

THE JOY OF LITTLE FAITH

Mark 9:14-29

If there is anything that the church of the living God is in need of today, it is the power of God manifested in her midst. If there is anything that the people of God are in need of today, it is the power of God manifested in their homes, and in their everyday challenges and struggles of life. When we look around at most churches and most professing Christians what we see is a far cry from New Testament Christianity. We see dying churches and we see defeated, downhearted Christians. We see the kingdom of darkness being advanced and the kingdom of light being marginalized. And every true believer in Jesus Christ is grieved because of this sad state of affairs, and every true believer longs in the depths of his soul for something better.

Well, beloved, if what I'm saying strikes a chord in your heart, God wants you to know that He most certainly does have something for you that is infinitely better! God said in Jer. 29:11, "For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope". And concerning the devil and all his minions who fight against us to keep us from realizing God's blessings, the apostle John writes, "You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, for greater is He that is in you than He that is in the world" (1 John 4:4). The Lord Jesus Christ Who lives in us is infinitely more powerful than the sputtering power of Satan and all of the demons of hell. And John gives an additional promise: "Whatsoever is born of God overcomes the world..." (1 John 5:4). Whatsoever! Each and every single child of God overcomes the world. But there is a caveat. John goes on to say, "And this is the victory that overcomes the world – our faith" (1 John 5:4).

Beloved, the power of God in your life and mine is either operative or inoperative upon one condition – our faith. Faith is of such essence in the Christian life that the writer of Hebrews says that without faith it is impossible to please God (Heb. 11:6). And there are two OT verses that coupled together spell out faith's role as plainly as it can be said. Part of 2 Chron. 20:20 says, "...Believe in the Lord your God and you shall be established...." Now, listen to the last part of Is. 7:9, "...If you will not believe, surely you shall not be established". How much clearer can it get, beloved? "Believe in the Lord your God and you shall be established". "If you will not believe, surely you shall not be established". God says that our success or failure in the Christian life hinges totally upon our faith.

Today I want to issue to you a call to faith. By the Holy Spirit's power I want to God to pierce your souls with the conviction to be men and women, teenagers, and children of faith, and that you will say "Yes!" to the Spirit's call. Turn in your Bibles, please, to Mark 9:14-29.

It had already been an eventful day for Jesus. At the time of our story it was most likely in the afternoon. Jesus and the inner circle of His disciples, Peter, James, and John, had hiked up an unnamed high mountain where Jesus had a glorious meeting with Moses & Elijah. At that meeting God removed the veil from the disciples' eyes and they were given a glimpse of Jesus in all of His heavenly glory. Mark writes that Jesus' clothes became exceeding white like snow and Matthew adds that His face shown like the sun. What an awesome worship experience it was for Peter, James, and John! Basking in the presence of the divine glory and perhaps actually getting to meet two of the heavyweights of the entire OT. It was so good that Peter didn't want to leave. And so as the meeting was winding down Peter said to Jesus, "Lord it is so good to be here. If you wish, let's

make a tabernacle for You, Moses, and Elijah and stay a little longer.

Have you ever been there? Have you ever been in the presence of God so strong, perhaps in a worship service, perhaps in a small group prayer meeting, perhaps in your own personal quiet time, but wherever it was, God's presence was so strong and so sweet that you just didn't want to leave? Dinner could burn, the Super Bowl could start, all of your family and friends could be waiting for you to start your birthday party, but it just didn't matter. You were in the presence of Jesus and you weren't going to leave. Let me say that this should be the goal every time we come into this place for worship! We should be so hungry for the presence of God and we should be so glad to be together singing His praises and hearing His Word proclaimed that it wouldn't matter one bit to us if we didn't get out at 12 on the dot. Friends, I promise you, if every one of us showed up each Sunday with a burning desire to meet Jesus on the mountain, then Jesus would start showing up in all of His glory to meet us and bless us.

But I want us understand today that Jesus was not most interested in His fellowship with Moses and Elijah, sweet as it was. Jesus had a **higher priority**, and he declined to take Peter up on his offer and headed back down the mountain. And when He and the three disciples arrived they ran up on another meeting that was totally different from the one they left. For a great multitude of people had gathered around the other nine disciples, who were in a heated conversation with a group of scribes. And it was the disciples who were taking all the heat. Because a man with a demon possessed son had come to them and asked them to cast out the demon, but they could not.

I want us to stop and learn a couple of lessons here. Lesson number one: **we must never allow worship to interfere with ministry.** Now, please do not misunderstand me. We need

encounters with God such as I mentioned earlier, that are so powerful you just don't want to leave. And when you do not truly worship on a regular basis you do not grow in your faith. When you do not come into God's presence, humble yourself, and praise Him for Who He is and what He has done. And if you are not meeting God in the Word and in prayer each day, your faith withers. When you are not faithful in your worship with the body of Christ on Sunday, your faith withers. And the reason many believers have such little impact for Jesus in their family and in their circle of friends and in a lost world all around them is because worship is such a low priority with them. They can take it or leave it, and they are spiritual wimps as a result.

So with all my heart I plead with you, make worship a priority! Make time to get alone with God each day. Don't let a sore toe or your wife's sore toe keep you from being in God's house to worship Him on Sunday. I've never understood how some people can leave their spouses at home not feeling well and go everywhere in the world except to church. I've never understood why a visit to Aunt Suzie in the hospital has to be on Sunday morning rather than Sunday afternoon. Well, actually I do understand. Worship is not a priority. But today I plead with you, make worship a priority.

But having said that, you must also never allow worship to interfere with ministry. That's what Peter would have done that day. He would have stayed up on the mountain all day and into the night, the worship was so good. But Jesus knew that there was a man with his young son down below that desperately needed a miracle. So He left His fellowship with Moses and Elijah to go and meet a human need. Oh, what a lesson! Beloved, worship is never an end in itself. Some believers love to go hear great music and great preaching and get an emotional high that makes them want to shout, "Come, Lord Jesus, come and rapture

me now!” And that’s OK. But beloved, when you and I truly come into the presence of God, God’s intent is always more than self-gratifying emotions. God always shares with us the heart of Jesus, and Jesus’ heart is always, always, to minister to broken people in a broken world. And just like Jesus did on this day, God would have us to leave our worship and go out to the lost, hurting, and dying and minister to them in Jesus’ name. If worship doesn’t lead to ministry it is all in vain.

Have you ever thought about this? Of all the people who’ve ever lived on this earth, **not one** ever ministered as much as Jesus. Acts 10:38 tells us that God anointed Jesus with the Holy Spirit and with power, and that He went about doing good. Jesus did more good works than any person who’s ever lived. And by those good works, including His death, He’s had more influence than any man who’s ever lived. Beloved, if you want to influence lives, then just be a minister! Make a phone call, write a card, do an act of kindness in Jesus’ name. Beloved, it will make a difference in somebody’s life, and possibly an eternal difference.

So we see Jesus’ priority, ministering to hurting people, and if that’s His priority it certainly should be ours. But I want us also to see the **predicament** of the disciples. The disciples were in a pickle. They had run dry on the power of God. They were confronted with a boy that needed deliverance from a demon. But look now at the saddest three words in the vocabulary of any follower of Jesus seeking to do His work. They are the last three words of verse 18. “They could not”. They could not deliver the poor, demonized boy from his bondage. And the sad thing about the situation is that they had no one to blame but themselves. Back in Mark 6 we read that when Jesus called the twelve and sent them out that He gave them power over unclean spirits, and verse 13 tells us that they cast out many demons and healed many who were sick. But here they failed. So they went to Jesus

and asked Him why. And in Matthew's account Jesus tells them point blank: "Because of your unbelief" (Matt. 17:20). They quit believing Jesus' promise of His deliverance and healing power.

Beloved, I declare to you that there is no greater sin for a Christian than unbelief. For you see, when you get angry, lie, lust, or steal you sin against God's commands, but when you don't believe God you sin against His character, and that is so much worse. Look at verse 19. Jesus calls the entire generation faithless, and that included the disciples, the scribes, and the father of the demonized boy. But in Matthew's account Jesus calls them faithless and perverse (Matt. 17:17). And the word "perverse" means corrupt and wicked. Jesus said the disciples' unbelief was wickedness! And in frustration He asks them, "How long is it going to take for you to learn to believe what I say is true?"

Suppose your teenage son asks you if he can take the family car out one night and you tell him no, but he sneaks it out anyway, and on his joy ride with his buddies he has a wreck. You are hurt and upset, but you tell your son that because of God's grace you will pay for the car to be fixed. And then suppose when the repairs are finished and you go to pay the bill, the body shop tells you that your son has already paid it. So you go to your son and say, "Don't you remember that I said that I'd take care of it?" And he says, "Yes, dad. But I didn't think you to be a man of your word, so I took out a loan and paid it anyway". Tell me, which action would hurt the most, his disobedience in taking the car, or his disbelief of your word? There is no question. And beloved, to doubt God's word is to question His perfect, holy character, that He Who is truth would actually not tell the truth. And nothing hurts Him anymore. I wonder, if Jesus were present in the flesh with us today, would He say to us what He said to the disciples? But let's make it more personal. Would He say to you or to me, "O

faithless and perverse generation? How long is it going to take for you to learn to trust in Me?”

Well, that was the predicament of the disciples, but even worse was the **peril** of the boy. This young boy was in a pitiful state. The demon that inhabited him would rise up and absolutely torment him from time to time. It would cause him to foam at the mouth, to grind his teeth, and to fall out as stiff as a board. The demon would cause the boy to throw himself into fires and into rivers or lakes to destroy himself, and it also caused the boy to be deaf and dumb. Can you imagine the grief and agony that this gave to the boy's father? To have a child in such a horrible state and to be able to do absolutely nothing to help him?

Beloved, let me say that what the demon was doing to this child is no less than what he would do to you and to me, and to every other person in the entire world. The devil hates the human race. He is as a roaring lion, seeking whomever he may devour (1 Peter 5:8). The devil shows no partiality, just like God shows no partiality, and it is only by the grace of God that none of us have been demonized as this child. But what we fail to realize so many times is that even though the devil can't touch a believer's soul, he is still seeking to destroy us every day! He is seeking to destroy our witness for Jesus, he is seeking to destroy our marriages, and he is seeking to destroy our health. He is seeking to destroy our peace of mind, telling us that we are not saved or that we've committed some sin that God won't forgive, or that God will never answer our prayers. The devil brings up memories of past hurts and strokes our feelings of bitterness to the point of controlling us. And he throws temptations in our face every day, seeking to cause us to fall. And the scary thing about it is that Satan doesn't come to us breathing out fire and with pitchfork in hand, but as an angel of light (2 Cor. 11:14), and we never know it's him until it's too late.

That's the reason that as Peter says we must be serious and be alert, lest we be devoured.

There's another thing we tend to forget about the devil and his activity, and that is even though very few people who are not saved are actually demon possessed, they are none-the-less a child of Satan and just as securely bound in sin as the boy was bound by the demon. They follow the dictates of the devil and their destiny is the home of the devil, eternal hell. Jesus told the Pharisees, "You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do..." (John 8:44). These people are our relatives, our neighbors, our work associates, the kind lady that checks us out at the grocery store or is our waitress in the restaurant, and they are all in desperate need of Jesus, and most of them don't even know it. And they will never know unless somebody tells them.

So this young boy was in a hopeless, doomed condition apart from a touch by Jesus. But I want to point out something just in passing. In verse 21 Jesus asked the father of the young boy how long the demon had been plaguing his son, and the man responded, "From childhood". From childhood. Beloved, those words shout out a message to the church of God that we must not miss. Reach the children! We don't know how old this boy was when the demon first inhabited him, but he was just a child. And he was just as much a child of the devil as the worst adult sinner in Rome. And how it should break our hearts at the number of children in Fosters and Ralph who are being raised in homes where their parents have no care for their souls, who never bring them to church, and who are letting them grow up with no knowledge of their sin and their need of Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord. And how it should burden us to try to reach every single one of them. And what a great time to start, this week, by inviting that child or children you know in your

neighborhood to our VBS this year, and bringing them yourself if that's what it takes to get them here.

We have seen the **priority of Jesus**. Jesus came to minister to hurting humanity. We have seen the **predicament of the disciples**. They had lost the power of God upon their lives. And we've seen the **peril of the boy**. He was demon possessed and hopeless without God's intervention, but praise God, that is exactly what happened. And it happened by the **power of faith**. I love the honesty of this troubled father who came to Jesus. He desperately wants Jesus to deliver his son, but he is not sure if Jesus is able to do it. But he does not try to hide his doubts from Jesus. He openly admits his lack of faith. He said to Jesus, "If you can do anything, please have compassion on us and help us". But Jesus let him know right quick that any question concerning a deliverance did not lay with Jesus, but with the man himself. Let me paraphrase Jesus' response. Jesus said, "Sir, My power to heal that is not the problem, it is your ability to believe. All things are possible if you believe, including your son being set free".

Beloved, let me share the best open secret a believer in Jesus could ever hear. **Jesus has never been interested in what you can do for Him, but what He can do for you.** Does this surprise you? Well, I don't want you to take my word for it. Listen to what Jesus says. A group of people came to Jesus one day and asked Him, "What shall we do that we might work the works of God?" In other words, "What does God want us to do?" And Jesus replied, "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him Whom He sent". Just believe in Me, Jesus said. And that's what Jesus told this distraught father in our story. "Just believe. All things are possible if you will just believe". And that was both good news and bad news to his ears. All things! That meant that his son could be healed. But there was a condition. He had to believe. And that scared him to death. He wanted to believe, but

he was not sure that he could. So with all the passion of his soul he cries out to Jesus, “Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!” And Jesus did help his unbelief, and cast the demon out of his son. What a miracle! And what glory to God. Luke writes that all the multitude was amazed at the mighty power of God (KJV). And all that the father did was lift up what little faith he had to Jesus. Oh, the joy of little faith!

Now, beloved, all of us who know Jesus long for faith that will move the hand of God. And just like the father of the demoniac child, all of us have at one time or another cried out for greater faith. And so in these last few minutes I want to give you some principles that I trust God will use to increase your faith.

1. **God desires that every Christian have mountain moving faith.** Jesus says that **whoever** says to a mountain to be cast into the sea and does not doubt in his heart, it would be granted unto him (Mark 11:23). That’s the same “whoever” of John 3:16. If “whoever” believes can be saved, then “whoever” believes can move mountains. The writer of Hebrews says that the **all those** who under the new covenant would know the Lord, from the **least** to the greatest (Heb. 8:11), and that is every born-again child of God. God is no respecter of persons. “The Lord is near to **all** that call upon Him, to **all** that call upon Him in truth” (Ps. 145:18).

2. **Mountain moving faith does not have to be great faith.** Jesus told His disciples after this miracle that the faith of a mustard seed could move a mountain (Matt. 17:20), and a mustard seed is tiny. Remember, it’s not the size of your faith, it’s the size of your God that matters! So never even consider the size of your faith. You will always be discouraged and you will always doubt if you focus on yourself. Focus on the size of your

God. Focus on the miracles He's done in Scripture. Focus on the miracles He's done in your own life and in the lives of others you know or have read about.

3. God delights in answering prayers prayed for the glory of His name. Jesus told His disciples the night before He died that if they would abide in Him, then whatever they asked would be done for them, that God might be glorified (John 15:7-8). So find the will of God through His Word and prayer and ask!

4. Pray for faith. The father asked for faith and received it. In Luke 17:5 the disciples prayed, "Lord, increase our faith". Faith is a gift, and Jesus said that our Heavenly Father gives good gifts to those who ask Him (Matt. 7:11).

5. Pray big prayers. I don't suppose there has ever been a prayer prayed as big as Peter prayed out on the Sea of Galilee the day he said to Jesus, "Lord, if it is You, let me walk on the water". And Jesus didn't rebuke Peter for such an audacious request. He didn't say, "Peter, are you crazy?" He simply said, "Come". Never mind that Peter's faith failed, because Jesus came to his rescue. Peter had a big God, he prayed a big prayer, and Jesus gave him an experience no one has had before or since.

6. Try fasting. Jesus told His disciples that the reason they could not cast this particular demon was that it would not come out by any means except prayer and fasting (Mark 9:29). Beloved, fasting is not just an OT practice. I do not say that every situation that arises calls for fasting. The Holy Spirit will be your guide. But there are times when Satanic strongholds can be broken no other way than prayer and fasting.

Someone described the whole account of Jesus delivering the demon possessed boy in this manner: “The boy was mad and the father was sad”. But after Jesus delivered the boy, “The devil was mad and the crowd was glad”. Friends, how Jesus is longing to turn sadness into gladness in so many lives today! How He is longing to save lost sinners and give them joy they’ve never known. Could you be one of them? How He is longing to deliver many who are plagued by Satanic oppression and even possession and bring joy to many hearts. Would you be a part of their miracle by praying for them in faith? Let us pray.