this story with two verses about how Jesus taught his disciples about faith.

And here's the message behind that (and this is the principle from this study that helped me the most in my walk with the Lord this week). Everyone has been amazed at Jesus for 8 chapters. But that amazement always fell short of faith. Now it's time to convert that amazement to faith. How do you do that? It's easy to read these stories about the amazing things Jesus did and just say, "Wow, that's amazing," and walk away unchanged. That's what the crowds have been doing for 8 chapters. But how do you walk away changed? How do you convert amazement to real trust—stronger faith?

As I was studying this, I really wanted to know the answer to that, and not just for Jesus' miracles, but for everything God does that's amazing. We live in Colorado. We're amazed most every day by the mountains or a sunset or a powerful storm or something in the sky. How do I drive to work in the morning, see the full moon sitting just above the mountains with a sliver of cloud going through it and just about catch my breath at how beautiful it is, and then somehow convert that to faith, so that an hour later, when I drop my phone and shatter the screen, I can trust God more in that moment because of what happened an hour before?

I searched the book of Mark to try to find an answer to that, and I was taken back to the feeding of the 5000. After dismissing the crowd, Jesus sends the disciples across the lake in the boat while he goes up on a mountain by himself to pray. A storm hits, the boat almost sinks, Jesus walks out there, climbs in the boat, and stills the storm, and then asks the disciples why they were so afraid. And Mark gives us the answer: it was because they had not understood about the loaves. What? What do loaves and fishes have to do with storms and boats? *Everything!* When Jesus feeds 5000 people with one boy's lunch, he expects that to have an impact on our emotions the next time we're in a storm. Then in chapter 8 Jesus expects the disciples to be able to understand a parable without being distracted with earthly concerns because of the feeding miracles. God expects us to use logic and draw inferences—to ask the simple question, "If he can feed a multitude, what else can he do?" So often we are like the Israelites at the Exodus. God sends the plagues, defeats Pharaoh and all the gods of Egypt, parts the Red Sea, delivers them safely on the other side while drowning the Egyptians; the people are all excited for a couple days, and then they are in a panic, "How are we going to get water to drink?" So God miraculously supplies all the water they need, and they are happy about that, but then they get all worked up, "What are we going to do about food? Can God spread a table in the desert?" And God gets angry. How hard is it to put 2 and 2 together and say, "If God can do what he did to Pharaoh, and he can miraculously provide water, then my powers of deduction tell me that food shouldn't be a problem for him"? If he can part the sea, he can provide water. If he can provide water, he can make food. If he can feed a multitude, he can still a storm. If he had divine power, he can do anything.

So how do we make that sink in? The next time you're amazed at something God did—some amazing person he created, some amazing thing he did in Scripture, something amazing in his creation; don't just be amazed. Take the next steps.

First of all, make it personal. Have a little conversation with God about it. "God, I realize that came from your hand. It's amazing, which means you're amazing." Connect the dots in a relational way with the source of that amazing thing.

And then ask one more question: "God, if you can do that, what else can you do?" Make a habit of saying that—say it out loud if you need to. "God, if you can make the sky that beautiful, what else could you make beautiful? Here, God, I've got a challenge for you. Here's the train wreck of my life. Can you

make that beautiful? Actually, don't answer that God. I know the answer. I can look at that sunrise and put 2 and 2 together. I can see what you're capable of. I can connect the dots between past miracles and future needs. I'm not going to be afraid of this storm I'm in right now, because I've seen your handiwork. I understand about the loaves. I trust you." Take the raw ore of amazement and refine it into faith.

Summary

There are four kinds of unbelief in this passage. The one that exasperates Jesus most is the disciples'. The father's faith was damaged by the disciples' failure, so he questioned Jesus' ability. But the question mark was only on the father's faith. God's grace in our lives is limited only by our faith. Jesus strung the miracle out to work on the man's faith, which was a much greater problem than the demon. Instead of an amazement report at the end, there's a discipleship session because Mark part 2 is about discipleship, not messiahship anymore. It's time for amazement to turn to faith. Do that by connecting the dots from what God has done in the past (*If he can do that, what else can he do?*)