

FEEBLE FAITH APPEALING TO A STRONG SAVIOR

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“And straightway the father of the child cried out and said with tears, Lord, I believe; help You my unbelief.”
Mark 9:24.

THIS is the case of a man who knew well enough what he wanted, and who was full of anxiety to obtain it; indeed, he was so anxious to obtain it that he prayed most earnestly, and most importunately, for it. He prayed to the right Person, too; for, after having failed with the disciples, he resorted to their Master Himself. Yet, notwithstanding all this, at the time recorded in our text, he had not obtained the blessing that he sought.

We probably know of many persons who have not yet been awakened to a sense of their need, and much labor has to be expended by the faithful minister in order to show them their danger, and to make them realize their true condition in the sight of God. They have many spiritual needs, but they do not know what those needs really are. This man had gone further than that, for he did know, what, was the great need of himself and his son.

Then there are others, who have head knowledge as to their spiritual needs, but they do not seem to be anxious to have those needs supplied. They are stolid, careless, and immovable. That was not the case with this man. He knew that he wanted his son to be healed, he was intensely eager that he should be healed, and healed there and then. His heart was moved with compassion for his child, and he was most anxious that the evil spirit should be cast out of him at once. There are some of our hearers, who seem to have desire of a certain kind, but they do not use that desire in the right way. They go about seeking salvation where it is not to be found. They are, to an extent, earnest in their own fashion; but to them the Lord might say, as of old, “Why do you spend money for that which is not bread and your labor for that which satisfies not?”

This man had gone a stage beyond that. He was directing all his entreaties to Jesus; he was appealing to the great Lord Himself, from whom alone deliverance could come. It is a great mercy, my dear friends, if you are brought as far as this poor man was—to know what you really need, to be anxious to obtain it, and to be making your appeal to Jesus to grant your requests. Yet, with all that, this man had not obtained the gift he was seeking; and there are many, like him, who, also have not secured the blessing they are seeking. You are aware of your sin, and you lament it, yet you cannot get a sense of pardon. You know your spiritual needs, and you bemoan them, but you cannot grasp that which can supply them. You have made an appeal to God in Christ Jesus, and you are resolved that you will never leave off so appealing. Yet, for all that, you have not, thus far, received the blessing. There is something or other in the way—something that hinders you; and I should not wonder—no, I feel quite certain—that the thing which hinders some of you from getting what you seek from Christ is your own unbelief. That is the point at which I am going to aim in my discourse, as God shall help me; and I pray that as I do so, from many a heart may be breathed this confession and cry, “Lord, I believe; help my unbelief.”

I. There are three things in our text; and the first is THE SUSPECTED DIFFICULTY AND THE REAL DIFFICULTY.

Reading the story carefully, I gather that this man saw difficulties as to his child's cure, but that he never thought of the real one. *He fancied that the difficulty lay in the case of his child.* His words to Christ, “If You can do anything,” seem to imply that he felt, “This is a case that is quite out of the ordinary run—something special and singular—and, therefore, beyond Your power.” If I can interpret his thoughts, it is my opinion that he said to himself, “This is too mysterious a case to be cured. An evil spirit has struck my boy dumb, yet that same spirit makes him foam at the mouth, and gnash with his teeth. Those very organs,

which refuse to utter articulate speech, are, nevertheless, strangely set in motion. He seems to be taken, too, by this evil spirit, at intervals, and hurried this way and that—he cannot tell how—and, at one time, he is hurled into the fire, and, at another time, into the water. It is a most mysterious malady; and, possibly, because it is so mysterious, it is not in the Messiah's line of things."

I have known some who have thought their case, spiritually, to be very mysterious. They have imagined that there was something about their constitution or, worse still, that some extraordinary guilt had brought upon them a condition of heart that was peculiarly vicious. They have even fancied that this state of heart had put them beneath the ban of the unpardonable sin, and that others had better beware of coming near them, for their condition was so strange, so singular, so wild, that they could not tell what to think or say of themselves. Sometimes, they are hot and in the fire; and, at other times, cold, and in the water; with no voice for praying or praising, yet able to curse and to blaspheme. "Ah!" says such a one, "my case is so mysterious that even the Lord Jesus Christ will never be able to save me."

Very likely, too, the father thought that his child's disease was too violent to be cured. He was dashed about, here and there, and rent and torn as though his poor body must be dissolved into the atoms of which it was made. He could not be held in or restrained; no government or control could be exercised over him; for the demon carried him, with an irresistible influence, wherever it pleased. The poor father could truly have said, "Look at him now. I brought him into the presence of Christ Himself, and here he lay wallowing upon the ground, being torn in pieces by the demon; and now that the paroxysm is past, he lies there as if he was dead, and some say that he really is dead."

I should not wonder if I am addressing a man who thinks that the difficulty as to his salvation lies in the fact that his passions are so violent and so fierce. Possibly, he says, "I kept sober for months; but, all of a sudden, it seemed as if the drink demon overpowered me, and I had an awful bout of drinking till delirium tremens was well-near upon me." "Ah!" says another, "I did struggle against a vicious habit which I had formed, and I thought I had overcome it; but, alas! The next time the temptation came in my way, I did not seem to have any more power to resist it than a snowflake has to resist the wind that drives it along; and I was carried right away by the evil impulse. Some men have a peculiar bent towards evil because of their intense vehemence of character; it was so with Samson, though he had the saving grace of faith. Such men are, perhaps, strongly developed in the sinews and muscles of their body; but, certainly, they are in the passions and impulses of their soul. You may bind them with fetters and chains, but the strongest bonds are only like the green twine was to Samson. The devil that is in them seems to be absolutely supreme over them when he puts forth his power. I do not wonder, therefore, if they think that the difficulty, in their case, lies in the violence and suddenness of their sin; but it is not so.

Perhaps this poor father thought that in his child's case, the difficulty lay in the fact that he had been such a long time a sufferer, even from his childhood. In answer to Christ's question, "How long is it ago since this came unto him?" he said, "of a child." So a man sometimes says, "Sin is bred in my bones, and it will come out in my flesh. My very nature is corrupt; while I was but a child, I loved sin; and since then, throughout my youth and manhood, I have gone after it greedily, and it has become a habit that is firmly fixed upon me. 'Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard his spots?' Then may he, that is accustomed to do evil, learn to do well." Such sinners feel as if they had been steeped and soaked in the crimson lye until there was no hope of ever getting the stain out of them. They have been wanderers from God even from their youth, how can they be brought near to Him?

Yet we know that the difficulty did not lie in the child's case at all, for Jesus Christ was able to cast the devil out, and He did cast it out. And if that child had been possessed by a whole legion of devils, instead of only by one, Jesus Christ could, with a single word, have cast them all out. No matter how long the demon had been in possession of the child, nor how vehement and impetuous he might be, Christ could drive him out whenever He pleased. And, at this moment, dear friend, your past life, your sins, your natural corruptions, your inherited vices, your evil habits, which have grown so strong upon you, are not the real difficulty. The Lord Jesus Christ "is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him." He Himself said, "All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men;" so I care not how bad your case may be—it may even be worse than I should dare to guess, there may be a secret criminality about it that sets it altogether by itself as an unusual and even unique offense against God; but that is not the difficulty in the way of your salvation. Christ can easily write "*settled*" at the bottom of the long account of your sins, and it is no more trouble for Him to write that word at the foot of a long bill than a short one. God can as readily make you a new creature in Christ Jesus, whatever your sins may have been, as if you

had been living a strictly moral life. You are spiritually dead in any case, and it is He alone who can give you life. You are lost in any case, and the good Shepherd can just as readily find the lost sheep that has gone far astray as another which is only just outside the fold, for He is almighty; and, therefore, able to do all things. So the difficulty does not lie there.

Perhaps, however—no, we know that it was so—*the father thought that the difficulty lay with Jesus Christ Himself*. He seemed to say, “I have done all I can for my child; I brought him to Your disciples, but they could not cure him, and now I have brought him to You. If You can”—but he had hardly got those words out of his mouth before the Lord Jesus addressed him, in a peculiar Greek idiom, which cannot be fully translated into English, but which might run something like this: “The *if you can*”—that is exactly the Greek word—“the *if you can* believe, all things are possible to him that believes;” as much as to say, “The *if you can* does not lie with Me. Oh, no, the *if you can* lies with you.” He takes the man’s word, and hurls them back at him. I daresay the man may have thought, “If His disciples *cannot* cure my child, at all events their Master *does not*. He has seen how afflicted he is; if He could have done it, surely He would at once have said to my child, ‘Be healed;’ yet there He is, standing still, and talking to me, as if this were not a pressing case of urgent need. It must be lack of power on His part that keeps Him from curing my child.” But Jesus Christ will not let such a thing as that be said without showing that it is not true; and, brethren, if you harbor in your heart any idea that there is a lack of power in the Lord Jesus Christ to save you, you are believing a most atrocious falsehood, and defaming the almighty Savior. The difficulty, in your case, is not either in the sin or in the Savior. He is able to forgive the greatest conceivable transgressions of all who believe in Him; and He is able to break and to renew the hardest heart, even though it should be hard as steel or like the nether millstone.

II. We have now to consider, in the second place, THE TEARFUL DISCOVERY: “Lord, I believe; help my unbelief.”

What was his discovery? Why his discovery was, *that he did not believe*; and that is where the real difficulty lay. When did the man make this discovery? When he began to believe. Is it not a very singular thing that as soon as ever he had a little faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, he discovered the great abyss of his unbelief? “Lord,” he said, “I believe; but, oh! I do also disbelieve so much that my unbelief seems to swallow up my belief.” Until a man gets faith, he may think that he has got it; but when he has real faith in Jesus Christ, then he shudders as he thinks how long he has lived in unbelief, and realizes how much of unbelief is still mixed with his belief. There are many of you, who have never believed to the saving of your souls; yet you say, “Oh, yes! We believe the Bible; we believe in God; we believe in Jesus Christ.” You stand up in church, and say, “I believe in God the Father almighty, Maker of heaven and earth,” and so on, but you do not do anything of the sort. If you did, you would be saved; since, true belief in Jesus Christ brings salvation to everyone who so believes. While men have no faith—I repeat what I said just now—while men have no faith, they are unconscious of their unbelief; but, as soon as they get a little faith, then they begin to be conscious of the greatness of their unbelief. When the blind man gets a little light into his eyes, he perceives something of the blackness of the darkness in which he has been living; so, you must be able to say, from your heart, “Lord, I believe,” or else you will never be able to pray, as this man did, “help You my unbelief.” Even the small measure of faith is needful to discover the great measure of the unbelief.

This man, *as soon as he discovered his unbelief, was distressed and alarmed at it*. He could not look straight at Christ and say, “Lord, I do disbelieve You, but I cannot help it.” No, he was distressed about it; he felt how dreadful a thing it was to be unbelieving; and he appealed to Christ, confessing his unbelief, saying, “Lord, help me out of it, I beseech You.” Notice how he turned his whole attention to that one matter of his own unbelief; he did not even mention his poor child. His child was, no doubt, still in his thoughts; yet his prayer was not concerning his child, but concerning his own unbelief, for he saw that was the difficulty needing to be removed. And when God, in infinite mercy, visits a poor troubled heart, and gives it even a little faith in Jesus Christ, its great distress is concerning its remaining unbelief, for it perceives that this is the greatest of all sins, the most terrible of all stumbling blocks, and is, indeed, the chief hindrance to men’s entrance into rest of heart, and into eternal life.

Now, look, all of you who are seeking Christ, but who say that you cannot get peace. The difficulty lies here; if you can believe, all things are possible to you; but it is because you do not believe, that you remain as you are.

Let me show you what it is that you do not believe. You say that Christ cannot save you. Then, you believe that omnipotence—you dare not say it is not omnipotence—has for once met its match. Look that statement in the face—that the Eternal Son of God has a task set before Him which, He cannot perform; in other words, you do not believe in the omnipotence of God, for, if He be omnipotent, He must be able to save you.

Next, sinner, when you say, “Jesus cannot save me,” you cast a slur upon His precious blood. You stand, in imagination, at the foot of His cross, and you see Him bleeding away His very life, yet you say, “The merit of that blood is limited; I know it is, for it cannot atone for my sin.” You are trampling upon the blood of the Son of God, and counting it an unholy thing, by declaring that your sin is mightier than His infinite sacrifice.

Again, after shedding His blood for sinners, Christ went back into heaven, and a great part of His occupation there is to make intercession for the transgressors. Yet you say that His intercession cannot be powerful enough to avail for you, although I have already reminded you that God has said, “Wherefore He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever lives to make intercession for them.” To say of yourself, “Christ cannot save me,” or to say of any other man, “He cannot save that man,” is to insult His blood, and to caste a slight upon His ever-living plea. What greater crime can there be than thus to limit the Holy One of Israel—yes, to limit Him both when bleeding on the cross and sitting on His throne? I charge you, sirs, to feel the utmost horror at the very thought that you should have been guilty of such a crime against the Lord Jesus Christ. God has declared that “He that covers his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesses and forsakes them shall have mercy.” The apostle John, writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, declares that “the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.” If, then, you say, “But it cannot cleanse me from my sin,” you give the lie direct to the most solemn revelations and pledges of the divine mercy. Do you mean to do that? Oh, how often shall we have to remind you that whether you mean to do so, or not, that is what you are doing? Remember how the loving John writes, “He that believes not God has made Him a liar; because he believes not the record that God gave of His Son.”

In addition to insulting the Son as to the efficacy of His blood, and insulting the Father concerning His veracity—bear with me, sinner, in bringing these grave charges against you; and as God bears with you, you may well bear with me as I remind you of your sin—you also insult the Spirit of God by your unbelief, for you as good as say, “The Spirit of God cannot renew my heart; He cannot bring me to repentance; He cannot bring faith to me.” Yet the Spirit, and the Father and the Son, is Himself God, infinite and almighty. It is a great sin for anyone to say, “The Spirit cannot regenerate me; there is no hope for me.”

Is it possible that you, poor despairing sinner, think that your despair proves that you are humble; it is not so. Despair is one of the proudest things in the world, for it dares even to tell the almighty Spirit of God that He cannot—*He cannot*—save. I beseech you, do not say so; but if you have faith enough to believe that Jesus is omnipotent, and that there is unlimited value in His blood and His plea; that the Father is true, and that His promises must be fulfilled; and that the Spirit of God is able to work such a change in your heart that old things shall pass away, and all things shall become new; then be alarmed to think that there should be any unbelief remaining in you, and cry out, with tears, as this man did, “Lord, I believe; help You my unbelief.”

III. Now comes our third point—THE INTELLIGENT APPEAL.

The man has seen where the difficulty lies; he has made a discovery as to his own unbelief; and now he turns round to Jesus, and he cries, “Lord, I believe; help You my unbelief.” Kindly notice the wording of the man’s prayer as recorded in the 22nd verse: “If You can do anything, have compassion on us, and help us.” See that word “help.” And, now, when he is convinced of his unbelief, look at his prayer: “Help You my unbelief”—the same word that he had used before. In his first petition, looking at his poor child wallowing on the ground, he cried, “Help us.” But now he has been taught better, and he says, in effect, “Lord, I see that it is easy work for You to cast a devil out, but the difficulty is that I am unbelieving, and that hinders You, Lord. Help me believe, for that is what is needed.” I recommend some of you—instead of praying, “Lord, give me a sense of pardoned sin, give me a new heart, give me to feel that You love me”—pray those prayers by and by; but, for the present, pray like this, “Lord, help me to believe; Lord, give me faith; Lord, drive away my unbelief.” Direct your prayers to that one point, for that is the matter in which you are lacking. Unbelief is the great stone lying at the door of your heart, and preventing that door from being opened.

Notice that *this man's prayer was intelligently addressed to One, who, he believed, could help him.* He seemed to say to himself, "If Christ can help my child to get well, then He can help me to believe." Believe that, sinner; and ask Him to help you to believe. His prayer was addressed to One in whom he did believe, in a measure; for he would not have prayed to Christ to help his unbelief if he had not felt that Christ could do so. And he did say, "Lord, I believe." His was a strange mixture of belief and unbelief; and so are you, my dear friends; but I charge you, with the little faith you have got, if you believe that Jesus can save other people, go to Him, and beseech Him to cast out of you the unbelief which is still lurking within you. The chief reason why you have not peace with God, why you have not found the conscious enjoyment of eternal life, is that you lack faith; you need your unbelief to be cast out.

I am going to close my discourse by showing you that *there is nobody but the Lord Jesus Christ who can help us to get rid of unbelief*; and by advising you to take your unbelief, and all your other sins, and confess them to Christ as sins, and then ask Him to enable you to get rid of them. It ought to enable you to see how Jesus Christ does help you to get rid of unbelief if you consider His nature; if you rightly understand that, it will be a deathblow to unbelief. Who and what is Jesus. You believe—I know you do—that He is "very God of very God"—that Jesus of Nazareth is "over all God, blessed forever." If you will only think of that great fact, it will help you to believe in Him. Cannot you trust your soul in the hands of God? Is He not able to deliver you? Is He not able to pardon you? "The Son of man has power on earth to forgive sins" because He is God. If I had an angel sent to be my Savior, I dare not trust him. When any man says that he can forgive my sins, I will not trust him, for I know that he is a liar and a thief, trying to rob God of His prerogative. When Jesus Christ, the Son of God, says that He can save me, I cannot find any reason why I should not believe Him, and I do not believe you can suggest any such reason. Unbelief is a most unreasonable thing, but faith is most reasonable and right. As Christ is divine, my natural inference is, "Then I will trust Him."

Moreover, our Lord Jesus Christ is man as well as God; and such a man as the world has never seen before or since. You have read the story of His life; did you ever read of any other man so gentle, so tender, so true, so kind, so full of affection, so willing to live and die for others? What; not trust Him? Oh, it seems to me as if I could not help trusting Him. Certainly, ever since I have known my blessed Lord and Savior, I have felt that I could say to Him, as David did, "They that know Your name will put their trust in You." Son of God, and Son of man, Your very nature helps to banish our unbelief; and, as soon as we rightly understand it, we feel that unbelief is an unnatural, illogical, and wicked thing.

Think also, for a minute or two, of His great offices. Our Lord Jesus Christ has a thousand offices, but there is one upon which I especially love to dwell. He is a Savior; He "came into the world to save sinners." Many people imagine that they cannot be saved because they are sinners; but that is the very reason why they can be saved. You remember how Martin Luther put it. He said, "The devil came to me, and he said, 'Martin Luther, you are a big sinner; you are so great a sinner that you cannot be saved.'" Luther replied, "I will tell you what I will do, Satan; I will cut off your head with your own sword; for if I am a sinner—and I know that it is so—Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, so I believe He came to save me, and I have trusted my soul to Him for time and eternity." A doctor does not come to heal those that are healthy, he naturally looks after the sick; and a Savior does not come to save those who need no saving, but He comes to save sinners; so that your sinnership, instead of being a disqualification, is, to speak broadly, a qualification. Just as filth is a qualification for being washed—just as poverty is a qualification for receiving alms—just as sickness is a qualification for medicine, so your very sin and vileness are qualifications for Christ's work of grace in you. I am using expressions that some will think strange, yet I am speaking, nevertheless, what is absolute truth. Does it not help to remove your unbelief to hear that Jesus is "mighty to save"?

Think, next, of the anguish which Christ endured when He offered up Himself as the great atoning sacrifice for His people's sin. I have never been able, for a single instant, to believe in any limit to the value of the atonement offered by Christ on Calvary. It does seem to me to verge upon blasphemy to suppose that if God Himself becomes incarnate, and suffers, and bleeds, and dies, there can be anything less than infinite value in the atonement that He offers. So then, sinner, as it is infinite, it can cover your case; as it is without bounds, there cannot be a bound set to it as far as you are concerned. Look at Christ on the cross, and you will not dare to say, "He cannot save me." Know what He is, and who He is; see how He suffers, how the Father smites Him, and yet how the Father loves Him all the while; and you must

say, “Christ’s blood must have sufficient power in it to take away all the guilt of all who trust Him.” It is so; believe it, and that will help to drive away your unbelief.

Remember, too, dear friends, that when Christ died upon the cross, He was not working out a trifling scheme of salvation. It was a sublime enterprise that took Him from His throne in heaven, and brought Him down to the manger in Bethlehem. It was a God-like undertaking which made Him lay aside the scepter, and bear to have great nails thrust through His hands. It was a great scheme, and therefore it included great sin, great pardon, and great salvation; so, if you are a great sinner, you match the general scale of the whole scheme, which is of such huge proportions that it can encompass even you.

Christ’s design in dying, too, ought to help to kill your unbelief. Why did He die? Was it not that the free grace of God might have full swing and abundant scope; and will it not have full swing if you are saved, and is there not great scope for pardoning mercy in you? Remember, dear friends, our Lord Jesus Christ never thought it was worth His while to come from heaven to give glory to a man: He came from heaven to bring glory to God, by vindicating His justice, and manifesting His mercy. Now, if such a sinner as you are—you who think yourself too bad to be saved—if you get saved, what a display of divine grace there will be in your case! A man said to me, some time ago, “If ever I get to heaven, sir, I believe they will carry me about the streets, and exhibit me as a marvel of God’s mercy.” “Well, then,” I replied, “they will have to carry me around as well.” I suspect that every saved soul in heaven is a great wonder, and that heaven is a vast museum of wonders of grace and mercy, a palace of miracles, in which everything will surprise everyone who gets there. It has been well said that there will be three surprises in heaven—first, we shall not find some we thought we would meet there; then, we shall find some we never thought would be there; but the greatest surprise of all will be to find ourselves there! I think it will be so—not that we shall be astonished at the fact when we remember God’s promise, and what He has done for us; but we shall be amazed when we recollect what we used to be, and what the grace of God had to do for us to make us fit to be there. Well, if you are one of those who will be carried all around heaven as a marvel of mercy, I believe you are the very person who is likely to get there, because God wants the angels and all the redeemed to see the wonders of His grace displayed to us-ward who believe.

I close with this one thought. If, poor soul, it is your lack of faith that stands in the way of the blessing coming to you, and if that lack of faith is infamous on your part, since you give God the lie; I charge you to repent of it, and to believe God, here and now. If you still say, “I know not how to believe, and I cannot trust,” I dare not try to excuse you for saying so. Unbelief is the greatest of all crimes; I know of none to match it. But, if you really want help in fighting against your unbelief, cannot you go to Christ for it? Even while you are thinking about Him, you will believe in Him. If you want to trust His blood, think of His blood. If you want to trust Him as a living, loving Savior, think of Him as a living, loving Savior. “Faith comes by hearing.” When you are hearing about it, thinking about it, reading about it, the Holy Spirit will breed faith in your soul. Oh, do get faith, whatever else you do not get! May God enable you to exercise saving faith in Jesus Christ before you rise from your seat, lest, in this very building, you should stumble into death and into hell! Do I need to ask you, sirs, a thousand times, to believe the truth? Must I, over and over again, say to you as Jesus said to the Jews, “Because I tell you the truth, you believe not me”? If Christ is not worthy of being believed, then He is a liar. If Christ cannot be trusted, then He is wrongly named. Oh, do not drive us to the inference that you think thus of Him! Commit your soul into His hands this very moment, and have done with it, once and for all, for His dear name’s sake. Amen!

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON:

MARK 9:2-29

Verses 2-6. *And after six days Jesus took with Him Peter, and James, and John, and led them up into an high mountain apart by themselves: and He was transfigured before them. And His raiment became shining, exceeding white as snow; so as no fuller on earth could whiten them. And there appeared unto them Elijah with Moses: and they were talking with Jesus. And Peter answered and said to Jesus, Master, it is good for us to be here: and let us make three tabernacles; one for You, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah. For he knew not what to say; for they were sore afraid.*

Brethren, like these disciples of our Lord, we are not yet fit to be favored with a sight of His glory. As we now are, we could not bear it. As our poet says—

“At the too-transporting light,

Darkness rushes over my sight."

These three apostles of Christ were too bewildered to know what to say, they were quite lost, and I suppose that, if we could go to heaven as we are, our bewilderment would even exceed our bliss. But we may rest assured that God will prepare us for that which He has prepared for us.

7, 8. *And there was a cloud that overshadowed them: and a voice came out of the cloud, saying, This is My beloved Son: hear Him. And suddenly, when they had looked round about, they saw no man any more, save Jesus only with themselves.*

And although this was not so ravishing or so astonishing a sight, yet it was more encouraging to them—something which they could more easily bear with joy and peace: “they saw no man any more, save Jesus only with themselves.” May God grant to us, as long as we are here below, that, if no Moses or Elijah shall ever come to visit us, at any rate Jesus may never be absent from us! May our fellowship with Him be unbroken!

9, 10. *And as they came down from the mountain, He charged them that they should tell no man what things they had seen, till the Son of man were risen from the dead. And they kept that saying with themselves, questioning one with another what the rising from the dead should mean.*

These were Peter, and James, and John, the three most privileged disciples of Christ—probably, the best scholars in that class which had the Lord Jesus Christ Himself for its Teacher; yet His plain language was without meaning to them: “questioning one with another what the rising from the dead should mean.” I wonder whether, when our Lord comes the second time, we shall discover that the prophecies concerning His advent were wonderfully clear, but that we could not understand them till He came. Plain as His teaching concerning His resurrection was, His disciples could not understand it till that great event had really occurred.

11-13. *And they asked Him, saying, Why say the scribes that Elijah must first come? And He answered and told them, Elijah verily comes first, and restores all things; and how it is written of the Son of man, that He must suffer many things, and be set at nothing. But I say unto you, that Elijah is indeed come, and they have done unto him whatsoever they listed, as it is written of him.*

John the Baptist had come, in the spirit and power of Elijah, and had reconstituted matters, and prepared the people for the advent of the Savior, whose herald he was.

14, 15. *And when He came to His disciples, He saw a great multitude about them, and the scribes questioning with them. And straightway all the people, when they beheld Him, were greatly amazed, and running to Him saluted Him.*

Some relics of the glory on the mountain still remained upon His face, and the people were astounded; so, though deeply interested in the battle which was proceeding between the scribes and the disciples, they left them, and turned to look upon that mysterious radiance which hovered about His brow.

16. *And He asked the scribes, What are you discussing with them?*

The circumstances of the disciples resembled a battlefield on which the enemy was winning the day, and the loyal troops were about to die defeated; when suddenly, the great Commander Himself appears for their relief. His presence is worth more than a thousand battalions of men; and He charges at once upon the adversary, and puts them to rout: “He asked the scribes, What question you with them?”

17. *And one of the multitude answered—*

One who had a peculiar reason for answering—just as, I trust there will be one in this multitude before me who will have a peculiar reason for listening to my message, and a peculiar reason for remembering it after it is delivered: “One of the multitude answered”—

17-19. *And said, Master, I have brought unto You my son, which has a dumb spirit; and wheresoever he takes him, he tears him: and he foams, and gnashes with his teeth, and pines away: and I spoke to Your disciples that they should cast him out; and they could not. He answered him, and said, O faithless generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I suffer you? Bring him unto Me.*

I suppose our Lord’s rebuke was meant especially for His disciples. It was something like the speech of a schoolmaster, who, having taught his pupils the same lesson a great many times, and labored hard with them, from year to year, yet finds them failing in the very elements of knowledge. Christ does not speak as if He was tired of His life, and wished to get away from His disciples; but this is His way of saying how disappointed He is that these learners have learned so little.

“How long shall I suffer you? Bring him unto Me.” Those words struck my heart very forcibly as I read them: “How long shall I suffer you?” Does not the Lord Jesus Christ have to put up with a great deal

from every one of us? I applied His words to myself, and I thought I heard Him saying to me, “How long shall I be with you? How long shall I suffer you?” Often, He must derive more pain than pleasure from communion with many of His people. How grieved He must often be to see their slowness to learn, their readiness to forget, and the difficulty with which they can be brought to live the lessons which He so carefully imparts to them! Then note what His action is concerning the poor child: “Bring him unto Me.”

20. *And they brought him unto Him: and when He saw him, straightway the spirit tare him;*

As soon as ever Christ looked at him, “the spirit tare him.” One look from Christ awakes the devil. Sometimes, sinners are worse for a time when Christ looks upon them. The devil always has great wrath, when he knows that his time is short; and he rages and tears most violently when he is about to be ejected. The Jews have a proverb, “When the tale of bricks is doubled, Moses appears,” and we may make it into a Scriptural proverb, “When the devil’s torment of the heart is doubled, then Jesus appears to cast him out.”

20. *And he fell on the ground, and wallowed foaming.*

And Jesus, instead of curing him at once, gave his first attention to the other patient before him, namely, the father of the child. He was suffering from an equally bad disease, though the symptoms were different, and Jesus meant to cure him as well as his boy.

21, 22. *And he asked his father, how long is it ago since this came unto him? And he said, of child. And oftentimes it has cast him into the fire, and into the waters, to destroy him: but if You can do anything, have compassion on us, and help us.*

He put himself on a level with his child, and that is the best way to pray for your children: “Have compassion on *us*, and help *us*.” It will be compassion on you, as well as upon your son, if the Lord saves him.

23. *Jesus said unto him,—*

Catching at his words, “If You can do anything,”—

23-29. *If you can believe, all things are possible to him that believes. And straightway the father of the child cried out, and said with tears, Lord, I believe; help You my unbelief. When Jesus saw that the people came running together, he rebuked the foul spirit, saying unto him, You dumb and deaf spirit, I charge you, come out of him, and enter no more into him. And the spirit cried, and rent him sore, and came out of him: and he was as one dead; insomuch that many said, He is dead. But Jesus took him by the hand, and lifted him up; and he arose. And when He was come into the house, His disciples asked Him privately, Why could not we cast him out? And He said unto them, This kind can come forth by nothing, but by prayer and fasting.*

There are some things, which we are not fit to do until we have drawn very near to God, and have been deeply humbled, and, with sincere repentance, and the gracious operation of the Holy Spirit, have been cleansed so as to receive so great a gift. Faith alone will not accomplish everything. Faith must be accompanied by prayer, and prayer must be, at least sometimes, in special cases, attended with fasting. The Lord makes reserves of His mercies, which He does not give immediately even to the request of faith; He demands importunity on our part, and heart-searching, and heart-cleansing, before the blessing will be bestowed.

Adapted from *The C. H. Spurgeon Collection*, Version 1.0, Ages Software.

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