

INTRODUCTION

My two sons have very contrasting personalities. The older one is very self-confident. His motto is: “That’s easy!” The down-side is that he often commits careless mistakes when he thinks he is too smart to double-check on the answers in his homework. He is a quick learner too. When he first learned to ride a bike he hopped on to the equipment, and within minutes he told mom that he had acquired the skill. On he went to a neighbor’s house on his bike. In comparison, his younger brother is a timid kid like me. His motto is: “I don’t know how to do it.” Often he is too afraid to try new things because of his fear over failure. He has not started walking until he was about 16 months old. Even after he learned how to walk he would pace back and forth over and over again just to fine-tune the skill. At various stages in your life or on different matters you may be inclined to be overly-confident about yourself or suffer from low self-esteem. In fact both states of mind reflect self-centeredness because you put all the focus on yourself. If you think too highly of yourself, more than likely you will not ask for help from others. If you think too lowly of yourself then you may be paralyzed by difficulties in life. God wants us to rely on Him rather than ourselves. Through hardship or even failure He reveals our weakness. That humbles us and turns our focus to Him. In our passage today a father brought his demon-possessed son to Jesus for help. Through this miracle healing Jesus disclosed the weaknesses of not only this father and his son, but also Jesus’ disciples too. To a certain extent we can identify ourselves with these three groups of people in the story. But no matter what our weakness is God is willing to show us His mercy.

EXPLANATION

1. 神憐憫我們的疑惑 God Shows Mercy in Our Doubt

From this passage, first of all, we can learn that God shows mercy to us in our doubt. The father in the story had his doubt. His struggle can be summarized by what he said in **verse 24**: ...“I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!” Brothers and sisters: don’t we all experience that? On the surface we say we believe that God can do anything. But deep down inside we still have doubt. At one time when I was laid off from work I knew that God would point me to the right direction. But I was still unsettled in my heart because I did not know where the Lord would lead me and how long I had to wait. That feeling of hanging in the air was gruesome. From the passage this father did not seem to have an in-depth knowledge about Jesus. We can conclude that he just wanted to try and see if Jesus could help his son. Part of the reason for his doubt was because Jesus’ disciples failed to heal his son. As recorded in **verse 18** when this father met Jesus he complained: “...I asked your disciples to drive out the spirit, but they could not.” This father tried to put his faith in the disciples but it did not work out. Though it may not be fair, often our testimony before non-believers may affect the way they look at Jesus. More than likely, it is the negative incidents that catch people’s attention. They say: “If Christians can commit those sins, or if a church can be so indifferent toward the needs of the society, then I don’t want to believe in your Jesus?” But God would not be put to shame because of people’s doubt. In response to the father’s report Jesus lamented in **verse 19**: “O unbelieving generation,” Jesus replied, “how long

shall I stay with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring the boy to me.” To whom did Jesus make this remark? My understanding is that Jesus was describing the public in general when they built their faith in Him from the miracles He performed. In another occasion a group of religious teachers tested Jesus by asking Him to perform a miracle. In **Mark 8:12** Jesus also lamented at their request: ...“Why does this generation ask for a miraculous sign? I tell you the truth, no sign will be given to it.” Miracles should not be the only means to validate Jesus’ true identity as God. People who chase after miracles may soon stumble in their faith when they fail to see miracle anymore. Miracles are real because they come from an Almighty God who is full of authority. Despite his doubt the father was willing to give Jesus one more try. In **verse 22** he plead to Jesus: “...But if you can do anything, take pity on us and help us.” Pay attention that he said - “if you can.” Seemingly the father was saying: “Jesus, I have asked your disciples to cast away the demon but it did not work. I do not know what you can do to help my son. But if there is anything at all you can do, even if it is relieving his pain, then please help him.” This father had doubt in his mind about Jesus’ power. We can compare that to another miracle Jesus performed when he healed a leper. **Mark 1:40** records that the patient kneeled before Jesus and begged: “...If you are willing, you can make me clean.” See the difference between the two? This leper had no doubt about Jesus’ healing power. He had doubt about Jesus’ willingness to heal him. Through the miracle Jesus showed mercy to the father despite his doubt. When we present our needs to God we should not have any doubt about His power because He is able.

2. 神憐憫我們的無助 God Shows Mercy in Our Desperation

God shows us mercy in our weakness. The father in the story had doubt, whereas, his son was in a desperate condition. Listen to how the father described the symptoms of his son in **verses 17-18**: 17 ...“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...” From the descriptions it may look like the boy suffered from epilepsy. It is a neurological disease that causes the patient to have seizure and periods of vigorous shaking of the body. How could the father tell that his son was demon-possessed? He said in **verse 22**: “It has often thrown him into fire or water to kill him...” It was more than an incurable sickness. There was an evil force behind the disease that tried to take the boy’s life. From the Bible demon-possession is a reality. It is not just a plot in horror movies. A person who is demon-possessed would have strange behavior. For example, Mark 5 records a demon-possessed man who lived in a graveyard. **Verses 3-5** read: 3 This man lived in the tombs, and no one could bind him any more, not even with a chain. 4 For he had often been chained hand and foot, but he tore the chains apart and broke the irons on his feet. No one was strong enough to subdue him. 5 Night and day among the tombs and in the hills he would cry out and cut himself with stones. Just like this man, the boy in our story was desperate because he was bound by a demon. The boy was desperate in that the demon took away his ability to listen and speak. Therefore, he could not express the pain he felt. Moreover, the boy was desperate because he had been possessed by the demon from childhood. Just imagine the agony this father had to go through. Day after day he felt hopeless about his son. But out of man’s desperation God showed mercy. In **verse 25** Jesus rebuked the evil spirit: ...“You deaf and mute spirit,” he said, “I command you, come out of him and never enter him again.” Jesus showed that He was God by casting out the demon. What happened next? Continues to read **verses 26-27**: 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. Jesus cast out the demon and gave this boy a new life by lifting him up. By His mighty power Jesus proves that is God. The Bible tells us that Satan is real. He is the chief enemy of God. Satan is very much active and at work in our world. His goal is to lure people away from believing in God. While the Biblical accounts we read above may look scary Satan has been using more subtle ways to entice people. Paul says in [2 Corinthians 4:4](#) - The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. Satan is the “god of this age” that hinders people from knowing God. He uses different means to occupy people’s minds making them too busy to think of eternal matters. Some people invest their whole life in chasing after money, education, relationship, video games or leisure to the point that they cannot let go of it. Dear friends: is there anything that has become the “god of this age” in your life? Brothers and sisters: a classmate, colleague, friend or family member of yours may be in a spiritually desperate situation that he does not even realize. Without Christ he is walking toward destruction. Pray for God’s mercy on this person. Pray also that God would use you as an agent to bring him to Christ, just like the father in our story bringing his desperate son to Jesus. Only Jesus can deliver us in our desperation.

3. 神憐憫我們的不足 God Shows Mercy in Our Deficiency

God shows us mercy in our weakness. The father had doubt about God and the son was in desperation. A third group of people we see in the story who had weakness were Jesus’ disciples. They were deficient in their ability. They tried to help the demon-possessed boy but they were unable to cast out the evil spirit. What was their problem? Jesus told His disciples afterward in [verse 29](#): ...“This kind can come out only by prayer.” Jesus’ answer reflected that the disciples had not prayed. If the disciples attempted to cast out the demon without prayer then whose power did they rely on? Their own! Back in [Mark 3:14-15](#) when Jesus called His twelve disciples Jesus gave them power as they went out to preach the gospel. The passage reads: 14 He appointed twelve - designating them apostles - that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach 15 and to have authority to drive out demons. The disciples might think that the authority they received would become part of their natural abilities. However, Jesus wanted them to constantly rely on Him for power. Otherwise, their faith would be limited. Actually, this is not the only time Jesus admonished His disciples for their lack of faith. In [Mark 4](#) the disciples were scare to death when their boat was close to being capsized by a fierce storm. After Jesus calmed the storm He rebuked the disciples in [verse 40](#) by saying: ...“Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?” Over and again Jesus wanted His disciples to put their faith in Him, rather than on their own ability. Of course when we talk about putting our faith in Christ it is not a blank check as if God would give us anything we ask for, whether it is a lottery jackpot, admittance to a renowned university or a good-looking mate. In some people’s mind God is not real unless they can get what they ask for. I remember some time ago a sister in our church died of cancer. Someone blamed her that she was not cured because she did not have enough faith, or there must be some hidden and unconfessed sins in her life. How helpful would such remark be for an ailing patient? Prayer is not a shopping list. It is not a magic wand to get what we want. Prayer works more like a suggestion slip. We tell God that in our limited wisdom and perspective we hope for a certain favorable result. After we present our request we submit ourselves to the sovereign will of God. No matter what the result may be we trust that it is His best plan for us. Jesus convicted His disciples for not praying. Brothers and sisters: do you pray? If you do not pray you may be

relying on your own ability, intelligence, resources and experience. Just more than a year ago when our church was in a difficult situation many brothers and sisters poured out their hearts to pray to God. Our Wednesday night prayer meeting was packed with people. Besides Wednesday we also held special prayer meetings. After the storm had subsided attendance at those prayer meetings dropped drastically. I wonder what is going on. I firmly believe that many people still care about God's Kingdom and this church. But we need to pray together in good times as much as when are in bad times. Some people comment that the problem is with the format. Of course we can explore other arrangements. But deep down inside it is a heart issue. You eat dinner with your family not because of fancy food, fine china or dining room decor. You join them because it is your home and your family members are present. Therefore, I encourage you to come on any Wednesday for us to pray as a family. Don't come because I tell you so. Come because God urges you to do so. By praying together we learn to look up to God in faith.

CONCLUSION

God shows us mercy in our weakness. Before we know Christ we are desperate like the boy in the story. Our merciful God stretches out His hand and lifts us up from the bondage of the devil. We can be doubtful about God just like the father, wondering if God has the power to solve our problems. Jesus says to us: "Put your trust in me. I can accomplish anything according to my authority and will." Even after we have accepted Christ we can be deficient like the disciples when we do not pray. We have confidence in ourselves rather than God. Jesus reminds us: "You can only triumph when you commit yourselves to me in prayer." However, Jesus Christ is not only interested in solving our problems. Through showing mercy in our weakness He wants us to get to know Him. He is willing to build an eternal relationship with you. Jesus is not a customer service agent where we call upon only when we are in need. Jesus wants to become the Master of your life.