

Lessons on Discipleship (Part 4)

Luke 9:37-43

We have been camping out in Luke chapter 9 for a while in our Luke series, looking at several lessons on discipleship that we're getting from different interactions Jesus had with his disciples, and this morning we get to a lesson on faith. Do you have faith in God? Do you live by faith? I'm not talking about believing in the existence of God or even about trusting in Christ for salvation, I'm talking about relying on God in the decisions you make every day so that your behaviors, thoughts and attitudes are influenced by your faith. Do you have that kind of faith?

I have that kind of faith in a lot of things. One of them is electricity. When I go to bed at night, I don't worry about getting up on time the next morning because I have an alarm clock and I believe it's going to work. I don't worry about the house staying warm because I have a gas furnace that I trust is going to turn on whenever the thermostat tells it to. I look forward to a cup of coffee that brews automatically and is ready for me when I get out of bed. And I look forward to reading my Bible with the light of the lamp next to my couch.

I don't worry about whether or not these things are going to work because I have faith – faith in electricity. I fully believe it's going to work. It's a practical faith that effects a lot of things in my daily life. Do you have that kind of faith?

What about when it comes to God? If we have as much faith in God as we do in electricity, it will have a profound influence on our lives. It will affect all kinds of things – the decisions we make, the things we do, the things we think about, the attitude and mood we have. Do we have that kind of faith?

In the story that we look at today we are going to see whether or not the disciples did at that point in their journey. They were about 2 years into their discipleship process with Jesus and you might think that by then, their faith should be pretty strong. But the story we see today is going to show us it wasn't. It's a story of failure, and through it we will have the opportunity to examine our own lives to see where our faith is at and how we can grow. This story takes place the day after the Transfiguration, and it involves the disciples of Jesus that weren't with him up on the mountain. We pick it up in Luke 9:37...

Read Luke 9:37-43.

³⁷ On the next day, when they had come down from the mountain, a great crowd met him. ³⁸ And behold, a man from the crowd cried out, "Teacher, I beg you to look at my son, for he is my only child. ³⁹ And behold, a spirit seizes him, and he suddenly cries out. It convulses him so that he foams at the mouth, and shatters him, and will hardly leave him. ⁴⁰ And I begged your disciples to cast it out, but they could not." ⁴¹ Jesus answered, "O faithless and twisted generation, how long am I to be with you and bear with you? Bring your son here." ⁴² While he was coming, the demon threw him to the ground and convulsed him. But Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit and healed the boy, and gave him back to his father. ⁴³ And all were astonished at the majesty of God.

Luke emphasizes the majesty of God in this story and says very little about the disciples, but if you look at the other gospel accounts you see that this is a significant learning experience for them. So I want us to see what was going on with them. Three of them: Peter, James, and John, had been up with Jesus on the mountain for the Transfiguration experience, but 9 of them stayed behind. It appears to be these who are involved in this story. In Luke's account, the only thing said of them is that the father begged them to cast the demon out of his son, but they could not. That's interesting. Why couldn't they? They'd seen Jesus do it many times before. This was only one little boy with one demon, why couldn't they cast it out?

When Jesus heard about this, his response was: "*O faithless and twisted generation, how long am I to be with you and bear with you?*" Who is he talking about? Is he talking about the father? The disciples? The great crowd that was gathered? Mark's retelling of this story fills us in with a lot more details...

Read Mark 9:14-20.

¹⁴ And when they came to the disciples, they saw a great crowd around them, and scribes arguing with them. ¹⁵ And immediately all the crowd, when they saw him, were greatly amazed and ran up to him and greeted him. ¹⁶ And he asked them, "What are you arguing about with them?" ¹⁷ And someone from the crowd answered him, "Teacher, I brought my son to you, for he has a spirit that makes him mute. ¹⁸ And whenever it seizes him, it throws him down, and he foams and grinds his teeth and becomes rigid. So I asked your disciples to cast it out, and they were not able." ¹⁹ And he answered them, "O faithless generation, how long am I to be with you? How long am I to bear with you? Bring him to me." ²⁰ And they

brought the boy to him. And when the spirit saw him, immediately it convulsed the boy, and he fell on the ground and rolled about, foaming at the mouth.

So we see there was an argument going on between the scribes and Jesus' disciples, and it appears to have been about their inability to cast out the demon. Perhaps the scribes were criticizing them or questioning them. We also get a little clearer picture of what effect the demon was having on the boy. This sounds very similar to an epileptic seizure. His body was rigid, he was silent, but also convulsing on the ground, grinding his teeth, and foaming at the mouth. I don't know if you've ever seen anything like that, but it's very unnerving – very scary. I've been in close proximity with people going through something like that and it's very scary.

It's assumed that the boy was doing the same thing earlier when the disciples were unable to cast out the demon. The father was begging them, the boy was convulsing, and the disciples didn't know what to do. A very stressful situation for most people. What would you do? We see what Jesus did here in Mark in a little more detail.

Read Mark 9:21-27.

And Jesus asked his father, "How long has this been happening to him?" And he said, "From childhood. ²² And it has often cast him into fire and into water, to destroy him. But if you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us." ²³ And Jesus said to him, "'If you can'! All things are possible for one who believes." ²⁴ Immediately the father of the child cried out and said, "I believe; help my unbelief!" ²⁵ And when Jesus saw that a crowd came running together, he rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, "You mute and deaf spirit, I command you, come out of him and never enter him again." ²⁶ And after crying out and convulsing him terribly, it came out, and the boy was like a corpse, so that most of them said, "He is dead." ²⁷ But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up, and he arose.

So Jesus rebuked the demon and it immediately came out of him. It was no problem for him. His disciples couldn't, but Jesus could without any trouble whatsoever.

One of the things that sticks out to me is this conversation with the father. The father is being open and honest when he pleads: *"If you can do anything, have*

compassion on us and help us.” It reveals where his faith is at – he’s uncertain about Jesus and doesn’t know if he can help. His disciples couldn’t, so maybe he can’t either. It’s understandable for the father to be like that – his son’s condition probably felt like an impossible situation for a very long time, and he’d probably asked a lot of people for help, and no one could, but maybe, just maybe this Jesus could help. That’s where his faith was at – very small.

Jesus responded with a little surprise and a lot of confidence: Of course he could help! There was no reason for there to be any doubt or question in the father’s mind. Why? Because, “all things are possible for one who believes.” Whose faith is he talking about? I think the father assumed Jesus was talking about his faith – that if he only believed then Jesus would help his son. This is why he cried: “*I believe; help my unbelief!*” But I think Jesus was actually talking about his own faith. He had complete faith in his heavenly Father and knew without a shadow of doubt that his Father would heal the boy. “Of course I can help! All things are possible for one who believes. My Father is able to do all things.” There wasn’t a doubt in Jesus’ mind, so he rebuked the demon and it was over.

So there’s a major contrast here between Jesus and his disciples. His disciples were faced with the demon-possessed boy and couldn’t help him, but Jesus could. What’s the difference? That’s exactly what the disciples were wondering, which brings us to the last verse in Mark’s account.

Read Mark 9:28-29.

And when he had entered the house, his disciples asked him privately, “Why could we not cast it out?”²⁹ And he said to them, “This kind cannot be driven out by anything but prayer.”

So this is interesting. This means that the disciples didn’t even pray when faced with the demon, which I find to be very surprising. Why didn’t they pray? For this we need to look at Matthew’s version.

Read Matthew 17:19-20

Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, “Why could we not cast it out?”²⁰ He said to them, “Because of your little faith. For truly, I say to you, if you have faith like a grain of mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move, and nothing will be impossible for you.”

They didn't pray because they didn't have faith. And I believe this is the practical faith I talked about at the beginning – a daily, active reliance on God. They didn't live with that kind of faith, so when the father brought the boy to them they didn't know what to do, and they didn't even pray. Jesus told them that even with a little bit of faith you can move mountains – not as some kind of reward for your weak faith, and not because faith or prayer has power, which people oftentimes misunderstand, but because you're depending on a God who has limitless power and can literally do anything.

In his commentary on Matthew, R.T. France says that Jesus' example of the mustard seed *"is a striking illustration of the fact that faith is, for Jesus, not a matter of intellectual assent, but of a practical reliance on a living God. It is important to observe here that it is not the 'amount' of faith which brings the impossible within reach, but the power of God, which is available to even the 'smallest' faith."* In other words, it's all about God and what he can do and relying on him.

That's the kind of faith that Jesus had and that's why he had such confidence when the father brought his son to him. Jesus believed, he rebuked the demon, and it was all over.

Jesus wants us to learn to live with that kind of faith. When something comes up and we don't know what to do, rather than relying on ourselves and being unable to move, he wants us to rely on God and pray. When there's something going on at work or at school or maybe in your very own home – rely on God and pray. Live with faith in him. Live like you believe he's God and he can do anything.

So if you're like me, you find yourself in a very similar situation to the father in the story where you say, "Jesus, if you can, please help me." And "I believe; help my unbelief!" Let that be our first prayer as we learn how to live by faith.