

Help Thou Mine Unbelief

We have before us a return to our Saviour's ministry of miraculous healing by casting out a demon or 'foul spirit'. This act is itself wonderful yet there is much, too, in the additional information given to teach and encourage our hearts. As the Lord returns with Peter, James and John from the mount of transfiguration He encounters a boisterous crowd of people and a group of scribes mocking His disciples for their inability to cure a sick child.

Jesus comes to His disciples' aid

We should not ignore the readiness of the Lord to defend His own. Often the Lord's opponents attacked His disciples seeing them as an easier target. This still happens today when religious opponents make sport of the Lord's little ones because of their weakness and faults. Such attacks often come as opposition to the gospel of free grace and are designed to embarrass the Lord's people in their high doctrine and low estate. But we note the speed with which the Lord comes to His people's defence and with renewed demonstration of His power. The gospel is the glory of the Godman, the church is His Bride and all who attack either attack Him!

The Lord's compassion

We also note the Lord's compassion upon this needy family; an only son often harmed by a devilish foul spirit and a broken father at his wit's end after years of struggling to manage his boy's suffering; a condition afflicting him from birth. Original sin brings suffering to us all and 'man is born unto trouble'. Yet here the Saviour shows He is willing to receive troubled souls; the poor, sick, sinful and needy. Though we all are guilty sinners, and all suffer the consequences of sin in this life yet we have a God who receives sinners, heals the sick and supplies the need of all who come in faith to Him for help.

How hard to believe

Yet how hard it is to believe. This was the Saviour's criticism throughout this episode. He speaks of a generation with no faith at all, of a needy soul whose faith is shot through with unbelief, of disciples whose faith might be measured in terms of a tiny mustard seed. Even those of us who by God's grace have true faith yet struggle to trust Him whom we have no reason to doubt and every cause to believe.

Help thou mine unbelief

Faith is God's enabling gift to His people and all faith comes from the Lord Jesus Christ who is faith's Author and Finisher; faith's source and faith's object. By faith we discover grace, experience mercy, and grow in our relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. Yet faith is a delicate and elusive grace, easily crushed and readily distracted in our flesh by sight, sound, and self-reliance. It is only when a poor sinner is brought to a complete end of himself and full dependence on Christ that he is able to cry out with the father in our story saying, 'Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief'.

Praying for our children

I also wish to remind us how here, before our eyes, is yet another example of a believing parent successfully bringing their children to the Lord for healing. How often we see this happening in scripture! I do not suggest we can savingly believe for another person yet the frequency with which the Lord willingly and graciously honours the intercession of a parent for his or her child cannot pass unnoticed. Personal faith is evidence of personal grace, yet let us take the example of Jairus, the Syrophenician woman, this desperate father, and others, and bring our needy children, and grandchildren, in prayer to the Saviour with requests for grace and mercy.

Past successes or present need?

On other occasions the disciples had in the name and by the authority of Jesus cast out devils, but here they failed. In God's providence it pleased the Lord so to order it, for the greater glory of Christ, the humbling of the Apostles, and the trying the faith of the father of this child. Perhaps the reason was to remind us where ultimate power lies and re-focus our attention away from past accomplishments to our present need. This miracle is surely amongst the most blessed accounts of both our Saviour's mercy and power and our own dependency and need. May the Lord open our hearts to learn its lessons and imitate this father to say, "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief".