

The Memoirs of Peter
No Faith, Weak Faith, Little Faith, Part 2
Mark 9:14-29
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Turn with me in your Bibles again to Mark 9, as we continue our journey through Mark's account of the life of Christ. Let me just remind you that when you approach the Gospels, as the Apostle John said at the end of his Gospel, if everything Christ did and said was to be written down, the world itself couldn't contain the books.

And so when the Gospel writers, under the inspiration of the Spirit, composed their Gospel accounts of the life of Christ, they choose specific discourses, specific miracles, in order to communicate the message behind their particular Gospel. Their message comes through in the stories and accounts that they recount for us.

We find ourselves in Mark 9, and the chapter began with the Transfiguration. At the Transfiguration in verses two through ten, three disciples (Peter, James, and John) got a chance to see the glory of Christ. They mounted (probably) up Mount Hermon: one of its peaks, the highest point in Israel, some 9000 feet above sea level. And there for minutes or hours the veil of Jesus' humanity slipped away, and they got just a glimpse of His true personal glory.

What takes place next is a dramatic change of scenes, a change that takes us all the way down from the glory of heaven, to earth filled with human tragedy. Because in all the three Gospels that record the transfiguration, when the four men got back down the mountain the next day, Jesus encounters a true human tragedy: a demon possessed boy. Let me read it for you in Mark 9:14:

“When they came *back* to the disciples, they saw a large crowd around them, and *some* scribes arguing with them. Immediately, when the entire crowd saw Him, they were amazed and *began* running up to greet Him. And He asked them, ‘What are you discussing with them?’ And one of the crowd answered him, ‘Teacher, I brought You my son, possessed with a spirit which make 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*.’ 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!’ 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*. And He asked his father, ‘How long has this been happening to him?’ And he said, ‘From childhood. 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!’ And Jesus said to him, ‘If you can? All things are possible to him who believes.’ Immediately the boy’s father cried out and said, ‘I do believe; help my unbelief.’ 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.’ 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’s (sic) dead!’ But Jesus took him by the hand and raised him; and he got up. When He came into *the* house, His disciples *began* questioning Him privately, ‘Why could we not drive it out?’ And He said to them, ‘This kind cannot come out by anything but prayer.’”

I’ve entitled our study of this paragraph “No Faith, Weak Faith, and Little Faith,” because the healing of this demon possessed boy illustrates to us the importance of faith in our relationship to Christ. The main human characters in the story all reveal the true state of their relationship to Christ by their faith—or their lack of it. The first group that we met last time identifies those who have no faith. Probably early on the morning after the transfiguration (it may have happened in the late evening or night-time hours), early the next morning, the Gospels tell us that Peter and Jesus and James and John had begun their descent; and when they arrived where they’d left the other nine disciples some 24 hours before, they find a large crowd gathered. And in the middle of that crowd were the nine, locked in an intense argument with some scribes.

When Jesus arrived, He asked the scribes a question: “What are you discussing with [My disciples]?” Jesus steps in to defend His own, and the scribes apparently didn’t respond at all; instead, the father of the boy who caused all of this argument suddenly spoke up. Verse 17: “And one of crowd answered Him, ‘Teacher, I brought You my son, possessed with a spirit.’”

This is the man’s only son (according to Luke), and he’s one of those individuals in the New Testament who are described as demonized, demon possessed, controlled and dominated by a fallen angel.

The father goes on to describe how this terrible tragedy played out in his son’s case. Verse 17:

“{He’s} possessed of (sic) a spirit which makes him mute; and whenever it seizes him, it slams him to the ground and he foams at the mouth, and {he} grinds his teeth and stiffens out.” This demon that controlled him made him unable to speak. Later we’ll see down in verse 25 it made him deaf as well, and it made him have epileptic type symptoms.

This father had seen his son suffer and had suffered himself for many years. He had heard that Jesus was in the area of Caesarea Philippi (up north of the Sea of Galilee), and he brought his boy to Jesus hoping that Jesus would cast out this unclean spirit. But to the man’s great disappointment, Jesus wasn’t there. He was gone with the three up the Mount of Transfiguration. So this father asked the nine disciples of Christ who were still there to do something. After all, Jesus had given all of His Apostles, who were His hand-picked, legally authorized representatives, the authority to cast out demons, and they had done it many times before. But verse 18 says, “I told Your disciples to cast it out, and they could not do it.”

In response to this set of circumstances, our Lord turns not to His disciples, because the language He uses is never used of His disciples in the New Testament. Instead, He turns to speak to the scribes and the crowd that’s gathered. And to them He makes this stinging indictment (verse 19): “O unbelieving generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring him to Me!”

In Matthew, Jesus adds “unbelieving and perverted generation.” Here were people who had enough of everything to believe in Jesus. They had enough Old Testament prophecy, they had enough teaching from Jesus, they had enough miracles that they ought to believe. But they don’t believe, and Jesus indicts them for it: “O unbelieving generation, how long will I tolerate this?” There is implied in that statement a coming judgment. So when Jesus spoke of an unbelieving generation, He was talking about the scribes and the people of Israel who as a whole refused to believe; and they would be held accountable for it—by Him.

But we ended last time, this section, with a glimpse of Jesus’ compassion for this father and his only begotten son—which is exactly the language that’s used. At the end of verse 19, Jesus says “Bring him to Me!” There is implied in that that Jesus intends to act: there’s hope. The second focus of this passage takes us away from the scribes and the crowd who manifested no faith, and shines instead on this father who brought his boy to Jesus to heal; and he represents all of those who have weak faith. The first group, made up of the crowds and the scribes, had no faith; that is, no true saving faith. But here in this section, we’re introduced to a man whose faith is weak, but who eventually comes to true saving faith.

Look at verse 20: “They brought the boy to Him.” Apparently the crowd brings the boy to Jesus, because it says “they.” “[And] 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.” When “he,” that is the boy, saw “Him,” that is Jesus, the demon within him responded. But this particular demon’s response is unusual.

Notice how the demons usually responded to Jesus. Look back in chapter one. You’ll remember the first encounter we had with a demon possessed person. In chapter one, verse 23, in the Capernaum synagogue, “There was a man... [there] with an unclean spirit; and he cried out, saying, ‘What business do we have with each other, Jesus of Nazareth? Have You come to destroy us? I know who You are—the holy one of God!’ ... Jesus rebuked him, saying, ‘Be quiet, and come out of him!’ Throwing him into convulsions, the unclean spirit cried out with a loud voice and came out of him.” Verse 34: “He healed many who were ill with various diseases, and [He] cast out many demons; and He was not permitting the demons to speak, because they knew who He was.”

Look over in chapter five, verse six. Here’s the Gerasene demoniac. “Seeing Jesus from a distance, he ran up and bowed down before Him; and shouting with a loud voice, he said, ‘What business do we have with each other, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I implore You by God, do not torment me!’”

Now what I want you to see is, in both cases these demons responded to Jesus with some measure of respect. And in fact, in the case of the demoniac of Gadara (as he’s often called, of the Gerasenes), this man actually comes and falls down on his face recognizing, grudgingly, the truth of who Jesus was. The demon in him is acknowledging the reality of Jesus’ superiority over him.

But back in chapter nine, when the demon here recognizes Jesus through the boy’s eyes, he immediately, instead of running and acknowledging who Jesus is (maybe even falling down before Him) instead he immediately responds by throwing the boy into a convulsion. Right there in the middle of the crowd, right there in front of Jesus, the demon takes out its full fury on this defenseless boy. He’s rolling around on the ground and foaming at the mouth.

By the way, it’s clear from this that this boy’s problem was not epilepsy, because the moment the demon sees Jesus, he causes this to happen-to happen; and because we’re told by Mark that the evil spirit was controlling this, he is the one who initiated these convulsions. It wasn’t some sort

of electrical impulse in the brain that started all of this. In this boy's case it was an evil, spirit being.

Now why did the demon respond like this as opposed to the way the other demons have responded to Jesus? It was probably a lack of respect for Jesus. It was an overt act of rebellion in the presence of the Son of God. It's interesting because this wasn't just any demon. This was a particularly wicked kind of demon. Notice verse 29. Jesus says "this kind," referring to the demon. "This kind" only comes out by prayer. "This kind" of demon, implying that it's a special kind. It's clear that even among the demons there are differing levels of evil.

In Matthew 12:45, Jesus is explaining how the spirit world works, and specifically how when somebody tries to clean up their life without the work of the Spirit, tries self-reformation, they can end up in a more desperate situation. And He says the spirit that left in the self-reformation goes and comes back, "And takes along with it seven other spirits [and notice He says] more wicked than itself... and the last state of that man [is] worse than the first."

So there're apparently in the world of fallen angels, in the world of demons, according to the Lord, there are differing versions and levels of wickedness. And this particular demon was particularly evil and wicked, and he refuses to acknowledge Jesus; and when he sees Jesus, instead of coming and acknowledging who he is as the other demons did, he throws this boy into a convulsion, probably as an act of defiance, as an act of rebellion.

Jesus looked down on this dumb, deaf boy as he writhes in demon-induced seizure on the ground there in front of Him, and what did Jesus do? Now, if you had never read the story, what would you expect Jesus to do next? You'd expect Him to act. You'd expect Him to do something. You'd expect Him to command the demon to leave. But Jesus doesn't, not right away, because He's got another mission. Jesus does the unexpected here, because He is dealing with more than the healing of this boy.

Jesus is at work on the heart of this father. So, verse 21, He asks his father, "How long has this been happening to him?" Jesus here is not looking for information that would help Him diagnose this boy's problem and thereby help him treat it in some way. Jesus has cast out by this time hundreds of demons with merely a word of command, without any information. He didn't need this information, but He wanted this information to come out for the sake of others: perhaps for His disciples; perhaps for someone else in the crowd; but mainly, as it becomes clear here in Jesus' interchange with this man, Jesus asks this question for the sake of the father. He wants

this man to see just how impossible his real situation is.

By the way, can I just pause here and say, our Lord still does this today? He will often find a way—and I’ve seen this in so many lives—He will often find a way to bring a person to the absolute end of himself or herself where they can do nothing else but look up to God. They are fresh out of ideas, out of strength, out of any means of solving their problems on their own. They’re at the end of themselves and their resources. Why does God do that? So that all human effort is gone, and there’s nothing left to do but to believe in Jesus’ power to act.

So as the boy writhes there on the ground in front of them, Jesus asks “How long?” Verse 21, he said “From childhood.” The root of this word “childhood” is used often in the New Testament. It refers to a newborn. It refers to Jesus when He was eight days old. It refers to children younger than two, when Herod killed all the children younger than two. It’s used of a 12-year-old. When it’s used of an age, it-seems-that to be the outer limit. So it’s probable in this case that we’re dealing with a child who is around 11 or 12; he’s not yet a man.

In that culture, at 13 a boy became a man (still today with the Bar Mitzvah, officially, legally a man), and so it’s likely that we’re dealing with someone about 11 or 12. And his problems had been a constant plague for a long time: “From childhood.” Clearly this proves, by the way, that this is not merely the “terribly bad” that Satan seeks possession of. In this case, this wicked demon took control of this boy when he was a child.

Now the father here doesn’t stop with answering Jesus’ question. This too, I think, shows us that Jesus wants this man to see just how bad the circumstances are. He literally had no hope outside of Jesus. Jesus knew that, but He wanted this father to see that as well. “How long?” And he tells Him, “From childhood.” And then the father continues in verse 22: “It has often thrown him both into the fire and into the water to destroy him.”

It’s clear that this boy’s seizures were not normal epilepsy. Those can simply happen in a variety of places and times, often with no apparent rhyme or reason. But in this boy’s case, the demon waited until the boy was in a place of danger, and then it would maliciously throw him into the fire and into the water. You see in this the wicked heart of those fallen beings who were once holy angels. They delight in hurting and maiming and torturing. This is the heart of Satan. Anything he tells you is a lie and a deceit. His ultimate goal, as we saw this morning, is to destroy you, to hurt you in any way he can. You see in this picture of this boy what Satan does in a life, what he desires to do: maliciously threw him into the fire.

Fires were very common in first century Israel for cooking. That was what was the first resort on most days and in most homes. They also used fires for heat. This area north of the Sea of Galilee, up toward Mount Hermon, can get quite chilly. The daily mean in January is 53 degrees. So they had fires as a common occurrence both for cooking and for heating. This demon would wait until this poor boy was near one of those fires and would throw him in convulsions in an effort to burn him. The demon had no doubt been successful many times before in having him sustain severe burns.

There was also plenty of water around in first century Israel. Not only creeks and rivers and lakes, but the mikvehs (those ritual baths, the ceremonial baths) were everywhere where the Jews lived in any numbers. And again, the demon had thrown him into convulsions when the boy got near any significant amount of water in an attempt to drown him. Why? Verse 22 says “to destroy him.”

This wasn’t accidental; this was malicious. This demon was driven by nothing but a desire to hurt and maim and destroy. That is Satan’s great mission in the world. It’s all he wants to do to you and to me, to everyone who bears what theologians call the “Imago Dei”: the image of God, even the residual image of God in those who are fallen but not redeemed.

This is a great human tragedy here. Try to image what it would have been like for this father and this boy—since childhood. By asking this question, Jesus has gotten this man to realize just how bad the situation really is. His only son, perhaps now about 12 years old, has since childhood been controlled by an evil spirit that has rendered him unable to speak, unable to hear, and has constantly produced terrible symptoms like epilepsy—and at crucial moments when he’s near fire or water in an effort to hurt and maim him.

So this man has come seeking Jesus’ help, but instead he found the nine. And the disciples couldn’t help him either. So it’s in that context that the father says in verse 22, “But if You can do anything, take pity on us and help us!”

Now there’re several important observations to make from that statement, because they really reveals what’s going on in this father’s heart at this point. Notice first of all in this statement this father’s obvious love for his son. Not only had he patiently cared for him through all of those years, but now he’s made the effort to find Jesus, hoping against hope that perhaps Jesus would be able to intervene, that Jesus would be able to help. He loves his son so much that he even associates himself. Notice how he says “us.” “Take pity on *us* and help *us*!” [Emphasis added.]

He's not just interested in his boy as if it's more convenient for his family not to have to put up with the circumstances, you sense some of the genuine love this man has for this boy.

Also note that in this statement, that the father didn't doubt Jesus' compassion. You see that? "If You can do anything, take pity on us and help us!" That's a little different than what we saw back in chapter one, verse forty, when the leper came up to Jesus beseeching Him, falling on his knees before Him saying, "If You are willing, You can make me clean." The leper didn't doubt Jesus' power ("You can make me clean."); instead, he doubted Jesus' willingness to help him.

But here, this father has no real doubts about Jesus' willingness to help; instead, he doubts Jesus' ability to help. With the leper it's, if You will, You can; with this father it's, if You can, You will. This case may be too hard even for You, Jesus. In fact, notice he didn't expect Jesus to completely heal his son. Notice how he says, "If You can do anything."

We use that expression when we don't believe the person can fully help us, but perhaps they can do something that will be some help. That's what he's saying. He's essentially saying this to Jesus: my situation may be too hard for You, certainly to fix it completely, but it-even if it's too hard, maybe You can do something that will possibly help relieve some of the misery. "If You can do anything, take pity on us and help us!"

The Greek word for "take pity" here literally means "to feel with your bowels." He's saying, Jesus, show true sympathy on us, feel genuine compassion, and act on that compassion and help us. I love the word "help." It's an unusual Greek word actually. It's not the common word for "help." The Greek word translated "help" here is a compound noun. That's, it's a noun made up of two words put together. The two words are "to run" and "to cry." The word literally means "run to us as we cry or cry out." In other words, "run to our aid as we cry out to you."

Now, Jesus could have healed this boy at this point. He could have healed him at any point. He didn't always require true saving faith in order to heal or cast out demons. There are many times when He apparently required nothing at all. He simply acted on His compassion and healed or cast out the demon. But Jesus has more in mind here with this man than just healing his son. Jesus also plans to lead him to saving faith.

And so Jesus seizes on what this man has just said. Out of the heart the mouth speaks, and this man has just revealed his heart. He said "If you can." "If You can do anything." The Greek word for "can" is the word that speaks of "capacity" or "ability." If You have the ability, Jesus, if

You have the capacity, if You have the power to do anything that will help my son—please do it. So in verse 23, Jesus responds to him: “If You can?” We might respond something like this: did you just say, if I can? Verse 23 goes on to say, “All things are possible to him who believes.” Jesus completely turns the tables on this man. Jesus said to him, look, the issue is not whether I am able, the issue is whether you believe.

Now, let me just say that this verse has been terribly used and abused by many for every kind of imaginable excess. For example, this is one of the faith healers’ favorite verses. They love this verse. They use it as kind of a get-out-of-jail-free card. You know, if someone doesn’t play along with their little game and doesn’t temporarily demonstrate some kind of physical relief in front of the crowd—often under the power of suggestion. And of course those who’ve tracked down those healings after the fact find that they never last.

They’re not in the hospitals healing anybody. They’re not in the cemeteries raising people from the dead. They don’t have that power. It’s all a game, it’s all a shell and pea game, it’s all a charade—and when people don’t play along, they fall back on this verse. What they say is, well, I couldn’t heal you because you didn’t have—what? Enough faith. That’s the problem: you didn’t have enough faith.

Unfortunately, this verse is often explained like that in such a way that the real point is that there is some inherent power in faith. Get this in your mind: faith has no inherent power. Let me say that again: faith has no inherent power. My faith, your faith, can’t do anything. Faith is not a power; faith is not a force. Faith is simply believing, and believing doesn’t have any power to act. Somebody else has to act, and my faith is in the power of someone else to act. The focus of Jesus’ statement here is not that my faith is powerful. Instead, the focus of Jesus’ statement here is that there is absolutely no limit to God’s power to act. That’s what this man doubted: there was a limit to Jesus’ power to act.

Jesus says listen, the problem is not with My power to act. This is an indictment of this man’s faith in God. Jesus is in effect saying, the reason you don’t think I can do anything to help is because you lack faith in Me, but the truth is I can do all things. There is nothing that’s impossible to Me, or to put it positively, all things are possible to Me. That’s what Jesus was saying.

He wasn’t saying your faith has some power. He was saying, I, as the object of faith can do everything. There’s nothing impossible for Me to do. If you truly believed in Me, you would

understand that healing your son and casting out the wicked demon that controls him is absolutely nothing. I spoke the worlds into existence.

The same is true for us. The issue is, do we believe in the One who has the power to act? Is there anything in your life—let me put it very directly and personally—is there anything in your life that you don't think Jesus is capable of solving?

Really? You fill in the blank. Is there any problem that as far as you're concerned He can't overcome? Is there any sin in your life that as far as you're concerned He can't replace with perfect holiness? Is there anything in your life that would cause you to come to Jesus saying, if You can do anything, have compassion and help me.

Jesus wanted this man to see that the problem in his life was not beyond the reach of Jesus' power, and He wants us to see the same thing. Jesus is calling this man to genuine faith in Him. I can do all things is what Jesus was saying. The problem isn't in My ability act; the problem is your faith.

Now Jesus calls this man to genuine faith in Him. How did he respond? Verse 24: "Immediately the boy's father cried out and said, 'I do believe; help my unbelief.'" The-the Greek word for "cried out" here is a word of intense emotion, and often loud. This man is completely distraught. He cries out with a loud voice, "I do believe; help my unbelief." This man understood that he lacked the faith he needed, so he did the only thing you can do when you recognize that you cannot believe on your own—which is true of every human being—he pleaded with Christ to give him the faith he needed. "I do believe." "In you" is understood here.

This man had some faith in Jesus, at least faith in Him as a good, compassionate man who might be able to help his son in some way, but it wasn't true saving faith where he was willing to risk everything on Jesus. But now Jesus has led him to the only true source of saving faith. I do believe, he says, but my confidence in You is weak.

This man humbly accepts Jesus' spiritual diagnosis, and on that basis he pleads with Christ to show him mercy and not to treat him as deserves. His hope here is now in the character of Christ alone, not what he deserves. He's saying "help my unbelief." He's asking Jesus—literally the word "help" here is the same word he used before. It's "run to my aide." It's that unique word for "help." He's saying, I'm crying out, run to my aide! And the word "help" is in the present tense which means "I need You to continually do this." He's asking Jesus to continually give

him the faith to believe in Him.

This is, after all, a powerful illustration of the doctrine of justification by faith alone. He's not asking that Jesus somehow help his faith grow until God says, oh, OK, now you've got, you've got great faith, and so I'm going to reward that faith with forgiveness and with the healing of your son. That's not where this man is. That would be salvation by works.

Instead, he is pleading for Jesus' help at the very same time he's admitting that his faith is not worthy of it. This is how any sinner comes to Christ: I don't deserve anything from You, there's nothing in me that would make You accept me, but I'm pleading for Your help, for Your mercy, for Your grace.

It's like the publican, the tax gatherer, standing outside the temple, falling down and beating on his chest, "God, be merciful to me, the sinner!" It's like the beatitude when Jesus said if you're going to come to the kingdom, if you're going to enjoy the kingdom, you have to come as a beggar in spirit. That's what this man is at this point. He's a beggar in spirit. He's been reduced to nothing but begging: I don't have sufficient faith in You, help my unbelief, be constantly giving me the faith to believe in You.

Verse 25: "When Jesus saw... [the] 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.'" Apparently, when the demon threw this boy down, the crowd probably had backed away; and now they come back, and others began to gather in as well, as word spread about what's going on. And when Jesus saw that the crowd was growing, He acts fast before it gets any larger.

(Now that's fascinating and worth probably another message all of it's own, because that's exactly the opposite of the response of many Christians in churches today. They want to do everything they can to build a crowd. Jesus wanted to act before the crowd gathered.)

But before the crowd gets any larger, Jesus acts to heal this boy and to cast the demon out. The original language here emphasizes Jesus' authority. Literally in the Greek text He says, "I, Myself, command you." He's basically saying to this demon, listen, you're not dealing with the disciples anymore: I, Myself, command you to come out and to stay out.

And the demon obeys because he must, but he does so while throwing the equivalent of a sort of

supernatural temper tantrum. Verse 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’s (sic) dead!’” The demon utters this horrible, loud shriek through the boy’s vocal chords. He throws the boy into one last terrible convulsion, and then he leaves his body never to return. The boy lies there in front of the crowd and Jesus: pale and motionless, deathly still, perhaps even his breathing is temporarily stopped. Because of that, most of the crowd concluded that the boy was dead.

Look at verse 27. “But Jesus took him by the hand and raised him; and he got up.” I love Matthew’s account. Matthew says, “Jesus rebuked him, and the demon came out of him, and the boy was cured at once.” Luke adds a point of compassion, a point of tenderness. I love these vignettes looking into the heart of Jesus. In Luke 9, “Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit, and healed the boy and gave him back to his father. And they were all amazed at the greatness of God.”

Now what’s going on in this story? In this remarkable account, in this section of the story, Jesus brings this father from insufficient weak faith to true saving faith. In this passage you really have divine sovereignty and human responsibility colliding. On the one hand you have human responsibility: you must come to Jesus believing that He can, that He has the power to forgive sins, to change your heart, to make you new, to overcome your past life of sin.

In the words of Hebrews 11:6, “Without faith it is impossible to please [God], for he who comes to God must believe that He is and *that* He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.” You have to come in faith. But on the other hand, when it comes to divine sovereignty, you come realizing that faith itself is a gift. You can never generate the kind of faith required, and so what do you do?

Well, Scripture makes it clear that faith is a gift. Acts 13:48, “As many as had been appointed to eternal life believed.” Ephesians 2 is even clearer, “For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves.” “That” here may refer to faith, or it may refer to the whole package including faith. Regardless, faith is included. “It is a gift or the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.”

Faith is a gift. Philippians 1:29 puts it very clearly, “To you it has been granted for Christ’s sake, ...to believe in Him.” O by the way, that passage also adds, and “to suffer.” “[But] to you it has been granted for Christ’s sake ... to believe in Him.”

How do you reconcile those two vantage points? You have to come believing that Jesus can, but faith is a gift. What do you do if you find yourself caught on the horns of that dilemma, when you're told to demonstrate a faith that you don't have the power to generate? You do exactly what this man did. You throw yourself on the mercy of God in Christ. You acknowledge your inability. You acknowledge that you have certain faith, and you plead with Him to grant you faith as a gift.

As one author puts it, "True faith is always aware how small and inadequate it is. The Father becomes a believer, not when he amasses a sufficient quantity of faith, but when he risks everything on what little faith he has, when he yields his insufficiency to the true sufficiency of Jesus."

You know, so many people spend all of their time focusing on their faith. Listen, your faith is merely a vehicle. It's a vessel. It's a channel through which the salvation of God flows to you. Simply acknowledge the insufficiency of it, and plead with God to make it strong. Jesus didn't turn this man away, and He won't turn you away either.

Alan Cole writes, "The father cries for help, honestly confessing the poverty of his faith; and Jesus answers, not according to the poverty of the man's faith, but according to the riches of His grace."

If you're here tonight—and I never want to assume that everyone in our services or everyone listening on-line is in Christ, because it's very unlikely that that's true. If you're here tonight and you're not in Christ, Jesus will receive you, regardless of how weak and faltering your faith may be.

If you will come to Him and acknowledge your need of Him, that you deserve nothing from Him, and throw yourself on His mercy and His grace, He will receive you with the same spirit of compassion He received this man and He received everyone else that we read about in the Gospel accounts. He's the same yesterday, today, and forever. This is a picture of how He will respond to you, but you have to be willing to leave your sin and come and throw yourself on Him and His mercy. You say I don't know if He can fix the mess I've made. "If you can?" Jesus says, I can.

What about for us who are believers, who already believe? There's a powerful lesson here for us, and I can't capture it any better than John Calvin did in his commentary on this passage.

Here's the application of this passage to us as believers. He writes, "This father declares that he believes and yet acknowledges himself to have unbelief. These two statements may appear to contradict each other, but there is none of us that does not experience both of them and himself.

As our faith is never perfect, it follows that we are partly unbelievers, but God forgives us and exercises such forbearance toward us as to reckon us believers on account of a small portion of faith. It may be weak faith but our God is gracious, and He responds to that faith as He responded to this man." (not sure where quotation ends)

Which group do you fall into? Are you in the group with no faith who will not respond to Christ, who in spite of all you know of Him and all you've read of Him (maybe grew up in the church, heard about Him all your life) you simply will not bow your knee to Jesus Christ?

Jesus has a stinging indictment for you, and He says one day you will stand before Me and it will not go well. But for the person who will trembling come, acknowledging his sin, throwing himself on the mercy of Christ, Christ will respond as He did to this man. May that be true of every person under the sound of my voice tonight. Come to Him.

Let's pray together.

Our Father, thank You for this amazing portrait of our Lord, for the picture of His compassionate heart, for His wisdom in leading this man to a true saving knowledge of Himself, even as He heals his son. Father, thank You for the picture, because it reminds us, it shows us, that this is how Christ will respond to us as well, how He has responded to many of us, and how He will respond to anyone here who is willing to do what this man did and seek out Christ and throw himself on the mercy of Christ.

Father, I pray for those here tonight who have never acknowledged their need, who have never thrown themselves on Christ, who've never cried out Lord, I believe, help my unbelief, who have never acknowledged they deserve nothing from You, nothing from Your Son except eternal wrath and then pleaded with You for Your mercy, for Your grace. Father, I pray that tonight would be the night when You would break up the hard heart, You would help them to see their true condition before You and that they would cry out as this man did and know Your mercy even tonight.

Father, for us who believe, remind us that our life is encompassed with Your mercy and grace,

that our faith has never been, will never be strong enough to deserve Your response, but even where there's weak faith, You receive us. We bless You, O God, for the God of mercy and grace that You are, and for Christ, our Lord and Savior, who gave Himself for us. For it's in His name we pray, Amen.