

## “Faith and Doubt”

Scripture: Mark 9:14-29

Graphics: prayer, healing

Big Truth: The people of the PUMC are called to

Focus Phrase: Doubt addressed and given to God leads the disciple to greater faith in Him.

### 1. Introduction

- A. Let's Pray...**PRAY!**
- B. In the introduction to the gospel of Mark in my Wesley Study Bible, here's what it says, “Mark's Gospel is a relentless story about Jesus' announcement of God's righteous kingdom and the acts that accompany this proclamation. Through his ministry, Jesus encounters resistance. Evil is manifested in the demonic and in the actions of human beings. Human characters in Mark are often fearful and stubborn, and at times extremely violent. Self-seeking and the desire for honor work at cross-purposes with God's will. Evil, however, is being defeated... At times, people respond in faith, trusting in Jesus' compassion and divine authority. Though Jesus dies on the cross, once again evil is overcome as God raises him from the dead.” (The Wesley Study Bible, p. 1207)
- C. Starting two weeks ago, and continuing until the end of October, we're walking through the middle section of Mark's gospel. I encourage you to come each week right here or online to get some solid meat of Jesus' teaching on what the kingdom of God is and why Jesus invites us to be actively seeking to be part of it.
- D. Today, our message is entitled *Faith and Doubt*.
  - i. When we hear those two words, we tend to think that they're polar opposites...that “...if I have faith, I won't doubt. If I doubt, then I obviously don't have enough faith.”
  - ii. What we'll see today is that those two things exist side-by-side in the life of every believer. We want to be people of more faith (and all of us have a growing edge there no matter how long you've been a believer). Yet, doubts creep in, or hang around...and each of us struggles to know what to believe.
  - iii. James Philip Bailey said, “Who never doubted never half believed; Where doubt, there truth is -- 'tis her shadow.” (“Festus: A Country Town”)
  - iv. Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach said this, “The believer who has never doubted will hardly convert a doubter.” (“Aphorisms”)
- E. Here's where we're headed today (write this down): **Doubt addressed and given to God leads the disciple to greater faith in Him.** Doubt can lead us to greater faith if we allow the Holy Spirit to help us enter INTO it and through it.

- F. In our gospel scene today from Mark, Jesus and the disciples are just coming down the mountain of Transfiguration. I preached about the Transfiguration on Valentine's Day this year, so you can go back and review that message for some backstory.
- G. Jesus, alone with Peter, James, and John have just come down after having this amazing transfiguration realization. They find that there's a crowd gathered, arguing about something. It's obvious that they are disagreeing, expressing doubts, etc. Then Jesus meets a man with some specific doubts.
- H. Here's what they found when they got down the mountain... (open your bibles to Mark 9, starting in verse 14...)

## 2. Scripture

### A. READ Mark 9:14-29

- B. Reading about this miracle two centuries after it happened doesn't make it any easier to understand or believe.
- C. It's an incredible miracle! A son - we don't know his age but assume he is not a child - brought by a father to be healed by Jesus. The problem was, however, that Jesus wasn't around. Jesus, Peter, James, and John were all on the mountain of Transfiguration.
- D. So, Jesus and the three found that the disciples were arguing with the scribes - the religious leaders - and a crowd was gathered around them. The assumption here is that the crowd wanted to see Jesus but had to settle for the 9 disciples that remained.
- E. And as often happens when the leader is gone and group members aren't fully trained yet, they tried to explain, defend, and even attempt to heal this man's son. Unfortunately, it didn't work, apparently. The son was still diseased - possessed - with this seizure condition.
- F. It probably didn't help Jesus' standing with the scribes and Pharisees that His disciples tried to heal this guy but failed.
- G. When the man told Jesus that the disciples tried to heal him but couldn't, Jesus got pretty hot. We're not fully sure who he was mad at, but it was probably the disciples, the crowds, and the man himself.
  - i. Jesus was frustrated at the **9 disciples** because they tried to do something he hadn't commissioned them to do. And because they tried to do this thing on their own, it failed.
  - ii. Jesus was angry at **the crowd** for being so star-struck with Him. Were they there to give honor and glory to God or did they just want a show? Mark told us that when the crowd saw Jesus, they ran forward to greet Him like the Hollywood paparazzi.

- iii. AND, Jesus was disappointed **in this man** who brought his son to finally be healed of this disease. It didn't matter who healed him or why or how. He just wanted relief for himself and his son. It wasn't about faith, really...he just wanted to get what he wanted from whomever could provide it.
- H. And that's when Jesus, in a relatively uncharacteristic harsh rebuke, said, "You faithless generation, how much longer must I be among you? How much longer must I put up with you? Bring him to me." (Mark 9:19)
- I. Ouch. Ouch!
- J. So, they brought the boy...and we read that the demon possessing him did NOT want to meet Jesus, especially because Jesus was already angry.
- K. Then, at the end of the man's second explanation of what this disease does to his son, he said this to Jesus (and here's our focus for today), "**...but if you are able to do anything, have pity on us and help us.**"
- L. I sense that, although that was honestly where this man was at, and we hear the utter frustration in this man's statement, Jesus had had enough. "If you are able?!?! All things can be done for the one who believes."
- M. And in that moment - that pivot point - this turned into a teaching moment very quickly...and Jesus' words instantly convicted the heart of this man to get small before Jesus and cry out, "**I believe; help my unbelief.**"
- N. "Pisteuo boethei mou te apistia!" That's the Greek. Think about that phrase - that PRAYER coming from this man.
  - i. In my office, I have this piece of paper hanging where I can see it. It's very simple. It has that Greek phrase on it. I think this is one of the most honest and powerful confessions in all of the NT: "Pisteuo boethei mou te apistia!"
  - ii. I believe; help my unbelief.
- O. And it was then - through that confession - that **Jesus healed his son.**
- P. After the exorcism, the crowd thought the boy was dead...but Jesus took his hand and lifted him up.. HE. WAS. ALIVE. HE. WAS. HEALED!
- Q. Believe it. Do not doubt it.
- R. This man, whom we never hear from again in the Bible, went from doubt and despair, to a believer. What it took was not the miracle of Jesus' healing...but a confession that he doubted and wanted to have greater faith. The problem was, he didn't know what to put his faith in until he had an encounter with Jesus that day.
- S. **Doubt expressed and given to God leads you to greater faith in Him.**

### 3. Application

- A. Eugene Peterson said, “Any time we look into newspapers, or into our own hearts, and despair, we do well to remember that God's people have faced similar prospects, similar reversals, similar headlines, similar assaults on faith, and have recovered from the doubt, been rescued from the pessimism and foreboding and gone on to live in praise of God.” -Eugene Peterson, *Living the Message: Daily Reflections*, ed. Janice Stubbs Patterson San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996), 193.
- B. As you're hearing this miracle story today, what and where are your doubts?
- C. Notice I didn't ask, “Do you have doubts?” because I know you do, and I do. I wouldn't have that poster in my office if I didn't.
- D. Some doubts are big, like, “Is God even real?” Other doubts are more subtle, “Like does God care about me?” “Can God really save me?” “Is it ever going to be better?”
- E. Having doubts is not something to be ashamed of and doubts do not disqualify you from being a true follower of Jesus.
- F. Having doubts, however, is the Holy Spirit's opportunity to teach you, grow you, and use you for even greater levels of ministry and faith.
- G. “Martin Luther is generally thought of as one of the staunchest defenders of true faith that ever lived. As such, he recognized the power and pull behind faith's sister ... doubt. He wrote: ‘Nobody in this life is nearer to God than those who hate and deny him, and he has no more pleasing, no more dear children than these.’” (Weimar edition of Luther's works, 5:120, lines 25-26.)
- H. That's a pretty shocking statement from Luther. Here's what religious historian Will Herberg has to say about it: "Luther's statement, however shocking and extreme it may sound, points to a profound truth: Unless God matters infinitely, he does not matter at all. There is something absolute about faith which demands everything or nothing. Faith is not just one more interest or attachment in life, side by side with other interests or attachments ... "This is what Luther was saying. “The passionate unbeliever who 'hates' and 'denies' God may be all wrong in his ideas, but at least he takes God seriously. This kind of believer is no mere unbeliever: He is rather an anti-believer whose life is wrestling with God ... he does not take God for granted. For that reason, Luther insists, he is near to God and dear to him.” --As quoted by Walter R. Wietzke, *The Primacy of the Spoken Word. Redemptive Proclamation in a Complex World* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1988), 112.
- I. Now, there may be those who are here today, or worshiping online, who would admit that they are anti-believers. You take God seriously, but don't yet believe Jesus is the Son of God fully capable of full salvation in Jesus.
- i. The man who came to Jesus would very well fall into that category at first. If that's you, then God is as interested in you and your doubts as He is in me

- and mine. The very fact that you're here is a powerful confession that you believe, and yet want God to help you with your unbelief.
- ii. God's grace - prevenient grace that works in your life even before you know He's working - is wooing you - pulling you - to bring your diseases and hurts and doubts and failure to Jesus.
  - iii. The reason God is inviting you to bring all that to Jesus is because the world doesn't have the answers that work. Let me say that again: The world does NOT have the answers to the pain or doubts in your life. Drugs, alcohol, sex, hobbies, money, fame, or anything else don't work.
  - iv. "Pisteuo boethei mou te apistia!" I believe; help my unbelief.
  - v. That's your prayer. That's the prayer of someone who is ready to give up total control of their life to the One who calls you to deny yourself, die to self, pick up your cross with Jesus, and follow Him.
- J. For the rest of us, our confession and prayer is the same, "I believe; help my unbelief." Grow me, Jesus. Show me, Jesus. Lead me, Jesus.
- i. WE may be more like the disciples who are trying so hard to do things on our own, thinking Jesus asked us to do it. Yet, we have doubts because we don't see things happening...or happening fast enough or in our timing.
  - ii. We have a sense of what we're supposed to believe and do, but you and I are impatient, not fully willing to let go of our own desires and plans.
  - iii. If that's you today, be encouraged. Jesus said in Luke 17:6, "If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it will obey you."
  - iv. The key here is not commanding the mulberry bush to move because YOU want it, but through prayer and humility and sacrifice, learning what God wants to do with the mulberry bush and praying for THAT.
  - v. The disciples would eventually be commissioned by Jesus to go out and heal and preach and perform miracles. With the authority of Jesus, their doubts faded and their faith grew.
  - vi. James 1:6 gives us this command, "But ask in faith, never doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind;"
- K. So what do you do with your doubts:
- i. First **confess them to God and don't hide them.**
    - a. Cry out like the man in our story. Give God the full force of what you doubt about Him or the world or your faith. He can handle it.
    - b. God is the final authority of truth and faith.
    - c. Start by giving your doubts over to Him.

- ii. Then, **express your doubts to others** in a small group or bible study.
  - a. You'll never know how many people are walking the same path you're walking if you never walk the path with some others.
  - b. This takes vulnerability and humility, but it's critical to growing in faith.
  - c. Get into a Sunday School class or small group...our men's ministry group or women's ministry group.
  - d. Together, you can search the Word, pray together, study together, and talk about how God is challenging you, growing you, and using you.
  - e. Not only will it help you in YOUR doubts, but it will help others in THEIR doubts.
- iii. Finally, **allow God to turn your doubts into faith.**
  - a. God loves when you grow in faith. God does NOT want your doubts to turn you FROM Him.
  - b. God wants you to believe, but He also wants you to own your faith growth. Many times, that means letting your doubts blossom into a stronger faith than you would've had if you simply believed.
  - c. The goal at PUMC is for every person to be moving along and growing through our Intentional Discipleship Process - in worship, community, obeying, openness, serving, and sharing.
  - d. If you have doubts in those areas, it's a great place to start growing.

#### **4. Conclusion**

- A. Doubt expressed and given to God leads the disciple to greater faith in Him.
- B. "Pisteuo boethei mou te apistia!" I believe; help my unbelief.
- C. Don't hide from your doubts...let God grow your faith through them.
- D. Imagine a church that, together, is ready to turn over all our doubts to God and allow the Holy Spirit to grow our collective faith in Him.
- E. The result is a powerful witness to God's goodness and power, and a strong faith in the One who changes lives.
- F. Let Him change you today - doubts to faith.
- G. Let's pray and then come to the table...
- H. PRAY!