

All things in the Seeker - Prof. John Angus Macleod

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 15 September 2024

Preacher: Prof. John Angus Macleod

[0 : 00] Let's turn again now to the chapter we read in Mark's Gospel and chapter 9. We can read again at verse 21.

Jesus asking the father of the boy, How long has this been happening to him? And he said, From childhood. And it has often cast him into fire and into water to destroy him. But if you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us. And Jesus said to him, If you can, all things are possible for one who believes.

Immediately the father of the child cried out and said, I believe, help my unbelief. Faith is the biggest problem in the world.

You've got the teachers in this chapter, the scribes, those who were the learned people in the community.

[1 : 30] And they have an antagonistic absence of faith. They don't just have no faith, but they're antagonistic, attacking those that do.

Then you've got the community. Then you've got the community, the crowd, the generation. And Jesus calls them a faithless generation.

A universal prevalence of unbelief. Then you've got the disciples. The disciples were brought this young man.

And they tried to cast out this unclean spirit. And they were not able. The shocking limitation of little faith.

And then you've got the father of the boy. When he comes to Jesus and he says, If you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us.

[2 : 36] And Jesus said to him, If you can, all things are possible for him who believes. And then the father cries out such well-known words of such immense help.

I believe, help my unbelief. The deep anguish of uncertain faith. And then you have Jesus.

And Jesus here is the author and the encourager of saving faith. He takes time to care, to show compassion, and by his power, to change the life of a son and a father and maybe even a community.

Let's look at each of these briefly tonight. The teachers, first of all, with their antagonistic absence of faith. So here, Jesus, Peter, James, and John are coming down from the mountain of transfiguration.

They've had brilliant time up there. Peter, James, and John saw two saints who had been in heaven, brought to earth, strikingly.

[4 : 02] And they were able, in a measure, to hear some things, but not all of it, because they weren't meant to benefit from it in the way that Jesus was.

The conversation between Moses and Elijah and Jesus was not for the disciples. It was for Jesus. He was encouraged by it.

He comes down along with Peter, James, and John. And when they come to the disciples, the remaining disciples, they saw a great crowd around them and the scribes, these teachers, arguing with them.

The word here is disputing with them, debating with them, challenging them. Clearly, they are not the kind of people who have faith.

And we reason why. Because when this father brought the son to be healed, and the disciples couldn't do it, the scribes weren't showing any sympathy, the teachers weren't feeling sorry for the boy or the father or the disciples.

[5 : 15] Indeed, they were challenging, it seems, the disciples. They were arguing with them. They were making their lives difficult because they couldn't at all do what they thought they could do, so they're challenged by the teachers of the day.

They have this antagonism towards those disciples. They have no faith, and they want to antagonize those who claim that they do.

They're ready to challenge believers, ready to challenge their limitations, ready to point out their inconsistencies.

They look on these disciples, and there are only a few. Literally, you could count their numbers on one hand, those that were down at the foot of the mountain.

A minority, and it's easy to attack a minority. And the crowd gathers around them, and you can just imagine the teachers becoming even more provocative as the crowd are listening to them challenging this minority of believers pointing out their failure.

[6 : 32] And they're asking questions not to get answers. No, they are relentlessly negative, and they're so sure of themselves.

does that strike a bell with those who are leaders and teachers in our own world today? They are people who very often do not have faith, but they have the academic learning.

They have the intelligence. They are able to speak, and they use their speech to attack, and they use their speech to make believers feel small.

people. They may be people in law. They may be people in politics. They may be celebrities who have a following of millions, and they make their attacks on all those who are believers in Jesus Christ.

They have no faith themselves, and they're not content to respect believers, maybe like yourselves. no, they are so relentlessly negative, day after day, program after program, new philosophies of education, social media.

[7 : 55] What are you going to look at next where you find those who are leaders and teachers and influencers, the gray term used in social media, those who are influencers, those who influence people, well, often so antagonistic?

what does Jesus do with these people? He challenges them indirectly. He doesn't go directly to the teachers.

He just asks the question, what, what they were arguing about with them. What was the issue? Clearly, there was an argument going on. There was a debate going on, and Jesus is interested in the debate, and so he should.

I think it's wonderful that we have an institute called the Christian Institute, and it's a great thing for all Christians to sign up and to receive the things that they are doing, to find out the battles that they are finding, the information that they want to pass on to you.

[9 : 22] Take on board what they're saying, because they are often trying to reach the teachers, the leaders, the celebrities, the politicians of this world.

So important. The teachers, the antagonistic absence of faith. faith. Then the community, the generation, and the universal prevalence of unbelief.

Someone from the crowd said, Teacher, I brought my son to you, for he is a spirit that makes him mute. Whenever it seizes him, it throws him down. He foams and grinds his teeth and becomes rigid, so I asked your disciples to cast it out, and they were not able.

And Jesus answered them, O faithless generation, how long am I to be with you? How long am I to put up, to bear with you?

Bring him to me. Jesus calls the generation among whom he lived a faithless generation.

[10 : 30] So this is not now just the leaders and the teachers, the learned people. He's now addressing the generation of which they are a part.

He's addressing the crowd itself. And though the crowd are flocking to Jesus, though they're running up to him greatly amazed, and though they are supposedly greeting him, Jesus looks at them and says, faithless generation, that's what I see, a generation in which unbelief prevails.

See, this generation in which Jesus ministered, it was a generation that saw more miracles than ever before in the history of the world.

They heard more teaching than any other generation before them. They heard the teaching of God the Son himself, Jesus the Christ.

They heard the teaching of the apostles that he had sent out. They had seen people being changed and converted. They knew about people walking on water.

[11 : 48] They knew about those who were lame being brought to walk, people who couldn't hear being brought to hear, and those who were mute being brought to speak, those who were blind from birth being brought to see, and all of these miracles accompanied with the most wonderful teaching, and yet unbelief prevailed in that generation.

It dominated in the home, dominated in the school, dominated in the university, dominated in the public space, dominated in the workplace.

You didn't have to look far to see unbelief. How much unbelief is there in Barvis?

How much unbelief to the north of here? How much unbelief to the west, to the east? How much unbelief throughout our island here?

So much of it. Or you might say, these are incomers. It's the incomers who are unbelieving. They are the ones who are faithless.

[13 : 10] Is that so? Is that so? How many of our own loved ones, how many of my loved ones, are unbelievers, faithless, though they have seen so much, heard so much, been taught to pray and taught to read, though they have seen death after death, though they have seen loved ones go to glory, still unbelief prevails.

is that not your story too? And you may be here tonight and you may actually be part of this faithless generation in which unbelief rules.

It's a remarkable thing, unbelief. It really is. How often we've heard believers saying, surely when that thing happened in their life, surely that will shake them, surely that will make them tremble, surely that will bring them to their knees.

Instead, it leaves them even more hardened than before. More hardened. More hardened.

I was telling the family in the mans yesterday about a man who was up in Ness, not from the island, but married a Ness lassie.

[14 : 45] And this man was a firm unbeliever, somebody who had no time for God, for Christ, for the gospel, for the church.

Even though his own wife was somebody who attended the church, not for him. Cancer comes his way. Ah, this will change him.

This will be the means. This will show him that unbelief is not what he needs just now as he's heading into eternity.

And then the unbelief continues. And the minister Angus Smith comes in and he's not allowed to pray. He doesn't want his prayers.

And then he dies. And he dies and literally he went screaming into hell. Unbelief hardened to the very end.

[15 : 56] Hardened to the end. Unbelief prevails. The beauty in that situation was that the daughter of the man was converted through his passing to a lost eternity.

The mercy of God in a community and a generation of unbelief. See, that's the reality.

You and I, I can't see what's written on top of the door from up here. But when I was down there at the communion table this morning to see about entering into the mission field when you go through that door, how lovely.

Romans 1 is out there. A world in which the unbelief prevails. And that's the kind of world that is ripe for gospel proclamation.

But it's not easy. John 1, John reflecting on the coming of Jesus into the world, says, he came to his own, and his own received him not.

[17 : 19] And what does Jesus do with that faithless generation and the prevalence of unbelief? He says, how long am I to be with you?

How long am I to put up with you? Did Jesus say, ah, well, maybe they're not of the elect? Did Jesus say, ah, it's okay.

I've got this group of people, and so long as they're following me, I can sleep tonight. No. No. Jesus expressed it out so clearly.

Oh, faithless generation, how long am I to be with you? When he walked among people, and he knew he was walking among unbelievers, it got to him.

And when he was walking among communities in which there were more unbelievers, he was saying, how long must I put up with you? Why did he say such a thing?

[18 : 29] Because he was being dishonored. He was being disrespected. They were refusing to believe in him. He's the light coming into the world.

And what are they doing? They're running away from the light and they're saying, sorry, we prefer the darkness. Thank you very much. And maybe that's you tonight.

The Lord has come so near to you, walked close to you, close to your family, close to your loved ones. And what has happened?

Have you said, no, thank you? I don't want you. I prefer the works of darkness. Give me hardness of heart.

Give me hardness of heart. That's the logic of your position. If you don't want to be saved, ask for hardness of heart.

[19 : 32] I doubt you will. I doubt you would be here tonight if that were the case. No, Jesus is not content with unbelievers.

Not when he was down here and not when he's up there because when he's up there, he's down here. Where the two or three are gathered in his name, he is in the midst to bless.

When Jesus said all authority in heaven and on earth is given to me, go out and make disciples of all nations. What did he promise them? I will be with you.

I will be with you. Don't ever imagine that when murder preaches here that Christ isn't present. He's not only present at times when people are converted.

Oh no. He's present here always. Always. An unbelief he will never get used to.

[20 : 44] Never. That's why Jesus says, bring the boy to me. And then you've got the disciples and the shocking limitation of little faith.

Remember, they brought, the father says, I brought my son to you, but Jesus wasn't there. For he has a spirit that makes him mute.

Whenever it seizes him, it throws him down, foams, grinds his teeth, becomes richard. So I asked your disciples, you weren't there, Jesus, so I asked your disciples to cast it out.

And they were not able to do so. In Mark 6 and verse 6, Jesus has sent out these disciples.

He gave them authority to heal, to exercise unclean spirits. And they went out, and they taught, and they performed exorcisms, and they performed healings.

[21 : 51] And yet, in this situation, when the father brings the boy to a Jesus who isn't present, and asked the disciples whom he knew had done this somewhere else, what happened?

They were not able to do so. It was beyond their ability. It was beyond what was possible for them. Why? Why? Why? Why? As a Christian, have you ever been in a situation where it was beyond your limitations?

You were able to cope in the past. You were able to serve them. You were able to stand up to be counted, but in this situation, you folded, you couldn't do it.

Had the disciples become blasé? Had they begun to trust in their gift rather than looking to the giver of the gift?

[23 : 10] Had they begun to lose sight of the authority of the one who sent him out? And no longer were looking to him and were just going through places, doing this, doing that, and then suddenly they found they couldn't do it at all.

If you were reading this story in Matthew's Gospel and the disciples ask, how could we not do this?

How could we not cast this demon out? The answer, here, it's this kind cannot be driven out but by prayer. Matthew includes more, and it's Jesus saying to them, it's because of your little faith.

faith. If you had faith as a grain of mustard seed, you could say to this mountain, be moved. The assumption is, you don't have much faith.

And it may well be that they had started trusting in themselves, in their own gifts, without looking to the giver of the gifts.

[24 : 34] And that leads into what he says here, this kind cannot be driven out by anything but prayer. Can you imagine it? Here's the father of the boy with his very sick son, and he brings him to the disciples, and the disciples get ready to do their bit, and it doesn't happen.

Why? Did you pray? No. Did you pray? No. Did any of us pray? No. We just thought it would happen without prayer.

Faith expressed in prayer. No prayer. Little faith. The shocking limitation of little faith.

Every act of faith is a prayer. little faith. The disciples, the shocking limitation of little faith.

They probably never got over this. Never got over this. Can I take time to challenge you, to challenge myself?

[25 : 52] How's your faith? faith? What is it that you do pray about? What is it that you do in serving the Lord that you no longer pray about?

What is it that you do as a matter of rote? As in the old schools, you don't need to pray. Ah, my friend, prayer is at the heart of the work of the gospel.

have you come here tonight to be converted? You haven't even bothered to pray. Have you come here expecting your children to become Christians, and you haven't even asked the Lord in prayer for that?

My friends, brothers and sisters, prayer, prayer as an expression of faith is needed.

Don't be surprised if the Lord shocks you by showing the limitation of little faith. And then there's the father of the boy.

[27 : 05] The father of the boy. They brought the boy to him, verse 20, when the spirit saw him, this is the spirit, the evil spirit, the unclean spirit within the boy.

When the spirit saw Jesus, immediately it convulsed the boy, he fell on the ground, rolled about, foaming at the mouth.

Jesus asked his father, how long has this been happening to him? From childhood, he said, it's often cast him into the fire and into water to destroy him, but if you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us.

Jesus said to him, if you can. All things are possible for one who believes without any delay.

That's what the word immediately means here. Without any delay, the father of the child cried out and said, I believe, help my unbelief.

[28 : 09] see, this father doesn't appear to me to be like the teachers who are antagonistic towards the small group of believers.

He doesn't seem to me to be someone who belongs to that faithless generation, that community. Maybe others are, but he is different.

He's not one of the disciples, clearly. He's not somebody who's been out on mission, serving the Lord.

He is somebody who clearly has faith, faith enough to bring the child to Jesus, faith enough even when Jesus wasn't there to ask the disciples of Jesus to do the miracle, the exorcism.

But his faith lacks focus and it lacks clarity. And that's not been helped by the teachers with whom they are arguing.

[29 : 19] It's not helped by the generation among whom he lives. And this poor father wasn't helped by the disciples who had such little faith and lost sight of the giver and prayer.

yet he still says to Jesus, if you can, please help.

If you can. Any of you who are fathers, mothers, you know if this had been your child, this would have been horrible to see.

Maybe some of you have children who have disabilities and who have difficulties in their lives.

That's hard to bear. So, so hard to bear.

Some of you may have perfectly healthy children, physically, but spiritually, they're a nightmare. bear. And that's even harder sometimes to bear.

[30 : 34] When you raise a family to go there to the Lord, and they choose to go the other way, that's so difficult. And what do you do in that situation?

You come and you say to the Lord what this man said, if you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us.

The father wanted to be helped, as well as the son. The son couldn't ask for himself, so the father asks on his behalf.

Maybe you can ask for yourself. Maybe you no longer have a godly father or mother who can ask for you. And it's you that is now doing the asking.

And you just come to Jesus and you say, if you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us. How does Jesus respond to this as the author and encourager of saving faith?

[31 : 47] faith? Well, the first thing he does beautifully, he takes time to show that he actually cares.

Personally, I don't want just a Jesus who saves. I want a Jesus who cares and saves.

He saves because he cares. I want a Jesus who has compassion, whose heart drives him to save those who need to be saved.

I want a Jesus who goes to the cross and lays down his life, not just because the Father said, not simply because he's willing, but because he actually cares.

The Christ at Calvary is a caring Christ, a loving Christ, a compassionate Christ. And that's what you find in this narrative here.

[33 : 05] When Jesus says to him, how long, how long has this been the case? See what he says in verse 21, how long has this been happening to him?

You feel like saying, Jesus, you know the answer before you ask. Why are you asking the question to which you know the answer?

I'm asking because I care, and I want to hear it from the father of the boy himself, from childhood, from childhood.

He wants to know, he wants to hear it. God's love. Ah, maybe there's somebody here that says, I want to become a Christian, and I'm waiting for God to do his bit.

I'm waiting for God to come and with his own heavenly fire, just snatch me and save me. but you're not going to ask.

[34 : 22] I'm telling you, Jesus cares for you so much, he wants to hear you pray and to ask.

He wants to hear it from your lips, personally. Don't be silent. Come to him. how long has it been happening like this?

Go to Christ and say, all my life I've been like this. I'm getting harder as I grow older. I'm afraid that I might die unsaved.

I'm afraid like people in the community whose death has just happened, that I might die equally suddenly and then be lost. I'm afraid just like the people crossing the channel, I will so quickly perish when I was hoping for salvation.

Go and speak to him. He cares, he listens from heaven itself. That's why, you see, Jesus delighted in hearing the teacher, father, saying to him, the story, he is a spirit that makes him mute, it seizes him, throws him down, foams, grinds his teeth.

[35 : 52] Jesus could have stopped him and said, you don't need to tell me, I know it all. No, no, no. Tell it all to me. That's the first thing he does.

He shows, he cares, he exercises compassion. The second thing he challenges is unbelief.

The man said, if you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us. And Jesus says, if you can. You might think, oh, Jesus, you're being a bit heartless here.

This father is distraught. He's exercising faith. He's coming in public. He's got such a heavy burden to carry.

And he's had it all his lives. Surely this is a time for you to restrain yourself, Jesus. And Jesus says, no, no, no, because I want that father to have even stronger faith.

[37 : 02] If you can, he says. And then he comes out with this beautiful, beautiful statement. The father of the boy had never heard it before.

He had been with his child all his life, watched him falling down, rolling down, watched him being cast into the water and into the fire, the spirit trying to destroy him.

He couldn't go out of the room without looking to see, is the boy all right? Is there a fire close by? Is there water close by? Ready to snatch him so that the boy won't commit his suicide?

And in that situation, he is now hearing a promise that he had never heard before. If you can, all things are possible for the one who believes.

What? All things are possible for the one who believes. You can imagine the father.

[38 : 09] Am I hearing this right? I've never heard it before. It seems to be so extravagant. It's so broad.

Can this really be for me? Could this really be for my situation? And the Lord is saying the same to you, my sinner friend tonight.

all things are possible for the one who believes. You may have little faith. You may long for stronger faith.

And Jesus says all things are possible, doable, for the one who believes. and without any delay, look at what this man does.

Immediately, the father of the child cried out, I believe. This is public. This is not at the bedside. This is public.

[39 : 11] I believe. He's saying it in front of the teachers. So antagonistic. He's saying it in front of the faithless community, the generation.

He's saying it in front of the disciples who had shockingly failed. And he says, I believe. And it was so true that he believed.

But then he also said, help my unbelief. I see the word help there. It's the same as the word that he used earlier on.

If you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us. Help my son. And now he's saying, help my son and help my unbelief.

Help my unbelief and help my son. Help. The kind of help that will heal a broken child and the kind of help that deals with unbelief is one and the same.

[40 : 20] And Jesus is able to do both. The father of the son was so right. He was so right.

I believe. Help my unbelief. How beautiful. How beautiful. How honest.

No pretense. No making out. I'm there. I'm there. He says, I do have faith. But I struggle with unbelief.

I've never been here before. It's never been so clear to me before. But I do believe. That is absolutely certain. And because I believe, I'm going to say it.

I'm going to confess it. I'm going to profess it. And even though there are things that I still struggle with in unbelief, I know, Lord Jesus, that you will be my saviour as I believe and struggle with unbelief.

[41 : 26] But I will hold on to the promise you made. All things are possible for the one who believes. I'm going to come. I'm going to trust. I'm going to leave my son with you.

I'm going to take my sin to you. I'm going to trust in you. You are my only help and shield. How quick these words came from his mouth.

Immediately, the father of the child cried out and said, I believe. Help my unbelief. How beautiful.

The crowd begins to gather round Jesus, sees the crowd coming together. He rebukes the unclean spirit. You mute and deaf spirit.

What does he say to him? I command you come out of them and never enter again. Permanent healing. Under authority. And the evil spirit cannot stop himself being cast out.

[42 : 34] Come out. don't ever enter again. This boy's life will be forever changed. This boy's life will never be the same again.

He will never be inhabited by this mute spirit again. Come out and never enter again. Can Jesus change your life as permanently as that?

There are people who are there at the Lord's table today and their lives have been changed. Some of them may be changed 60, 70 years ago. Some of them 20 years ago.

Some of them more reasoned than that. The Lord changed them permanently. Never to be reversed. Can he do the same for you?

All things are possible for the one who believes. Is your faith there? Is it small? Is it mixed with unbelief?

[43 : 35] Ask the Lord as you tell him you believe to help your unbelief. I'll tell you, your life will never be the same again.

May the Lord bless his word. Let us pray. Our heavenly father, we are so, so thankful that you are the author and the encourager of faith.

You take such an interest in where every one of us is tonight. We have faith to preach. Others have faith to listen. Others have faith for the first time and they're crying out to you, help my unbelief.

Lord, pluck, we pray, a sinner from the burning. Hear their cry. Save them and bring glory to yourself.

Change a life permanently. we ask it in Jesus. Amen. Let's close now by singing the last three verses of Psalm 122 on page 416.

[45 : 00] The Scottish Psalter. Psalm 122, the last three verses. Often sung in the past at the close of a communion season.

peace. And it's a section of the Psalm that speaks about peace. Peace and felicity. Peace within the walls.

Peace be in you. Joining the people of God. Joining Jerusalem. Ah, wouldn't be lovely if there were one, maybe more, who joined in to sing this Psalm from faith.

Pray that Jerusalem may have peace and felicity. Let them let love the peace of still prosperity. To the end of the Psalm, to God's praise. pray for the call of peace Let them not love thee and thy peace have still prosperity.

Therefore I wish that peace may still within thy walls remain.

[46 : 45] And ever may thy policies prosperity retain.

Now for my friends and brethren's sake, peace be in thee I'll say.

And for the hands of God our Lord I'll seek thy good always.

Amen. Now may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

Amen.