

Matthew 17:14-21 The Doctrine of Faith Part 3

We are continuing in Matthew 14:17-21, a very powerful section because in it are the principles of faith like in no other section. The title of this series is The Doctrine of Faith. This is The Doctrine of Faith Part Three. We will finish up with part 4 next week. But Jesus and the three disciples were up on the mountain and Jesus was transfigured (or transformed) before them, talking with Elijah and Moses. And when Jesus and the three disciples came back down the mountain, when they got to the bottom, here was a crowd of people waiting for Jesus along with the other nine disciples. Remember there were 12 - Jesus took three with Him, left nine behind.

And so when He gets there, He finds that there is a problem. It says in verse 14, **When they came toward the crowd, a man came near to Him, kneeling down to Him, and saying, "Lord, have mercy on my son, because he is being moonstruck."** King James says, "he is lunatic." *Lunatic* is from our word *lunar*. Here is a person who is affected by the moon. **Because he is being moonstruck.** So in this instance, just like a person can be out in the sun too long and have sun stroke; so a person, especially during full moon, there are some people that are affected by the moon, they are moon struck. They suffer too much from the moonlight. That is a human condition, but it is also a spiritual condition. Sometimes demons use that to their advantage as one did here.

"Because my son is moonstruck and is suffering severely. For he often falls into the fire, and often into the water." So this demon is throwing him into the fire and into the water.

"And I brought him to Your disciples, and they were not able to heal him." So all of this is going on at the bottom of the mountain while Jesus was with the three disciples, talking with Moses and Elijah on the top of the mountain. And he says, "They weren't able to heal him."

In verse 17, which is what we have been focused on for the last - this will be now three weeks, but we will continue on past that today, no promises, but we will continue on past that today. And when Jesus answered in verse 17, **Jesus said, "O faithless and perverted generation!"** Now that is literally what it means, *faithless, having no faith whatsoever*. This is not a challenge for them to come up with the faith. He is making a statement of fact that this generation - and the *generation* means *the people who are alive at that time*, both Jews and Gentiles in that region, at that time, the people to whom Jesus is talking to. He says, **"O faithless and perverted generation!"** That is, people who take the things of God and pervert them, twist them. We have that a lot today, where people pervert and twist what the Scriptures say.

For the last couple weeks we have mentioned to you how important the doctrine of faith is, as it is taught in the Bible. What I am giving you is what the Bible teaches. Faith as it is taught today by many, if not most, teaches Scriptures on faith that you take promises and claim them for yourself by faith. That is psychology, that is not spirit.

As I mentioned to you before the Biblical faith, the word *faith* itself by the way, no matter what context you use it, the word *faith* **πίστις** (pistis) means *persuasion*. That is what *faith* means. Every time you see the word *faith*, if you were to substitute the word *persuasion* or *influence*, you would have the correct meaning of the word. The persuasion and influence of God's Spirit is what *faith* means in the Bible. Not people. It is not trying to motivate people to come up with their own persuasion upon themselves to believe enough so that God would bless them. That is not what the Bible teaches. That is psychology. It came from Christian science many years ago, who got it from the eastern religions. As you talk yourself, you persuade yourself into believing it. And once you reach a certain point of believing it enough, getting yourself to believe enough, then God will bless you. That is not the Bible. But it is major teaching today that is out there.

So what we saw was, in the Bible, six things:

- 1) But first of all, we saw in Hebrews 12:2 that Jesus Christ is the source of faith. He is the author and finisher of faith. It comes from Him.
- 2) Secondly, faith is produced by the Holy Spirit.

Galatians 5:22 says that the fruit of the Spirit is faith, not man, it is not human.

And then we ended up that particular study in James 2:14. Now I will repeat it again because that is how important it is. In James chapter 2, James says, "Faith without works is dead." Very confusing teaching unless you understand what faith is, and unless you understand that if you have the Spirit of God dwelling in you, then you have faith. And if you have faith, faith is active. James says, "If you say you have faith and it is not active, you do not have the faith the Bible is talking about." That faith that you are talking about does not save you. That is religious faith, psychological faith. And so James says, "Faith without activity is a dead faith." Faith is something that God is doing beyond us. We see Him do it through us. We see Him do it to us. We see Him do it around us, and it has nothing to do with us except we are the participants, and we get to observe Him move and work. So if He is not there moving and working, then He is not there. It is a dead faith. It is a religious faith.

- 3) Then thirdly, faith is given by the Holy Spirit.

I Corinthians 12:9 says that the Holy Spirit gives faith to people.

We saw in Acts 14:9-10 when Paul was on the first missionary journey, how he saw a man who was crippled from his birth. And the text says, **When Paul saw that the man had faith to be healed, he said to him, "Stand upon your feet and be healed."** He saw that faith had been given to that man.

And then at the end of chapter 14, at the end of the missionary journey, we saw that the missionary team got to Antioch and told them all the things that God had

done during the trip and how the Lord opened up the door of faith to the Gentiles. God opens the door. God gives faith. Whatever God does, whoever God is, He is called *faith*, He is active, He is alive.

4) And then next, fourthly, God's chosen way of expressing His faith is Romans 10:17. **Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God.** It is God's designed plan that when God's people gather together to get around the word His faith, His persuasion, His influence ministers through His word to influence and persuade people. It is called *ministry*.

5) And then fifthly, we are told to live by faith. In Romans 12:3 Paul says, "Don't think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has measured to each person the measure of faith." God measures faith. Whatever He wants us to do he gives us the faith to do it. If you have to force it, it is not faith, the faith of the Bible. It is not the faith of Jesus Christ. It is psychology. It is you forcing yourself. Influencing yourself to be a certain way to get God to bless you. That is not the faith of the Bible.

So basically Paul did not teach people that the reason God cannot move in your life is because of your lack of faith, Paul taught people you do more than faith is leading you to do. That is what is happening today in what we call the church in our day. People are going beyond what God is doing and they are doing it themselves.

6) And then lastly, someone might say, "Well what about when the Lord said in Matthew 9:29 to two men who were blind and they wanted to be healed, they wanted God to have mercy on them and He said, 'Let it be to you according to your faith.' What about the *your*?" It kind of tells you, you have to have faith for God to move in your life. Well just to show you and impress upon you the importance of the technical language of the text, the word *your* is a personal pronoun not a reflexive pronoun. That is in Matthew 9:29. A reflexive pronoun means *let it be to you according to your faith that you are producing and applying to yourself*. That is not the pronoun used there. It is a personal pronoun showing possession. Jesus is saying, "Let it be to you according to the faith that you possess." In other words, the faith that has been given to you that you now possess, let your blindness be healed.

Same as in Acts 14:27 when Paul saw that the man had faith to be healed. Jesus looking at the faith that was given to them. It is not the faith that they produce. It is not *your faith*, the faith that you produce, but *your faith*, the faith that you possessed. It makes a big difference, especially in the original language. In English you can take it and twist it, which many people have done.

So lastly, I want to mention another verse, before we move on about faith. Hebrews chapter 11 verse 1. That is the verse that everybody quotes when they are asked, "What does faith mean?" It reads **Faith is the substance of things hoped for the evidence (or conviction) of things not seen.** It sounds like a definition, except in Greek it is a description not a definition. It describes what faith does. Faith is the substance of things hoped for. It is the basis

of things hoped for. There is no other physical element, including the Bible, that our salvation and our relationship with the Lord is built on other than faith.

And secondly, that verse says, **And it is the evidence** (or literally *conviction*) **of things not seen.** Whenever I am convicted it is because of faith. God's Spirit. The things that I hope for in the future is all based on faith, God's Spirit. I cannot prove it to you. Just like I cannot prove creation - that God created all things. Lots of evidence to prove there is a God and that He created all things. I cannot prove it to you. But in Hebrews chapter 11, the verse that I just read you, that entire chapter Hebrews 11 is a whole list of people that lived by faith as an example. It says, **By faith we understand that the worlds were created by the Lord.** It is not my belief, something I choose to believe, it is something I am persuaded by. I am convinced. Even in my human understanding, if I should decide to not believe that God is the Creator, I could not deny His persuasion over my life that He is. Cannot do it.

Another example of faith in Hebrews chapter 11 is Hebrews 11:7 where it says about Noah building the ark. It says that when he was instructed by God about building the ark, "by faith he built the ark." I always use that as a perfect example of what faith really means, because Noah just did not say, "You know it has not rained for hundreds of years and we do not know what a boat is; so I tell you what, I am going to have the faith to believe God that He is going to make it rain and I am going to build a boat to show my faith." That is not what happened. God gave the instruction, and that instruction is called *faith*. People came along and mocked Noah for building the ark. It was not his idea. He was instructed to do it. And so he suffered the ridicule of the people, the mocking of the people, because he was responding to God's persuasion and God's influence when God instructed him, not only to build a boat but all the dimensions of the boat. That is *faith*.

So here is a definition for *faith*, definition is *persuasion*. But putting this all together in one lump here, for me this is my explanation of faith. That faith is the presence and the activity of the Holy Spirit in a person's life. Faith is the presence and the activity of the Holy Spirit in a person's life. It is not something that you produce. It is something that explains God. I say His presence and His activity because sometimes we do not, at least in the human we do not sense Him active. But He is there. He is energy. He is God. So He has to be active all the time. As James 2:14 told us, "Faith without activity is dead, it is a dead faith."

So then we go back to verse 17 for today, **And having answered Jesus said to him, "O faithless and perverted generation!"**

Before I leave this, let me warn you, be careful of people's books, workbooks, audio teachings, on how you can produce the faith to get God to give you all the human blessings that you want. Be careful about these people. They are false teachers. They are appealing to the American culture, to the American way of life. Faith is the presence and activity of God's Spirit in a person's life.

Jesus goes on to say, **"How long shall I be with you? Until when (or how long) will I bear with you?"** The word *suffer* means *to tolerate* or *to hold up under you*. How long am I going to be holding you up? **"Bring him here to Me."** This is the crux of everything. So both

this week and next week this is what you are going to get. That does not mean you cannot come next week, because you know what you are going to get. How long am I going to be with you? You see the nine disciples were down at the bottom of the mountain trying to lay hands on this guy. Trying to pray for this kid to be healed, and praying for the people, and everybody was in a big tizzy about how to get this boy healed. And Jesus said, "How long am I going to be with you?" It is not about formulas. It is not about you laying hands on somebody and getting them healed. How long am I going to be the one supporting you and you are just running around like chickens with your heads cut off? **Bring him to Me.** So Jesus is saying, "How long am I going to be with you until you start bringing the situations to me?" Not trying to take care of it yourself. Putting it in the Lord's hands.

I was able to experience this in a very beautiful way here about a month ago, where a young man was brought to me and he was having troubles, obviously demonic forces. And my first response was the effort to lay hands on him and pray for him and pray for the demons to be cast out of him. And right then and there the Lord is shared with me, "No it is not you. It is not you in the name of Jesus, it is Jesus." When you pray in the name of Jesus you are turning people over to Jesus. And it is Jesus who is doing the healing, not you. So I was able to pray with this young man and seemingly he was delivered, and he is in a rehab now, in a church in Los Angeles and doing fairly well, last time that that I heard from him. And it was a great experience because I am so used to saying, "Well I represent Jesus, so I am just going to take His name and lay hands on people and pray for them." Bring them to Jesus. Place them in His hands. Let Him work it out. That is the message that He gives.

And then after He chided with the disciples, verse 18, **He rebuked the demon and the demon came out from the boy, and the boy was healed from that hour.** Immediate. There is no lingering effects.

The Cause of the Problem, verse 19, **Then when the disciples came to Jesus privately,** the other gospel writers say, **When they got into the house they came to Jesus and said, "Why were we ourselves not able to cast it out?"** Why is it that we tried and could not do it? But notice what the emphasis was, *we ourselves*. Why were not we able to do it? Didn't we use the right formula? What is it that is the problem here?

Verse 20, **And Jesus said to them, "On account of your unbelief."** It is a different Greek word than in verse 17, this one also means *without faith*. Because you are without faith. **"For truly I say to you, if you should have faith,"** here is our regular word πίστις (pistis). **"If you should have faith as a grain of mustard plant, you will say to this mountain, 'Be removed from here to there!' and it will be removed. And nothing will be impossible for you."** Nothing will be impossible for you. That almost sounds too good. We will see what that means in a moment.

So Jesus said, "If you had faith as a grain of mustard plant." Mustard plant is the smallest seeds of the herb or garden. And so Jesus said, "If you have faith that is even as little as a mustard seed plant, you will say to this mountain, 'Be removed,' and it will be removed." It does not take much faith. Which I always quote, and I always make reference to with people,

especially when faith healers come into town and I ask them, "How many mountains have you moved?"

"Well, we see people healed but we have not moved mountains."

"Move a mountain for me. I mean it doesn't take much, if you have faith, do it."

They cannot do it because it is not Jesus is talking about.

The smallest of garden seeds is the mustard seed plant. This is a Jewish idiom here used for removing problems. In Jewish literature, it is mentioned for us as how the rabbis would remove the mountains of problems for people and it was by faith. So it is a metaphor of a seed, the smallest of seeds compared to a mountain, something very big. It can be moved with just a little bit of faith. Also taken from the Old Testament. The rabbis and scribes got it from the Old Testament when they talked about the mountains when the Lord comes in His judgments:

He will make the low the mountains, Isaiah 40:4.

He will flatten the mountains, Isaiah 49:11.

He will level them, Isaiah 54:10.

So the rabbis picked up on that and began to tell the people when they came with their mountains of problems, this mountain that is keeping them from moving forward, it just takes a little bit of faith to move that mountain.

If you are noticing, the parallel is a little bit of faith is Jesus. When you come to Jesus the mountains are removed. It does not mean that He changes all circumstances. But the hindrance from moving forward, the hindrance from being at peace is gone. It just takes a little bit of trust in Jesus to move a mountain.

And then He says, "**And nothing will be impossible for you.**" Nothing will be impossible for you if you have faith the size of a mustard seed plant. When God's Spirit is in you, you are able to do whatever God's Spirit wants to do. Did you catch that? Not whatever you want to do. But for everyone who has God's Spirit in them they are able to do whatever God wants to do. It is impossible to stop Him.

And probably on this subject more than any other that I have spoken to others when they say, "Well, if that is true, I have had faith and I just had nothing but trouble and God has not answered my prayers." That is because you are talking about a different kind of faith. You prayed to Jesus, but did you come to Jesus? Whatever the problem and situation, did you bring it to Him and give it to Him or did you just pray about it and hope that something is going to change? Basically when Jesus is in charge nothing really needs to change. He is in charge. But nothing will be impossible. The mountains will be moved with that little bit of faith that comes from Jesus. That little bit of faith, what it is going to do is it is going to bring us to Jesus. That is what faith does. Faith will bring us to Jesus.

Verse 21, "**But this kind,**" this demonic power, "**does not go out except in prayer and fasting.**" Oh boy. Problem verse that people quote and use all the time. Notice in the study guide this verse is bracketed because is not original in the Greek text for the King James translations. It was added. In Mark 9:29 it is original. But in Mark 9:29 the added part had another added part and that is the word fasting. So originally it just says, "This kind does not go out except in prayer." And the scribes decided to add *and fasting*. Because to the religious people you cannot have prayer without fasting.

Fasting means to go without food. Religiously it is to go without food so as to deaden the physical appetites and make a person more sensitive spiritually speaking to God. That is religious fasting. You go without food so that you become, your appetites become dull or deadened, and you become more sensitive spiritually speaking while you are praying. And of course *prayer is talking to God, talking to the Lord.* But in this context prayer is not presented as that which casts out a demon. Prayer is presented as the means by which I make my approach to the Lord and give it to Him. I pray and give it to Him. That is prayer. That is communication. Another word for *prayer* is *communication*. I communicate with the Lord about myself, about my problem, about my situation.

Jesus said, "Bring him here to Me." So when they come with the boy and voice their request for Jesus to do something to help this boy, that is prayer. That is placing the boy in the Lord's hands. Bring him here to Me. Keep yourself out of the way. Let go and let the Lord take care of it and deal with it. And the Bible promises that when you do that, nothing will be impossible. All the mountains will be moved and removed. Because you have let go of it and you have given it to the Lord and He is handling it His way and He is taking care of it. So the burden is off your back. The mountain is not in front of you anymore. It is all the Lord's doing.

Next week we have a special time from this last section. A special time that I think you will find interesting as we finish up the study of faith and bringing it to Jesus.

Let's close with prayer.