

The Battle

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 17 January 2021

Preacher: Alasdair MacAulay

[0 : 00] Well, let's turn back to the passage that we read, Mark chapter 9. Mark chapter 9, if we can draw your attention to verse 24.

Mark 9, verse 24. Immediately, the boy's father exclaimed, I do believe, help me overcome my unbelief.

So here's your man who sounds pretty mixed up about where he's at spiritually. It doesn't appear that he knows whether he's coming or going. He describes himself as both a believer and an unbeliever in the same breath.

And while that might seem odd, it's not at all unusual. It can often be the case that a person is confused about where they are at spiritually.

Maybe you've realized for yourself that something has changed in your life. You have a concern about spiritual matters that wasn't there before. But you're not sure if you're a Christian or not.

[1 : 05] Not sure if you're saved or not. What we have here in this man's words is a confession of both faith and failing at the same time. He says, I do believe, but he also says, help me overcome my unbelief.

And right there is something that it would do us good to take note of and to remember. And that is this, that the presence of faith does not eradicate all unbelief.

The presence of faith doesn't eradicate all unbelief. A person can be a believer, can be a Christian and still have doubts. Someone could be trusting Jesus for their salvation and still be worried that they're not truly saved.

In fact, the reality is that doubts and unbelief are seldom far away from the Christian. This man here, he believes, but he also doubts.

He's faced with a frightening situation. He has a son who is self-harming and suicidal and has been like that most of his life. And much as he wants to believe that Jesus can heal him and Jesus will heal him, he's just not sure.

[2 : 24] He has his doubts. And maybe today you know that you need Jesus. You know that you're a sinner who needs, who stands in need of salvation.

You might even have asked the Lord to save you. And yet you're not certain whether he's done that or whether he's not. Whether you're a Christian or whether you're not.

And you know, there is no more important question than that. Am I saved or am I not? And it will be good today to get some clarity on that.

So I want today with you to look at the tension between faith and unbelief. Because one of them battles against the other.

So we've got a theme of the battle. And there's three things I want to look at with you today. I want to look, first of all, at the battle in the background. The battle in the background.

[3 : 22] And then secondly, the battle to believe. The battle to believe. And then thirdly, the battle to be assured. So these will be all headings.

The battle in the background. The battle to believe. And the battle to be assured. Let's look at the first of these then. The battle in the background. So the reason I read both sections of this chapter is there's a contrast between them.

So the first section, you possibly know the story about the transfiguration of Jesus. And there's a real stark contrast between what took place there up the mountain and what takes place with this son who has an evil spirit down the mountain.

So in the early part of the chapter, Jesus and his three closest disciples, they go up that mount of transfiguration. And Jesus is transformed before their very eyes.

His appearance was dramatically changed. And his divine glory became clearly apparent. And then we're told that two men from heaven came to speak with him.

[4 : 31] Two men who were in heaven. Moses and Elijah came to speak with Jesus. So that whole experience of the mountain is teaching us about the reality of heaven.

Heaven is real. And then they come down the mountain and there's a reminder of the reality of hell. Hell is real.

Because there at the bottom of the mountain, they're met with a boy who, verse 25, is possessed by an evil spirit. An evil spirit. So these two contrasting situations teach us that there is a spiritual battle in the background.

And it's there in this chapter. But you know, it's there in our lives as well. And in fact, it's there today. It's there whenever we meet to worship.

A battle in the background. Because as we encounter Jesus in our times of worship, Satan gets annoyed. He gets wound up. He gets angry.

[5 : 34] Because he's never happy when we are in the company of Jesus. He's never happy when we are listening to Jesus and responding to Jesus. And just as there are in our lives mountaintop experiences where the glory of Jesus is so clear.

And heaven seems so near. So there are dark valleys where Satan attacks. There is a battle in the background.

And it's going on all the time. Ephesians 6 says this. Our battle is not against flesh and blood. But against the powers of this dark world.

And against the spiritual forces of evil. So the struggle. It's real, friends. It is real. And the contrast. Between these two kingdoms. The contrast is really vividly portrayed to us. Not just in the words that we find in this chapter. But just in the pictures it presents.

[6 : 36] So up the mountain. The voice of God was heard. An adoring father. Who says in verse 7. This is my son whom I love.

Listen to him. And then down the mountain. It's the voice of an anxious father. Who says this is my son. Whom I love.

And look at the state of him. There's a huge contrast there. Two fathers. Two sons. Two contrasting circumstances.

But the beauty of this story is that. One son. Will heal the other. Before we come to that. I just want to draw your attention to the.

Condition of this. Man's son. So verse 17. We're told he's. He's non-verbal. Teacher I brought you my son. Who's possessed by a spirit that has. Robbed him of speech.

[7 : 39] And then in verse 18. We're told that he has. Terrifying seizures. Whenever it seizes him. It throws him to the ground. He foams at the mouth. Knashes his teeth. And. Becomes rigid. And then in verse 22.

We're told that the son. Self harms. It has often thrown him into the fire. Or water. To kill him. Now. I just want to say a word about that.

Because. You read some of these symptoms. And you think. They're quite like. Symptoms. That I've seen. You know. In the lives of some people. Or maybe that I've even experienced. Myself.

Well. What I want to say. Is that this passage. Makes clear. That this boy's condition. Is not a physical condition. It is a spiritual condition. That's what the father says.

When he brings him. To Jesus. Verse 17. He says. I brought you my son. Who's possessed by a spirit. And Jesus doesn't contradict that. But probably.

[8 : 37] The clearest. The clearest indication. That this is. This is a spiritual condition. And not a physical condition. Is what happens. When they bring. The boy.

To Jesus. As soon as he's brought to Jesus. The spirit within him. Kicks off. Big style. Verse 20. So they brought him. That's the boy. When the spirit saw Jesus.

It immediately. Threw the boy. Into a. Convulsion. So this is no ordinary. Illness. Or. Disability. Or physical. Condition. This is a boy. Who's possessed. By an evil. Spirit. That's how Jesus addresses the spirit. In verse 25. You deaf and mute.

Spirit. You rebuke the evil. Spirit. Evil spirit. Now. That. Maybe raises the question. With. With some people. Does it still happen today?

[9 : 32] Well. Scholarship. Pretty much. Agreed. That. The prevalence. Of this type of thing. Was greater. Much greater.

In Jesus day. Than it ever was. Before. Or since. Then. The presence of. Evil spirits. Of demon. Possession. And the reason for that. Is that.

Whilst Jesus. Was publicly. Ministering. Here on earth. The. Satan. And his armies. Went into. Overdrive. They went into. Overdrive. And.

And. It's. It is just a reminder to us. That. There is a battle. There's a battle. In the background. It was there in Bible times. Between. Jesus. And Satan.

And. It's still there today. Between the followers of Jesus. And the armies. Of Satan. And. It may well be that. You have lived your life.

[10:28] Blissfully. Unaware. Of all of this. But let me tell you. The moment. You begin to follow Jesus. Or even. When you begin.

To seek the Lord. To take an interest. In spiritual things. It all kicks off. The battle. That was in the background. It soon comes. Into the foreground.

Comes into the foreground. And that. Really then. Becomes. The reality. Of life. As. A Christian. There are. Highs. And there are lows. There are. Mountaintop experiences.

When the Lord is near. Followed by. Dark. Valleys of. Doubt. Where Satan. Battles. For your soul. That is.

Life. As a Christian. So that's the first thing today. The battle. In the background. The battle. In the background. But then I want to look. Secondly. At the battle. To believe.

[11:24] So I want us to think about. Some of the obstacles. That this man. Faced. Obstacles to believing. Obstacles to putting his trust. In Jesus. Because just as he battled. Some obstacles.

So too will you. And it may be. That there's some similarities. Between them. So I want to mention. Three obstacles. That stood in this man's. Way. And.

There were probably more than that. But we're just going to touch on. On three. Today. So the first is this. And you might face this as well. Suffering in your family. Suffering in your family.

So this man had a son. Who. For the best part of his life. Had suffered. Immensely. We. Learned from Luke's gospel. That. The boy was an only child.

And he clearly required. Round the clock. Care. We read in verse 25. That he was. Deaf. And mute. We know that he had horrific seizures.

[12:18] We know that he had. Suicidal tendencies. Caring for him. Must have taken over. This man's. Life. And there was no let up. And there seemed to be no apparent hope.

Of. Improvement. And you know. The question is often asked. Why. Would a good God. Allow. Such. Suffering. Now. It's not my intention to. Digress. Because that would be a digression. From that point of view. It's not my intention to digress. Down that route. To Dayton.

But. But simply. To highlight this fact. That this must have been. An obstacle. To this man. Putting his trust. In the Lord. And yet.

Yet. In a strange way. It's that very trial. And that very trouble. That brings him. To Jesus. You know. You may have.

[13:14] Suffering. In your family. And I can understand. That that. Could well be. An obstacle. To you. Putting your trust. In the Lord.

But as we study this man. And as we learn. From this man. We realize that. He came. Confessing. His struggle. With unbelief.

And when he came. Jesus transformed. His situation. So we're looking at. The battle to believe. There's these obstacles. That's the first one. Suffering in your family. The second one. I want to draw your attention to.

It's here as well. And I've called it. Bickering. In the church. Bickering. In the church. Because that's what this man. Meets with. When he brings. His sick. Son.

In order to find. Healing. It's there in verse 14. So Jesus and the three disciples. They come down the mountain. And they meet up with the rest of the disciples.

[14:11] And we read in verse 14. When they came to the other disciples. They saw a large crowd around them. And the teachers of the law. Arguing. With them. So the teachers of the law.

That's the religious leadership. Of the day. Of the Jews. And they are arguing. With the disciples. Of Jesus. So that's what this man's faced. When he comes with this.

Desperate situation. Looking for healing. For his son. He finds. Church folk. Falling out. You know it's a great tragedy. That that happens.

In churches. And it puts people off. It is a barrier. To believing. For some. Now. Granted. Some people will just use it.

As a convenient excuse. If that's your Christianity. You can. You can keep it. But for others. It can be a genuine. Obstacle. This man came looking for.

[15:11] Help. And healing. For his son. And instead. He's met. With bickering. With bickering. But you know. Sometimes friends. The Lord.

Will. Allow. Others. To let us down. Even. Christians. To disappoint us. So that we lean. More heavily.

On him. Because remember this. While the followers of Jesus. May well. Disappoint you. And let you down. Jesus never. Will. He never will. And when this man.

Got past the followers. When he met with Jesus. Jesus changed things. Forever. So we're looking at the battle to believe.

We're considering some obstacles. There was. We mentioned suffering in the family. Bickering in the church. The third one is struggles in your own mind. Struggles in your own mind. You know.

[16:04] When people's lives are hard. When you face one challenge after another. After another. As this man clearly did. When everything seems against you. It's hard to believe.

It's hard to believe. That the Lord cares. For some people. It's hard to believe. That he can change things. And so this can become an obstacle. To believing.

Because we. Well we look at things from a human point of view. And we can tend to forget. That what is impossible with man. Is possible with God. And yet even when you know that.

When you know your Bible. Your mind can be so filled. With doubts. You maybe don't doubt God's ability. But you're not sure if he will help.

You see. Doubts are unbelief. As it's called here. So we're talking about doubts. The chapter refers to unbelief. And unbelief here. Is presented to us.

[17:05] Just the way it is. It's like a ruthless enemy. That constantly hunts you down. And stalks you. It's like.

It's like an unwanted tenant. That takes up residence in your heart. And resists every attempt. At eviction. That's what unbelief.

Is like. And you know. While we'll struggle with it. We should never become content with it. Because it's dishonoring.

To God. It's dishonoring to God. You know there's an awful lot going on in this encounter. We read the chapter. It all happened. And yet the thing that concerns.

Jesus most. Is unbelief. Lack. Of faith. And he denounces it. In the strongest possible terms. Before he even.

[18:04] Addresses the situation with this boy. Look at verse 19. He's told about the boy. By his father. And Jesus responds. Verse 19. Oh unbelieving generation.

Jesus replied. How long shall I stay with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring. The boy. To me. So it's clear that this boy's situation is serious.

That it requires urgent attention. But the reaction of Jesus shows. That he views unbelief. As even more. Serious. And it's serious because of this.

Friends. The Bible tells us that without faith. It is impossible. It is impossible to please God. So that's the second point today.

The battle to believe. There are obstacles. There are hurdles that we face. There are many threats. To faith. Things that might prevent you. From putting your trust.

[19:01] In Jesus Christ. There is a battle. Going on for your soul. And it's raging. Might even be raging. Right now.

As you tune in to the word of God. The battle to believe. But then. I want to look thirdly. And finally. At the battle to be assured.

So we saw the battle in the background. The battle to believe. Thirdly. The battle to be assured. Thirdly. Thirdly. So this man. Despite all the obstacles that he faced. He eventually comes face to face with Jesus.

And as he does so. If I can say this with reverence. All hell breaks loose. All hell breaks loose. The demonic spirit. That possesses his son.

Goes crazy. You see that in verse 20. So they brought him to the body. When the spirit saw Jesus. It immediately threw the boy into a convulsion. He fell to the ground.

[19 : 58] And rolled around. Foaming at. The mouth. This is serious. This boy's in a mess. And it seems odd.

That Jesus having seen that. Rather address the situation. Immediately. He begins to question the father. Almost like a doctor would question you. He says. Verse 21.

So how long has he been like this? Now I'm not certain. What the point of that question was. It may have been. Just. To remind the father.

Of how apparently. Impossible. His son's condition. Is. The fact he's been like that. All his. Most of his life. This is apparently. Incurable. And yet. Even having been reminded of that. This father comes. And he pleads with Jesus.

[20 : 51] He says. If you can do anything. Take pity on us. And help us. You see this man. He's not coming. He's not coming to Jesus. Making demands. He's coming to Jesus.

Seeking mercy. He comes. Filled with doubts. Yes. But still pleading. For the intervention. Of Jesus. And you know. Jesus. He highlights his doubting attitude.

He doesn't. Ignore it. As the man says. If you can do anything. And Jesus replies. And he says. If you can. But then he follows it.

With these great words. Of reassurance. Everything is possible. For him. And believes. Everything is possible. You know. Our human logic.

We might think. If Jesus wanted this man. To trust him. Then. Surely the thing to do. Would be heal his son. And if he saw his son. Had been sick for so long. Healed. He would then trust. But no.

[21 : 47] Jesus calls us. To exercise faith. First. Trust first. And then. You'll see. The miracle. Then you'll see. The miracle.

He was probing this man. He was testing this man. We need to trust him first. Ah. You maybe say. But. But. But. I can't trust. The Bible tells me. That faith is a gift.

From God. Well. This man seemed to have understood that as well. Because. His answer is this. He says. I believe. But I.

Need your help. With my ongoing doubts. Help me overcome. My. Unbelief. Oh. I do trust. I. I do believe. But I still. Struggle. With my faith. So. Here's this man's. Profession of faith. And you know. It's.

[22 : 43] It's pretty ropey. Isn't it? It's a bit. It's a bit shaky. For our liking. What he says. It's not a statement of. Great. Faith. And nevertheless.

It is. As. A great. Statement. Of faith. I. Believe. He says. I believe. But I still need.

Your help. Friends. That's all. The Lord. Requires. Of us. That we. Trust him. We're not. Required. To have. Great. Faith. Because. It's not. The quality.

Of your faith. Or the quantity. Of your faith. That matters. It's on. Whom. Does your faith. Rest. That's. What's important. And.

True faith. Is not always. Strong. Faith. A person. Can be saved. Who still. Wrestles. With many doubts. And we see that here.

[23 : 40] In this man's. Profession. This man's. Response. To Jesus. I do believe. Help me. Overcome.

My unbelief. That's his. Response. To Jesus. What is your. Response. Today. Amen. Let's pray. Lord. We. Thank you. That we have. Your word. We thank you. For all that it. Teaches us. We thank you. That it. Reassures us. When we have. Our doubts. When we struggle. With. Circumstances. In our. Lives. When we are. Plagued. By. The evil one. Or plagued. By doubts. Help us.

To know. And to remember. That he is. A conquered. Foe. That Satan is. A crushed. Enemy. We thank you. Lord. That the war. Has been won.

[24 : 35] And that we. If we are. Thrusting. In Jesus. That we are on. The winning side. Bless us. Lord. We pray. Draw near to us. Cleanse us. From sin.

We ask this in Jesus. Amen. Okay.