

Continue our series called Doubters Anonymous - Doubting the resurrection; doubting that God exists; next week doubting that God can use us; today, doubting that God is for us.

We may believe that God can do something, but often, we doubt that God will do it for us. I sometimes hear people say things like, "I believe God can..heal, forgive, bless etc BUT I'm not sure he'll do it for me."

Our reading today was about someone like that – someone who sort of believed. Jesus came across his disciples arguing with the religious people and when he asked what was going on this man said, "Teacher, I brought you my son, who was possessed by a spirit that has robbed him of speech." Now, later on in this story, we see that this father's son was possessed by an evil spirit, who did horrible things to this young boy, torturing him, and we see that the father brought his son to Jesus. The father said, "Whenever this evil spirit seizes him, it throws him to the ground, he foams at the mouth, gnashes his teeth, and becomes rigid. Now, (verse 18) the father said, "I asked your disciples to drive out the spirit, but they could not do it."

Jesus gave his disciples a row for their lack of faith. Jesus asked the boy's father, "How long has he been like this?" "From childhood," he answered. Verse 22, "The evil spirit has often thrown him into the fire, or water to kill him." Here is the important bit for us the boy's father says, "If you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us." That one word "if" captures the issue for so many people. "God, if You can, please do. If You are willing, please act. If You are good, why don't You do something? If you are actually real at all. If You are not some concept that we, as weak and frail human beings, dreamed up in order to cope with life. If You are really there, and can, and will, please do something." If ... Why is it that for so many of us, even those who would be called faithful Christ Followers, regular church attenders, why is it for so many of us, that we have an "if" in the back or even the front of our mind when it comes to things of faith? Why do so many of us doubt?

There's three common reasons for our doubt that emerge from the story. Maybe you can relate to one or more of these. Why do many of us doubt? Well, the first reason is this, because God doesn't do what we would do, in so many cases. When we're growing up people tell us to read the bible, pray and do our best and God will bless us and even if we do that we find that things don't always work out – bad things happen to us or to people we love. I can't tell you how many people I've heard say, "I was praying for so and so to be healed, and I really believed that God not only could, but

He would, and then He didn't." We see people hurting and wonder why God doesn't do what seems so obvious to us.

Another reason is this, because we've tried things that did not work. We tried many things that did not work. This father tried something that didn't work. He took his son to the disciples, and the disciples couldn't do anything about it. Maybe, for you, you read the book on whatever subject, and you did the seven steps to whatever, and it didn't work. Maybe, for you, you went, joined a Sunday School class, or joined church, or started listening to Christian radio, or sent some money in to some place, or stopped trying to do something bad, and started to do something good, and you tried religion, and you prayed, and things still went wrong. We try some things that didn't work, and so all of a sudden, doubts arise.

A third thing that causes many of us to doubt is simply this, that many people around us express doubts. You sincerely want to believe in the things of God, but maybe you've got family members, close friends, people that you work with that just say, "Don't be an idiot. I mean, this whole God thing is just a crutch for the weak. Why in the world would you buy into this?" And so, as you want to believe, you've got other people that just simply speak doubt over and over again into your life.

Here's a dad who is doing the best he can for his son but his faith is not all it could be and I don't know about you but I know how he feels. So, he says, "But, if you can do anything, take pity on us and help us." Now, Jesus seemed almost surprised. "If you can," said Jesus. "Everything is possible for him who believes." Verse 24, Immediately, the father cried out, "I do believe! Help my unbelief."

From deep within him, he cried out with every bit of emotion and desperation he had, "I do believe," sort of. Do you ever feel like that? "I do believe," but not completely. "Help, Jesus. Help me overcome my unbelief." The Greek word for unbelief is the word *apastia*, and it actually means actively disbelieving. It means a passively, untrusting person. "I do believe, but I still have pockets of doubt." What do we do when we are there?

Well, the bible says there is only one thing to do because faith comes from hearing the word of God so I believe that as we spend time reading the bible God gives and builds faith. I want to look at what this father did, and I want to mirror what he did to let Jesus honour his faith. We learn the principle that we should be honest about our faith struggles, to be honest about them, not to pretend like they're not there. You see, as you study the life and ministry of Jesus, Jesus never had any patience or

tolerance for fake faith. Whenever the Pharisees would exude this fake faith, Jesus would hammer them for it. I promise you, I would rather have a church full of people with faltering faith than fake faith. What is fake faith? Well, we show up for church, and we pretend like we are Christ Followers, and then we don't let it affect our life all week long, and then on the way to church, we fight like cats and dogs with our family, and walk in and say, "Praise the Lord. Hallelujah. Glad to see you." Be honest about your faith struggles.

Then we need to act on the faith Act on the faith you have we have, whatever it is and even if it's not great faith. James 2:26 said, "As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without acting on it is dead." Act on the faith that you have. What's amazing about Jesus is this. Jesus did not condemn this father for his lack of faith. He didn't say, "Nice try. Now go home and come back when you have some more faith." He didn't shout at him and say, "Is that the best you can do for your son?" No, instead, Jesus honoured that father's I-do-believe, sorta, kinda, help me faith,

Let me explain it like this. There's an animal known as an African Impala, which is, it's similar to a deer, a beautiful animal that, believe it or not, this animal has the ability to leap over ten feet high in the air. This animal can also leap over thirty in distance. The dudes can fly, and yet, even though they can leap high and far, they can be kept in captivity in a zoo by a wall that's about three feet high. You see, the impala will never jump over a wall if they can not see where their feet will land, and they can be kept in captivity if they don't know where their feet will land. The same is true for so many of us. We are simply unwilling to take the leap of faith, because we don't know where we will land. We don't know how things will turn out, but I will tell you right now, if we know how things will turn out, or if we know where our feet will land, then it's not called faith. Is it? Faith is leaping and trusting God when we don't know how things will turn out, and scripture is very clear when it says, "Without faith, it is impossible to please God." So, you may have to jump and act on whatever faith you have.

There's an amazing story of faith in the OT and it involves three quite young boys and it's in the book of Daniel, chapter 3. They were called Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. And they had such great faith in God that it disturbed the king. The king wanted them to worship the idols that everybody else worshipped, and so, the king brought them in and said, "Boys, unless you forget your God and worship these idols, I will have you thrown into a fiery furnace." These three teenage boys made two of the greatest statements of faith found in all of the Old Testament. The first is found in verse 17. They said this. "If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we

serve is able to save us from it, and He will rescue us from your hand, oh, king.” He is able and He will. No matter what you are facing, God is able, and God will meet you where you are.

The first great statement of faith found in the Old Testament, “He is able, and He will.” The second greatest statement of faith, verse 18, “But, even if He does not we want you to know, oh, king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold that you have set up.” That is real faith. Our God is able, and our God will. The leap of faith, but even if my feet do not land where I think that they should, God is still sovereign. He is still all knowing, ever present, and all powerful. His ways continue to be higher than our ways, and even if things don’t work out the way we think they should, we will not doubt the goodness and the presence of God.

Each of us are going to face giants in our lives – not real giants like David with Goliath, but sickness, unemployment, bullying – things that seem too big for us to deal with and they can cause us to have doubts about God or even stop believing in God. How can we help to prevent that? Two things: read the bible – get to know the stories and try to understand what it means, then act on what you have learned. If you start doing this every day you will be able to see the giants in a different way. The whole Israelite army saw Goliath and they were terrified – David saw Goliath and said, ‘God will beat him’. David was only able to do that because he had spent time with God and had been helped by God to chase a bear and a lion away from the sheep he was watching. He knew God, he had faith and he acted on it. That’s the second thing – don’t just read the bible, do what it says!