

BELPRES CHURCH

Sermon Title: Faithful Doubt

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Scripture:

Mark 9:17-29 ESV

¹⁷ And someone from the crowd answered him, "Teacher, I brought my son to you, for he has a spirit that makes him mute. ¹⁸ And whenever it seizes him, it throws him down, and he foams and grinds his teeth and becomes rigid. So I asked your disciples to cast it out, and they were not able." ¹⁹ And he answered them, "O faithless generation, how long am I to be with you? How long am I to bear with you? Bring him to me."

²⁰ And they brought the boy to him. And when the spirit saw him, immediately it convulsed the boy, and he fell on the ground and rolled about, foaming at the mouth. ²¹ And Jesus asked his father, "How long has this been happening to him?" And he said, "From childhood. ²² 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."

²³ And Jesus said to him, "'If you can't! All things are possible for one who believes." ²⁴ Immediately the father of the child cried out and said, "I believe; help my unbelief!" ²⁵ And when Jesus saw that a crowd came running together, he rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, "You mute and deaf spirit, I command you, come out of him and never enter him again."²⁶ And after crying out and convulsing him terribly, it came out, and the boy was like a corpse, so that most of them said, "He is dead." ²⁷ But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up, and he arose. ²⁸ And when he had entered the house, his disciples asked him privately, "Why could we not cast it out?" ²⁹ And he said to them, "This kind cannot be driven out by anything but prayer."

Transcript:

I was brought as a toddler over to America illegally. So my family were legal immigrants in the beginning. And obviously, being an illegal immigrant in this country has all kinds of problems and all types of things. But my mother had reassured me that she believed that God was calling us to this country. We don't have the time today to explain all the points that led her to that belief, but she was new in her faith and she was trusting. She was new for her to trust in God, and all these things pointed to us being here. The philosophy we typically had was like, "If God wants us here, he'll find a way. If he doesn't, we'll end up back in Mexico."

But of course, testing that promise, testing our faith was very scary. And sometimes those fears, they paralyzed my family. There was a time where a UPS guy was trying to deliver a package to our house. Came and knocked on the door, and my dad was like, "[inaudible 00:00:55]." He was like, "Don't open the door. Don't open the door." For those of you who don't know, immigration officers wear these dark forest green outfit that looks very similar to the dark brown UPS outfit. So they looked out the window, they're like, "They found us. Let's go." So we didn't open the door. This poor guy, he just wanted deliver his package, get a signature, and move on to the next house, but we wouldn't answer the door for him. That's what would happen with that paralyzing fear of this stuff.

And all these questions and doubts, they turned into fear, but slowly but surely we began to test all these doubts. We had to have faith in God's calling to this country, which eventually after many years we did gain legal status only by the grace of God. We're coming to the end of a sermon series right now, *Is It Good Or Is It God*, where we examine what passes as good advice or good ideas, but it's sometimes not necessarily the good news or the gospel. Our culture has a lot of truisms out there. There's a lot of inspirational quotes out there. This looks like the... What's a very old social media? This looks like a MySpace crowd, right? MySpace crowd maybe. Yeah. Right. You guys still have your logins. There we go. Or Vine. Everybody on Vine anymore? No, they canceled that shenanigans, right? All right.

But we see a lot of these inspirational quotes about God or about our faith that sound good and they make us feel good, but then when you dive into them, you're like, "Wait a minute, this is theologically inaccurate." And the problem with that is it sounds good but it's not quite right. We have a lot of that right now. But poor theology has always been around. We're looking at faith and doubt and the confusion around doubting and what it means for our faith and for us, well, poor theology has been around since the gospel times,. If you read anything past Acts, well, many of those letters are speaking into false teaching, false teachers, poor behavior and

argument over proper behavior. This is nothing new. Poor theology will always be prevalent, but God prevails for those who earnestly seek Him.

So right up front, what do I mean or what do we mean when we say faith. [inaudible 00:03:16] air quotes, "Faith." Well, there's a difference with our faith and with faith in things. Our Christian faith is that God exists, that Jesus is Lord, that His life, death, and resurrection paid the penalty for sins and now salvation is available to all people. That's John 3:16. That is our "faith". That is different than I have faith that God will do something in my circumstances, because our faith is not necessarily tied to our circumstances. Now, our circumstances may help build up our faith that God exists, but it's not necessarily the same. And this is where it gets dangerous because there have been people out there many who have muddied the waters about this. Many of us, myself included, who have made the two things sound the same.

Poor theology, that doubting, is wrong. That you are not a good Christian if you doubt or, what's more popular right now in this prosperity gospels, or that if you doubt the promise that God has for you, this kind of name it and claim it, this popular theology and these megachurches that you manifest the promises that God has for you because that's what you really want, you're living to your potential. And then when it doesn't happen, they shame you for doubting the blessing that God had for you that you just can't reach.

Poor theology is always going to be prevalent. Fortunately, when we begin to deconstruct these ideas, or what I say in my circles, when we begin to deprogram this poor theology, we begin to find out the truth. Because I got good news for y'all. Doubting is common thing in Scripture. It's very common. If you have doubt about what God can and cannot do or who God is, you're in good company. Let's start from the top, John the Baptist, John the Baptist.

This cat was prophesied by God, through an angel to parents who can't have kids anymore, ends up in the desert eating honey and bugs all day long, is completely separate from everything, dedicated his life to paving the way for Jesus, baptized Jesus with his bare hands, watched the dove of Holy Spirit come. John the Baptist. One time he decided to open his mouth and say to King Herod, "Hey, you shouldn't be sleeping with your brother's wife." Bam, threw him in jail.

So now John the Baptist is in jail and he used to have a little bit of premonition like, "I might not get out of this jail. This might be the end for me." So gets some disciples and tells them, "Go find Jesus and ask Him, 'Is He the one we're waiting for or should we be looking to another?'" That sounds like doubt. Why? Because John the Baptist wanted to make sure that he fulfilled his purpose that God gave him, did he pave the way for the Messiah? He just wanted to be sure if

he wasn't getting out of there, which he did not. Unfortunately, he was served up on a silver platter.

Now, I don't know about you, but I'd have put myself anywhere near the realm of John the Baptist. I'm not even like Juan the dentist. I'm not anywhere near there, man. If that cat was doubting, who else do we really need to talk about? But I know Sunday, you guys like deals because it's Sunday, so there's a little bit more, just hold on. How about Thomas the disciple? Oh Lord have mercy, what do we give this cat's name? Doubting Thomas.

Man, that is so unfair because if you go in Scripture and you look a few chapters before, this cat was willing to die for Jesus. But unfortunately, some of the last thing he said was he was doubting. The disciples said, "Hey, Jesus has resurrected. We're going to meet Him. Let's go meet Him." He's like, "No, no, no, I saw this cat buried." He's like, "No, He's alive." And sure enough, in a little bit, Jesus comes walking through walls and comes to Thomas is like, "[inaudible 00:07:20]. Go ahead and touch it, man." Because he's like, "Unless I touch the wounds of Him, I won't believe," and He was like, "All right, homie, you're alive." All right?

And the list goes on and on, Job, Gideon, Barak, et cetera. So let me ease your pain, doubt is not a sin. It's not moral. Doubt is neither good or bad, but untested, unchecked, it can lead us to sin. If we leave our doubts to fester and build up and prison us in fear, or I would say almost even worse, apathy, like, "I don't know if it's real, but I'm not really going to do anything about it. It's fine," that can keep us from following God's commands or turn us away from God completely. It can lead us to sin. But just know that doubt, I would argue, is necessary. Say what? Come on now. All right, so let's dive into Scripture to find out and unpack this a little bit.

All right, so right before this account in Mark, Jesus had took three disciples up to this mountain, Peter, James, and John. And where He was hanging out with homies from the past, prophets Moses and Elijah from like a thousand years before, and Jesus was transfigured, His face and His clothes became dazzling bright. So He has this divine experience, this supernatural experience at the top of the mountain. He comes down to the mountain, He sees His disciples arguing, He's like, "What's going on?" And this father presents Him with his son who's possessed by a demon. And this father in 9:18 says, "'So I asked your disciples to cast it out and they were not able.' And He answered them, 'Oh, you faithless nation. How long am I to be with you? How long am I to bear with you? Bring him to me.'"

Okay, so here it sounds like Jesus is pretty upset that we have doubts. So, is doubt a bad thing for us? All right, Senoro, hold on to your horseradish, [inaudible 00:09:28]. Jesus here, I believe, now you can read it for yourself, is referring to the disciples, in his frustration in the disciples, the ones he has ordained, the ones who have seen him do miracles, the one who have

done miracles, the one who is taught to deal with these supernatural things, not necessarily us. So Jesus is irritated with his disciples here. And then Jesus begins to ask this father, "Well, how long has this been going on with this boy?" And he says, "Since childhood."

And then the father was on in Mark 9:22 and he says, "But if you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us." And Jesus said to him, "If I can? If I can? I just came from a mountain shrub glowing like a light bulb up there. If I can? All things are possible for one who believes." Now, I mentioned this in the other service, I said, "It might be that I'm a weirdo," and I had to correct myself, "I am a weirdo." So we can just mark that off. And it might just be my personality, but I love hearing Jesus' frustration in Scripture because it breaks down the poor depiction of Jesus being some kind of medicated, meek, and mild person.

He is passionate. And maybe it's me because I'm a knucklehead, but I need a passionate God. I need a passionate Messiah. I need someone who's willing to stand up for injustice. I need someone who's willing to speak up, who needs to be spoken up to? I need someone who's willing to knock me around to let me know that I'm going the wrong path. I am hardheaded. I love passionate Jesus. Now, He is the Prince of Peace. There is times where He is peaceful. There's times where He's gentle, but there is times when He is passionate.

Okay, so again, it sounds like doubts here is seriously irritating Jesus here. So far as it sounds, at least south of the border, that doubt is [foreign language 00:11:26]. Now that's south of the Canadian border because south of the American border we say, " [foreign language 00:11:31]. But that's just poor Spanish. But, of course, come on now, it's Sunday, wait, there's more baby. Let's go on, Mark 9:24, very famous verse. "Immediately, the father of the child cried out and said, 'I believe. Help my unbelief.'" Okay. Now we are getting somewhere. Now we are getting down to honesty. Because I admire this father because I can relate. All he wanted to do was help his son. And now he's finally being honest himself, he's being honest with Jesus.

And he's already taken several leaps of faith. He already took his kid to the disciples. They couldn't do anything, now he's arguing with these cats at the bottom of this mountain, and now he has face to face with Jesus, Jesus the Messiah, his last hope. Are you who you say you are because I'm out of options? And even though he has irritated Jesus, he doesn't let his doubt get the best of him. In fact, he admits it. He says, "I can't do this on my own," and asks Jesus, "Please help my unbelief."

Being a father of three kids, if there was ever anything wrong with my kid, I would be just as desperate. This father reminds me of Proverbs 3:5 where it says, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding." This father had reached the end of his understanding, and now he was completely handing everything over to Jesus. That is faith. That

is what we see in Hebrews 11:1 where it says, "Now, faith is a confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see."

Now, I'm going to talk in a universal sense here not just this church, but all churches. The church's poor handling of doubt and faith on how we imprison people in fear that their doubt is the problem, or we do not empathize with people who are struggling with doubt and we give them a blanket answer like, "You just need to have more faith," and really aren't listening to what's going on in their lives. I had this sneaking suspicion that this kind of push and pull with this doubt of right and wrong can't be good for our mental health. And so, in preparation for the sermon, I decided to call a counselor friend of mine and ask her about this things, kind of laid it out. And this is what she said... Now I'm going to paraphrase her conversation, so hopefully I get it right. If you're a counselor here and I'm getting it totally wrong, please go explain it to everybody. Fill in the gaps. Help me out. But hopefully I'm on the right track.

She said, "Doubt is a human experience that everyone faces, religious or not. Doubt come from a belief that your ideas of what should happen is the whole spectrum of what could happen instead of recognizing that the spectrum of possibilities is beyond your perception. Faith is understanding that we know we do not have the full realm of possibilities, but we hand that over to God having this understanding." That sounds a lot like Proverbs 3:5, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding." We kept on talking about doubt and what it can do to our brains and all this kind of stuff, she went on, she said, "Doubt is a useful human tool as a required doubt in order to stay alive." We have to experience and test life in order to know how to live. We go into this with relationship, "Well, I don't know if this relationship's going to be good or not." So you go in with a little bit of doubt and then you go and you find out whether it is or not.

You might find out like, "Oh no, this is cool." Or you might be like, "Boo, look out, back away from that action." Doubt lives in our DNA before we are born, parts of the brain that are made or formed to doubt, and until we learn to acknowledge and address doubt, we can't learn what is safe. We live in anxiety. Is that a word heard you've heard very often in these days, anxiety and fear? I'll apologize now for all those churches who've hurt you in the past, for all those pastors or deacons or even maybe myself who has kept you in fear about this thing. That's poor theology. Instead, let me give you something. I'm only giving you one thing today. I didn't even put it on PowerPoint. So I don't even know if this is an actual Presbyterian sermon that's not on the PowerPoint.

You guys have to remember stuff. You have to write it down in your brain. Not the doubting part but the other part. In your doubt, like this father run to Jesus through prayer, Scripture, and listening. Oh my goodness, we got to learn how to listen. We're praying to Jesus, "Oh please,

Lord Jesus, help me with this problem. Please, Lord. I know you are powerful and whatever kind of God, please help me with this problem. I know you can do it." All right, the game's about to start. Yo, you got to listen yo, maybe Jesus is about to tell you or God's like, "Oh, well I guess he didn't really want to know. I guess he'll find out." We got to listen, yo.

This is what I believe this whole encounter in Mark is about. It's not whether Jesus will heal someone or whether He won't heal somebody, it's whether we believe that Jesus is who He says He is. That is what Jesus' irritation was about. And as far as the doubt that the people had, never in that story does Jesus condemn them from having doubt. It never once that He says, "Well, since you had doubt, now you are not welcome in the kingdom of heaven." He's irritated, "Oh, you faithless nation. Those who believe can do all things or all those type of stuff," but He never cast them out of being able to go to heaven. Even so much so that the disciples confront Jesus in private why they couldn't heal this boy. They're are not afraid that Jesus will now abandon them like, "You guys are useless, man. I got to go get another 12 peeps. One of y'all's bad anyways."
[inaudible 00:18:16].

Even though it seems like they royally mess this up, they are still assured that Jesus is Lord. And although irritated, He still loves them. He doesn't leave them that way, that's why I love the king James version of Mark 9:29. He says, "Look, this kind cannot be driven out by anything but prayer and fasting." Run to Jesus. Run to God. Now, I don't want to tell you what you should and you shouldn't do, but let me just say this, fasting shows up a lot in the Bible. If you've been a Christian a long time in your life, I would look into it. That is something that cannot be done spiritually with anything else that we do in our everyday lives. And we're going to have some prayer nights coming up shortly where you can be a part of that. If you want to test it out, it'll be prayer and fasting.

So I want to end with this story. I went to on a mission trip with Bob Prez on 2008. I was coming back from Bolivia, and at customs, the customs officer, immigration officer was like, "Oh Mr. Chevres, can you come with me please?" And they take me away. And my wife's like, "What's going on?" I was like, "I don't know." Was like, "Well, what's happening, what's wrong?" I'm like, "I don't know." Was like, "What did they tell you?" I'm like, "They didn't tell me anything." Was like, "What's going on?" I was like, "Immigration wants me to go to the little detention place. Is like, "But why?" I'm like, "It's immigration. I don't know."

And so we go into this detention part in Dallas Airport. There's a lady with her kids and there's an old man, there's a bunch of people there, and we sit there. And my wife, who's half Mexican, half Danish, but she's an American citizen, she is freaking out. "Why are you here? Why are they holding you? You didn't do anything wrong. We just came from a mission trip."

We had a two-year-old daughter who was waiting for us at home. We'd been gone for 10 days." She was just far freaking out of, "Why this is happening?" And I'm like, "Yo, you need to calm down." I'm like, "If you start messing around here, man, one of us is getting deported. And let me guess, it's not going to be you." I'm like, "So chill out."

I said, "Look, you need to calm down. God has already fulfilled His promise to us. I was already a legal resident. My paperwork was all in order. I had to have it in order even to go to Bolivia in order to come back. So I didn't do anything wrong. I knew I didn't do anything wrong. I was like, "Will you calm down? Look, go get a drink of water, go to the bathroom, come back and chill. Of course, that didn't help because she went to the bathroom that has no door and has the railing to handcuff people to it. So she came back like, "The bathroom has no door, and they handcuff people over there. We got to get out of here." I'm like, "Yo, I'm not about to make a break for it, yo. You can go ahead but I'm going to chill right here."

I knew that I was going to share this story today, and I asked her if I could. I asked her, I said, "Do you remember how I was acting?" She's like, "Yeah, you were very calm, which was very irritating that you were so calm. But I realized that as you said, I wasn't helping, so I calmed down with you." Because it wasn't my first rodeo. As I mentioned, I've been through this process since I was a child. God had already fulfilled His promise. And even if, even if some immigrant officer or somebody decided to plant something on me, some illegal drugs or something, and I did get arrested, I knew in my heart I didn't do anything wrong." I don't want to paint myself as the hero here, but my point is that my assurance in God's already fulfilled promise kept me calm, and that helped me calm my wife. And after three hours they did, they let us go. Just signed a paper and beat it. Beat it, Pedro.

And it reminded me quite a bit of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the Old Testament, these three Hebrew boys that the King Nebuchadnezzar said, "I want everybody to bow down to me at a certain time," and they were like, "Nah y'all, we only bow down to one God, and you're not it." He's like, "Oh really? Well then, let me put you in a pizza oven see how you feel about it." Right? And he tries to burn them or he wants to burn them, and they say this very famous passage, they're like, "You know what? We believe that God can save us. But if He does not, we will still call Him God, still call Him Lord." Why? This is kind of left out a lot of times, at least when I've heard this sermon, their faith was already battle-tested. You got to remember, they came from exile. God had already told them back in Jerusalem, "You will be taken exile. Jerusalem will fall. You will be taken into oppression. You're going to be in Babylon, and it's going to suck for a long time. But trust me, I will come back and I will bring you back to this land."

So their faith was in God's promise not their circumstance. Even if not, He is still Lord, or God is still Lord and not you. Their faith was already battle-tested. They were facing death who knows how many times before that. It wasn't their first time. Poor theology will always be prevalent, but God prevails for those who earnestly seek Him.

My one thing for you, in doubt, run to Jesus in prayer, fasting and scripture. Run, don't walk. Run. And for those of you who've been Christians a long time and your faith has been battle-tested, you've had those moments where you've had it coming to Jesus moment or whatever it is and your faith is assured, let me include myself with you, be patient, be patient with those who aren't there yet. Empathize with them. Remember the time when you brought your son to Jesus. Be patient with them because your testimony is going to help them.

Bow your heads with me. Father in heaven, thank you so much again for loving us, for sending your Son to die a cross, to pay the penalty for our sins, Lord, to give us the grace that leads to your mercy, Lord, a salvation that's available to all people. God help us in our unbelief. We want to believe. In your beautiful and your glorious name and together we all said Amen.

Discussion Questions:

Read this week's scripture(s) & answer the below questions with your friends, family, or All In small group.

Icebreaker Question:

- What's the best book you've read in the last year?

Opening Question:

- Looking back, were you able to apply any of the things we talked about last time to your life this week? What did you do? How did it go?

Scripture Reflection Questions – Read this week's scripture together and discuss the following:

- What do we learn about God (e.g. traits, personality, what matters, priorities) in this passage?
- What do we learn about people, and ourselves in particular, this week?

Sermon Reflection Questions - Reflecting on this week's sermon, discuss the following:

- In the Mark passage, the father asks Jesus to "help my unbelief." Is there a time in your life when it has been hard to believe that Jesus is who he says he is?
- Poor theology suggests that doubt is bad, and we should just have faith. In actuality, doubt is not a sin. It isn't good or bad. It is necessary for our faith. What can we do when we struggle with doubt?

Closing Question and Application:

- Given what we've discussed together today, how might God want you to apply these learnings to your life or in the life of your community this next week? Who might you share this with?

Closing Group Prayer:

- Spend a few minutes together in your group sharing prayer requests and then praying together for each other. Thank God for the time together, the conversation shared, the other people in the group, and for encouragement in the week ahead.
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