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Substance of Sermon preached by our Pastor
on Sunday Evening. August 15. 1982.

Lesson. Matthew 9.

Jesus said unto him, If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth. Mark 9. 23.

It is with us this evening, God willing, to set the scene of the narrative so we may bring out the salient points that are so important and vital to the spiritual health and profit and peace, both personally and in the Church of the living God. According to your understanding and knowledge, the dear father with his load of a poor afflicted son has ultimately come to the glorious Person who is in the New Covenant, heavenly Physician. There is every evidence in the Word of His grace, that not one poor sinner whose case is recorded in the Book of God, who came tremblingly with repentance and a plea for divine aid and merciful help, was ever refused by the Saviour or turned away by Him without singular benefit. So keep that in mind as we proceed. Here is a poor man who has carried the agonising load of a demented son, an only child for so long, and now he is in personal, vital contact with the glorious Prince of Peace, the heavenly Physician, and God has almighty, efficacious power to heal soul and body and all disorders that afflict us. You may say he is standing on the threshold of the bright morning of deliverance, and soon he and the lad will be rejoicing and the faithful will rejoice with them. There are a number of considerations in the narrative. First of all we have heard from the lips of the Saviour, and a solemn word it is; "O faithless generation, how long shall I be with you? how long shall I suffer you? bring him unto me." Friends, the general atmosphere that surrounds the scene was a considerable prevalency of the immoral sin of unbelief. "O faithless generation!" It is an atmosphere that is discerned by those who have grace to discern as a stultifying one: it renders things ineffectual, it paralyses, darkens the whole scene and greatly dishonours the ^{dear} Lord. His honour is His chief concern. Though we see the distracted, troubled father with his poor son near the Saviour, think of the atmosphere that surrounds the scene. The term stultifying

is expressive. There is nothing liberating, nothing cheering, nothing to dilate the soul but rather to contract: nothing to brighten the skies but ~~the~~ darkness was ^{the} general environment. "O faithless generation, how long shall I be with you? how long shall I suffer you?" You can imagine how impossible it would be, unless the Lord intervened, for God's ministers to preach in such an atmosphere. It is always ⁱⁿ an atmosphere of faith, and faith is a root grace, that there will be blessed hope, the activity of hope and a wonderful expectation and love and praise. That is where there is liberty and the Lord does great things.

I will come closer. Not only was the atmosphere stultifying, there was little faith in the disciples in activity. The Lord had given them power to cast out evil spirits and they had failed, and being concerned about it they asked the Lord in an examination of the case afterwards, "Why could not we cast him out?" He said plainly, "Because of your unbelief." I am not thinking of those who were with the Lord on the holy mount, but the others. Their faith was very feeble and at a low ebb, and they were powerless because of unbelief. Add to that the very enfeebled faith of the poor dear father himself, for there was no strong faith with him. The Lord could not say as He did to the blind man, "Believe ye that I am able to do this?" The father said, "If thou canst do anything, have compassion on us, and help us." The Lord quickly removed the 'if' and placed it in front of the man himself. "If thou canst believe." 'If' never stands before God because He is almighty, omnipotent. "Is any thing too hard for the Lord?" There is no 'if' there. "Is thy God able?" There is no 'if' there. It is a beautiful proposition of the Lord's character and glorious perfections. "Is any thing too hard for the Lord?" No 'if'. I suggest to the congregation that the poor dear man in an enfeebled condition concerning faith was not without faith. The atmosphere was stultifying, the disciples because of their unbelief could not cast him out, and the dear man was feeble in his faith.

I pause so you can assimilate this. We may say similar scenes may exist to day. You mourn over it in your own souls. When we see it in the aggregate it is a sad scene. Take the contrast between that and the Lesson. The four who let down the paralytic before Christ did not say anything. Jesus saw their faith and He said at once, "Son, be of good

cheer," and later, "Arise, and walk." Take the dear woman who was so afflicted. He said to her, "Daughter, be of good comfort; thy faith hath made thee whole," and, "Go in peace." Come to the blind men the Lord put the question to, "Believe ye that I am able to do this? Yea, Lord. According to your faith be it unto you." See the importance of the grace of faith. So the friends will recapture the whole atmosphere of the scene. Sometimes we are much like this; sometimes far removed from it. Sometimes faith is feeble and we need the Lord to increase it. Sometimes we are strong in faith; so strong - and this may astonish you - we do not doubt the matter. Take your examination. How do you feel your soul is before God? Is it strong in faith, or do you mourn because of the prevalency of unbelief, or is faith very feeble? What is the result of your diagnosis as before God? It can quickly be tested by the word, "Believe ye that I am able to do this?" What is your response? "Yea, Lord." They believed He was able to do it. "According to your faith be it unto you." I confess there are times when my faith is very feeble. How do I know my faith is so feeble? how do you know? There are a few points to name. We are so full of fear, servile and craven fear: we prove our faith is feeble. After by the help of God I have preached the first sermon I am fearful concerning the afternoon and the evening, and something says, "It shows how feeble your faith is!" Take providence. The Lord has sustained and supported you all through, You come to a dark period in life, a period of trials in providence, and you quickly discern whether your faith is strong or feeble: you hardly believe the Lord will help you through. So thank God for our hymn book, next to the Bible.

"Be still, my heart! these anxious cares
To thee are burdens, thorns, and snares;
They cast dishonour on thy Lord,
And contradict His gracious word.

Brought safely by His hand thus far,
Why dost thou now give place to fear?
How canst thou want if He provide,
Or lose thy way with such a Guide?"

Yet we are so fearful, and have to come to a close examination and say, "My faith is very small after all these fifty, sixty, seventy, eighty, ninety years of the Lord's goodness to me. He has never failed me, yet I am so fearful." This will show you the course of your faith. The Lord is

able to increase your faith. It is sweet for the Lord's Day and His Word used by the Spirit to issue in this, for your faith to be strengthened.

"Faith is by knowledge fed." This is the exact opposite to what has been named. There is still faith, a little faith, as I believe we referred to earlier,

"The Christian often cannot see
His faith, and yet believes."

But let us go to the other end of the scale. There are those things the Lord has made you strong in faith in respect to. I will demonstrate and make a personal application of this. Take the dear woman who has figured in our Lessons to day, with sore affliction. It is a wonderful demonstration of faith. She "had spent all that she had, and was nothing bettered, but rather grew worse." She had got to the end, and she heard of Jesus: it was by the Spirit, however she heard of Him. The Lord gave her strong faith. "If I may but touch his clothes, I shall be whole." There was no doubt ^{about} it. It was a clearly defined, beautiful case of strong faith. "Here is Jesus. I have only to find Him and identify Him, and I shall be whole." The Lord led her and she found Him. Some of the characteristics of faith are recognition and identity. You will identify the Lord Jesus and His blessed presence. She went by faith and touched Him, and virtue went out of Him. That is strong faith. We have made a passing reference to Sara, when she first laughed, a laugh of incredulity because of her age, and the Lord said to her, "Is any thing too hard for the Lord?" "Through faith also Sara herself received strength to conceive seed, and was delivered of a child when she was past age, because she judged him faithful who had promised. Therefore sprang there even of one, and him as good as dead, so many as the stars of the sky in multitude, and as the sand which is by the sea shore innumerable." She was strong in faith, and once the Lord had said to her, "Is any thing too hard for the Lord?" her faith was fixed on Him and she was strong in faith and the Lord did not mention anything else, only her faith. I will make a personal application of this in discretion. How many things in life have you been ^{strong in faith} in respect to and you did not doubt it, you were fully persuaded that what the Lord had promised He was able to perform? I remember receiving a refusal and the Lord putting in my heart the verse of a hymn.

"With Heaven and earth at His command,
He waits to answer prayer."

You know, the Lord gave me strong faith and I rejoiced in the accomplishment of it. I felt sure God would answer prayer, and that was my course. I could not doubt it. What have you been strong in faith in relation to? When the Lord put the Church at the Dicker in my heart on the island platform at Polegate, did I believe it? I did not doubt it, yet no one knew about it. So there will be things when you are strong in faith, believing that what God has promised He is able also to perform. It is wonderful, isn't it? I want to put an appendix. If your child was born with a promise, or entered the world with a promise you will have a persuasion whatever you pass through, that God will perform His promise, and the Lord will so speak and confirm His Covenant that you will have strong faith - sometimes it may be shaky. Really, though some will hardly understand, basically faith is in you because the Word of God is written on the fleshy tables of your heart. You do not really doubt it, with all your troubles, sorrows and temptations. God has spoken and He will perform. Living faith, so valuable and precious is God's instrument to salvation. Every poor sinner believing by faith in the only begotten Son of God to salvation, once he believes he will cling to Christ and faith will never let go. The first triumphant act of faith is to take your soul and all and commit it into the hands of God, and the last act is when you take your soul by faith and put it in the hand of the Lord and yield your breath to Him. O this precious faith! an instrument receptive of the truth of God. Faith is of a fructifying nature: it liberates, it brightens the scene; it enables you to see the dawn, the Day Star, the Sun of Righteousness rising with healing in His wings. Faith enables you to look forward; distant things are made nigh. This faith enables you to believe in the Being of God, His holy Word, and to hold the Lord Jesus because He holds you. "O Love, that wilt not let me go." It embraces those in the Covenant and those the Lord will bring forth from the womb of the Covenant.

I will take a further step. In this scene the Lord brings two things into striking contrast, unbelief and faith. In the midst of all He gives an amazing degree of deep teaching and illumination and enlargement to the dear father and finally enriches him with this wonderful grace and all graces. I will run over the table with you. First, his unbelief. "If

thou canst do any thing, have compassion on us, and help us." and you will know how the man made a confession; "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief." Unbelief is a root evil: so many evils grow from it, and unbelief itself grows from the root of infidelity which alas, is in our fallen nature. It is a terrible thing when the Lord shows you the infidelity of your nature. It is agonising to the soul when you are assailed by it. Out of infidelity springs unbelief. It paralyses a child of God, puts him in bondage, darkens his spirit. It is like an occlusion; it prevents favours flowing to him. It is ~~is~~ an awful, immoral sin, unbelief. Do you confess it? It is clear that, the Lord being jealous of His glory and honour, will prepare His people for mighty acts so He has all the glory and the soul is mercifully cleansed from this great evil.

In striking contrast is the wonderful grace of living, saving, vital, holy faith. Again, faith is a root grace. We have in the hymn,

"Faith, implanted from above,
Will prove a fertile root,
Whence will spring a tree of love,
Producing precious fruit.
Though bleak winds the boughs deface,
The rooted stock shall still remain;
Leaves may languish, fruit decrease,
But more shall grow again."

Faith is a root grace that enables you to believe the promises the Lord gives you. Living faith makes the heart receptive of the truth of God. Faith enables you to cast anchor in Christ the anchor ground; to believe in the Being of God, the holy Trinity, the perfections of Deity, the glorious character of God in respect to His divine faithfulness as all His attributes. You will believe in His faithfulness. He said to the man, "If thou canst believe, all things are possible," "All things" are God's will; all things pure, holy, acceptable to Him by the Lord Jesus Christ. All He decreed, all He promised you; all things are possible. When He hears the constant, sustained prayers of His people - all things are possible to him that believeth. You will see the richness of the teaching, that God should be glorified and have all the honour and praise and be extolled and very high. There is a response from the father. He might have said, "Thou hast divinely enriched me, taught me. Lord, I believe, therefore forgive my sin of unbelief." That is the only way

the Lord is able to help you in relation to it; for you to confess the immoral nature of sin, and ask Him to forgive and cleanse you, and fill your heart with the rich grace of living, saving, vital faith. "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief." Blessed be God.