

Tusculum Hills Baptist Church
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Sermon title: The Cry of a Desperate Father, Mark 9:14-29

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SCRIPTURE: Mark 9:14-29 ¹⁴ *When they came to the other disciples, they saw a large crowd around them and the teachers of the law arguing with them. ¹⁵ As soon as all the people saw Jesus, they were overwhelmed with wonder and ran to greet him.*

¹⁶ *“What are you arguing with them about?” he asked.*

¹⁷ *A man in the crowd answered, “Teacher, I brought you my son, who is possessed by a spirit that has robbed him of speech. ¹⁸ Whenever it seizes him, it throws him to the ground. He foams at the mouth, gnashes his teeth and becomes rigid. I asked your disciples to drive out the spirit, but they could not.”*

¹⁹ *“You unbelieving generation,” Jesus replied, “how long shall I stay with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring the boy to me.”*

²⁰ *So they brought him. When the spirit saw Jesus, it immediately threw the boy into a convulsion. He fell to the ground and rolled around, foaming at the mouth.*

²¹ *Jesus asked the boy’s father, “How long has he been like this?”*

“From childhood,” he answered. ²² “It has often thrown him into fire or water to kill him. But if you can do anything, take pity on us and help us.”

²³ *“‘If you can’?” said Jesus. “Everything is possible for one who believes.”*

²⁴ *Immediately the boy’s father exclaimed, “I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!”*

25 When Jesus saw that a crowd was running to the scene, he rebuked the impure spirit. “You deaf and mute spirit,” he said, “I command you, come out of him and never enter him again.”

26 The spirit shrieked, convulsed him violently and came out. The boy looked so much like a corpse that many said, “He’s dead.”²⁷ But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him to his feet, and he stood up.

28 After Jesus had gone indoors, his disciples asked him privately, “Why couldn’t we drive it out?”

29 He replied, “This kind can come out only by prayer.”

I have three points to my message today:

1. It all boils down to who you know and what you believe.
2. In your spiritual life it’s also all about who you know.
3. In your spiritual life it’s also all about what you believe.

First, IT ALL BOILS DOWN TO WHO YOU KNOW AND WHAT YOU BELIEVE.

You’ve heard the old adage, “It’s all in who you know,” and that seems to be a true statement.

ILLUSTRATION: All military personnel coming off active duty are required to go through a week of classes called TAP which stands for Transitional Assistance Program. The classes are very practical and cover a myriad of helpful topics. I was required to attend the classes three years ago. One of the classes was about how to create a resume and market yourself on the internet. We learned about all the different sites and how to post certain words and information to get yourself noticed. After the instructor spent a lot of time on this matter, he said even though we have these resources, some 92% of people are hired because someone they know recommends them. Really, it is all in who you know. It’s important not to burn bridges because you never know who knows someone.

Second, IN YOUR SPIRITUAL LIFE, IT'S ALSO ALL ABOUT WHO YOU KNOW.

I am not talking about your preacher or a person you know who prays a lot or anyone like this. I am talking about Jesus. The believer's life is all about knowing Jesus. He is the way, the truth, and the life.

Third, IN YOUR SPIRITUAL LIFE, IT'S ALSO ALL ABOUT WHAT YOU BELIEVE.

It is possible to know Jesus and not believe his words. It is possible to know Jesus and not believe in him.

In this case, we have a father who believed Jesus could help him. He had heard about Jesus and maybe his friends told him, "It's all about who you know." Jesus was not immediately present, so the desperate father asked his disciples to help his son. They were not successful. Then Jesus challenged the man's faith and asked him if he believed.

SCRIPTURE: Mark 9:23-24 ²³ *Jesus said to him, "If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes."* ²⁴ *Immediately the father of the child cried out and said with tears, "Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!"*

EXPLANATION: Immediately the father realized bringing his son to Jesus to be set free of the demon was more than just taking his son to the doctor. It was more than just taking his son and asking Jesus to heal him. The deliverance of his son depended on his father's belief! I like the humility of the man's words, "*Lord, I believe, help my unbelief!*"

He didn't just say "*Lord, I believe.*" He knew he had a struggle with belief, and he confessed it, "*Lord, I believe and help my unbelief!*"

APPLICATION: Have you ever heard someone say, "*Whatever the Lord wants?*" Most likely, a person who says that means well. But, think about what you are really saying if you really mean it. "*Whatever the Lord wants?*" Maybe he wants your wallet. Be careful saying, "*Whatever the Lord wants?*"

You may not know exactly what he wants. In fact, I think most times we do not know what he wants. And, don't think that because you've been saved for a long time, you have a better idea of what God wants. I find the older I become, the more difficult it is at times to discern what God wants.

Perhaps we should be a little more humble and say something like the father of the boy. Perhaps we should say, *“Lord I believe, help my unbelief”* or *“Lord, whatever you want from me, I pray I'll want to do it”* or *“Lord, whatever you want from us as a church, I pray that we'll want to do it.”*

QUESTION: Why did the father say he believed but had unbelief in the same statement?

EXPLANATION: The interesting cry of the father indicates he had a little belief, but he knew he needed more. He knew if Jesus delivered his son from the demon, it would be completely because of his grace. He knew that his belief was terribly lacking when compared to the grace and mercy of Jesus.

But, Jesus honored what little faith the man had. It wasn't much, but Jesus honored it. And, now here is a father whose life was changed and a son whose life was changed. Because the father believed Jesus, he changed the family tree forever. He went from hopeless to hopeful. He went from being desperate for his son to be delivered to being confident in the deliverer.

This man learned in a split second that life was more than about merely who he knew. It was also about what he believed.

APPLICATION:

- What you believe is important. Believing factual things is important.
- Believing the truth is important. Not everyone wants to believe the truth.

ILLUSTRATION: I want to give you an illustration of people who prefer living in a state of unbelief. Most of you have heard me speak of my Grand Canyon trip a couple of months ago. While on the trip, I learned there is a tribe of Native Americans called the Havasupai who live inside the National Park. They have no

cars and the only way to get to them is to walk, ride a horse or a donkey, or take a helicopter. There are about 650 of these people. Sometime around 1989, researchers at Arizona State University studied the tribe to try to find out why so many of them had diabetes. Numerous Havasupai donated blood samples. The researchers could find no genetic reason for the prevalence of diabetes.

The researchers went on to do other research. They used a very interesting science, which links DNA samples to people groups around the world. This helps determine how groups of people in one area are related to other groups of people in another area.

The DNA testing linked them to Asian groups who migrated there long ago. This research upset the Havasupai. The Havasupai believe they have a right to their land because they've lived there since the beginning of time. They claimed their blood samples were misused, and they sued the university. The spokesperson for the tribe said, *“When people tell us, ‘No, this is not where you are from,’ and your own blood says so — it is confusing to us . . . It hurts the elders who have been telling these stories to our grandchildren”* [Rex Tilousi].

In other words, this tribe of people did not want to know the truth and when they heard it, they rejected it. Quite frankly, some of us might not want to know our own ancestral heritage. But, this is a classic example of people not wanting to hear to the truth to the point they sued the university and eventually settled out of court for \$700,000. I am fascinated by this story.

Romans chapter 1 talks about people who exchanged the truth about God for a lie.

APPLICATION: The reason many people believe lies is because they aren't desperate enough to believe the truth. Many had rather live a life of convenient unbelief. Some people may purposefully walk around in unbelief in order to plead ignorance later on.

Let's look at the word: BELIEF The Greek word here is *pist-yoo'-o* [πιστεύω]. This exact word is only used five times in the New Testament. And, it means, by implication, to entrust one's spiritual well-being to Christ. But, what does this mean

“by implication?” It means the deeper meaning of the word is found in how the word is used.

Listen to what the Greek dictionary says: *pisteúō* ("persuade, be persuaded"), *believe* (affirm, have confidence), used of persuading oneself (= human believing), and with the sacred significance of being persuaded by the Lord (= *faith*-believing). Only the context indicates whether *pisteúō* ("believe") is self-serving (without sacred meaning) or the believing that leads to/proceeds from God's in birthing of faith.

Let's look at the word: UNBELIEF *ap-is-tee'-ah* [ἀπιστία]

1. Ap-is-tee'-ah can mean withholding belief in the divine power (Mark 16:4).
 2. Ap-is-tee'-ah can mean withholding belief in the power and promises of God (Romans 4:20, Hebrews 3:19).
 3. It can mean withholding belief in the divine mission of Jesus (Matthew 13:58, Mark 6:6).
 4. Ap-is-tee'-ah (or unbelief) can mean opposition to the Gospel (1 Timothy 1:13).
 5. It can mean opposition to the Gospel, along with obstinacy (stubbornness) (Romans 11:20, 23 and Hebrews 3:12).
- [These definitions remind me of the Indian tribe who refused to believe the truth.]

But, none of these definitions really describe the sincere father of this story seeking help, do they? No. That's because there's another meaning to this Greek work we translate as “unbelief” and here it is: weakness of faith.

CONCLUSION: The desperate father in this story had faith, but he knew it was weak and confessed it freely. Weak faith needs to become stronger, but weak faith is better than no faith at all. I wonder how the father's faith increased when his son was delivered from the demon. Now he had a testimony to tell. *“I went to Jesus with just a weak faith and he healed my son.”*

APPLICATION: You may be listening today and you've asked yourself, “How can I believe in Jesus if I know so little about him?” Answer: Come to Jesus with

what you know of Jesus. Come as you are. If you have only a small amount of faith and are willing to know you need more, Jesus will accept you as you are.

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 17:19-20, gives another version of the same story.

¹⁹ Then the disciples came to Jesus in private and asked, “Why couldn’t we drive it out?” ²⁰ He replied, “Because you have so little faith. Truly I tell you, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you.”

Faith the size of a mustard seed—WOW, that’s not very big. I’ve never moved a mountain, nor have you, nor has anyone, ever. This means the person with the most faith in the world does not have faith the size of a mustard seed.

Let me ask you today, do you have just a small amount of faith in Jesus? Are you willing to entrust that small amount of faith with him? You can be saved today.

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