

Faith's Dawn and Its Clouds

by C.H. Spurgeon

C.H. Spurgeon teaches that true faith is a personal, persevering trust in Christ's power to save, even amidst doubt and spiritual struggles.

Scripture: Mark 9:24, Hebrews 7:25, John 6:37, Isaiah 1:18, 2 Corinthians 5:21, Psalm 116:10, Jeremiah 13:23, Job 13:15

Topics: "Faith", "Unbelief", "Salvation"

Description

In 'Faith's Dawn and Its Clouds,' C.H. Spurgeon explores the nature of true faith as a personal trust in Jesus Christ that endures through doubt and spiritual trials. Using the example of the father in Mark 9:24, Spurgeon encourages new believers to persevere despite fears and discouragement. He highlights the battle between faith and unbelief that every Christian faces, offering hope and practical guidance for strengthening faith in difficult times.

Transcript

'And straightway the father of the child cried out, and said with tears, Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief.'"Mark 9:24.

LAST SABBATH MORNING we treated upon the way by which faith comes to the soul. 'Faith cometh by hearing.' It is our joyful persuasion that on the past Sabbath faith actually came to many, and they were enabled to rest themselves upon the Lord Jesus Christ to their soul's salvation. Now, every good shepherd knows that he ought to look very carefully after the newborn lambs, and, therefore, it seemed to me that it would be most expedient this morning to search after those who have just believed in Christ, and to endeavor to strengthen and help them against the very serious trials which are incident to their present weak condition. When a man first lays hold upon Jesus he is very apt to be in distress, if his joy be not always at its full height; he is untrained in spiritual conflict, and easily dismayed; the tremor of his former conviction is upon him, and he is prone to relapse into it. The light which he has received fills him with intense delight, but it is not very clear and abiding; he sees men as trees walking, and is ready to conjure up a thousand fears. The weakness of newborn faith, therefore, calls for the compassion of all who love the souls of men. In addition to their own weakness they are liable to special dangers, for at such times Satan is frequently very active. No king will willingly lose his subjects, and the Prince of Darkness labors to bring back those who have just escaped over the confines of his dominion. If souls are never tried afterwards, they are pretty sure to be assailed on their outset from the City of Destruction to the Celestial City. Bunyan very wisely placed the Slough of Despond at the very commencement of the spiritual

journey. The cowardly fiend of hell assails the weak, because he would put an end to them before they get strong enough to do mischief to his kingdom. Like Pharaoh, he would destroy the little ones. He seeks, if possible, to beat out of them every comfortable hope, so that their trembling faith may utterly perish. Perhaps, the text of this morning will be suitable to many here. I trust it may, and that the Spirit of God will give us reflections upon it which shall come home comfortably to all troubled souls. 'Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief.'

In the text there are three things very clearly. Here is true faith; here is grievous unbelief; here is a battle between the two.

I. Very clearly in the text there is TRUE FAITH. 'Lord, I believe,' says the anxious father. When our Lord tells him that, if he can believe, all things are possible to him, he makes no demur, asks for no pause, wishes to hear no more evidence, but cries at once, 'Lord, I believe.' Now, observe we have called this faith true faith, and we will prove it to have been so. First, it was faith in the person of Christ. It is a great mistake to fancy that to endorse sound doctrine is the same thing as possessing saving faith, for while saving faith accepts the truth of God, it mainly concerns itself with the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ, and its essence lies in reliance upon Jesus himself. I am not saved because I believe the Scriptures, or because I believe the doctrines of grace, but I am saved if I believe Christ; or, in other words, trust in him. Jesus is my creed. He is the truth. In the highest sense the Lord Jesus is the Word of God. To know him is life eternal. By his knowledge he justifies many. I do not know that the father in the narrative before us had heard many sermons. I am not sure that he had very clear notions about everything that concerned the Savior's kingdom: it was not essential that he should have in order to obtain a cure for his son. It was a very desirable thing that he should be an instructed disciple, but in the emergency before us the main thing was that he should believe Christ to be both able and willing to cast the devil out of his son. Up to that point he did believe; and, though his faith may have been deficient as well in breadth as in depth, yet it enabled him to realize that the Messiah who stood before him was the Lord, and it led him to place all his reliance upon him. He did not believe in the disciples; he had once trusted them and failed. He did not believe in himself; he knew his own impotence to drive out the evil spirit from his child. He believed no longer in any medicines or men, for doubtless he had spent much on physicians; but he believed the man of the shining countenance who had just come down from the mountain. When he heard him say, 'If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth,' he at once said, 'Lord, I believe.' Beloved hearer, I hope that thou hast come, at some time or other 'perhaps it is since last Sabbath day' to put thy trust in Jesus in the same way, believing him to be able and willing to save thee. This is the faith that will effectually save thee. Dost thou rest in him, in him thy God, thy brother, thy Savior; in him as living among the sons of men; in him as bleeding and suffering, as a substitutionary sacrifice, in thy stead; in him as risen from the dead no more to die; in him as sitting at the right hand of the Father, clothed with power to save? Dost thou trust him? If not, whatever thou believest, and however orthodox thy creed, thou art short of eternal life; but, if all thy trust is stayed in him, if thou bringest all thy help from him, if his wounds are thine only shelter, his blood thine only plea, himself thine only confidence, then art thou a saved man, thy transgressions are forgiven thee for his name's sake, thou art accepted in the Beloved. Rejoice with fullness of joy, for thou hast a right so to do, since every gladsome thing is thine.

The faith of this good man was true and saving for another reason. It was personal faith about the matter in hand, faith about the case which he was pleading. Have you never found it to be wonderfully easy to believe for other people? I know when I was seeking the Savior, I had no doubt about his receiving any other penitent. I felt certain that if the vilest sinner out of hell had come to him, he was able to save him:

and though I had no faith in him on my own account, yet had I met with another distressed soul in a similar condition to myself, I believe I should have encouraged him to put his trust in Jesus, though I was afraid to do so myself. To believe for others is an easy matter, but when it comes to your own case, to believe that sins like yours can be blotted out, that you, who have so badly played the prodigal, may be received by your loving Father, that your spiritual diseases can be cured, and that the devil can be cast out of you; here is the labor, here is the difficulty. But, beloved, we must believe this or else we have not saving faith. O my Savior, shall I trifle in faith by believing or pretending to believe that thou canst heal a case parallel to mine, and yet cannot heal mine? Shall I draw a line and limit thee, thou Holy One of Israel, and say, 'Thou canst save up to me, but not so far as I have gone?' Shall I dream that thy precious blood has some power, but not power enough to blot out my sins? Shall I dare, in the arrogance of my despair, to set a boundary to the merits of thy plea, and to the virtue of thine atoning sacrifice? God forbid. Jesus is able to save to the uttermost them that come unto God by him, he is able to save me. Him that cometh unto him he will in no wise cast out; I come to him, and he will not, cannot cast me out. Hast thou a personal faith, a faith about thyself, about thine own sins, and thine own condition before God? Dost thou believe that Christ can save thee? Sink or swim, dost thou cast thyself upon him, thine own proper self? He, his own self, bore our sins in his own body on the tree; and we, our own selves, must cast ourselves upon him. If we have so done, then we, like the man in the narrative, have the real faith, the faith of God's elect.

Lest any, however, should think this a very small thing, let me go on to show you that this man's faith was real, because it was faith which triumphed over difficulties, difficulties which typify our own, and hence it was clearly the work of the Spirit of God, for no other will endure the trial. I shall ask thee, dear hearer, whether faith has triumphed over difficulties in thy case. For observe, his child was grievously tormented, and the malady was of long standing. When the Savior said to him, 'How long hath this happened unto him?' he said, 'Of a child.' Must it not have seemed, now that his son had grown older, a very unlikely thing that he should be recovered. We expect our children to outgrow some of their complaints; but here was one who, after many years, was none the better. Years had only increased but not diminished his pains. Yet in the teeth of that the man believed that Christ could cast that long-established demon out of his son. Dear friend, thy case of sin is similar. The sins of thy youth rise up before thee now: are they not in thy bones? The sins of thine early manhood, and the sins of thy riper years, and, mayhap, the sins of thy decaying years; all these come up before thee. Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? If so, then he that is accustomed to do evil may learn to do well. Can I, after lying asoak in the scarlet dye till it is ingrained in my very nature, can I be washed and made whiter than snow? Crimes so long continued, evil habits so deeply rooted, can all these be overcome? O soul, if thou hast true faith, thou wilt say, 'Yes,' I believe that since Christ is God he can deliver me from all evil, and forgive me all sin. Even if I had lived as long as Methuselah, and had continued all that while in the vilest of transgression, yet Jesus is so mighty to save that he could deliver me in a moment. His word is, 'All manner of sin and of blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men.' Looking to those dear wounds, those fountains of love and blood, I do believe, and will believe, that all my years of sin are gone as in a moment, and like thick clouds before a mighty wind are blown away never to return. Oh, this is faith, poor soul. I pray God enable thee to exercise it.

This man had for a long time considered his son's case to be hopeless. Well he might. In addition to the fact that the child was subject to attacks of epilepsy and to extreme fits of fury, he was deaf and dumb, so that no intelligent expression of feeling could come from him: if at any time he felt stronger and better, he could not give his father a word of hope, he could not utter his gratitude for the sympathetic care that watched over him, neither could he hear any word of consolation which his father addressed to him. The

ear was closed and the tongue was bound. Painful affliction, exceedingly painful to the parent, and to be continued year after year! At last the father must have felt there was no use in making any further effort. The child must be controlled, but he could not be restored; he was a hopeless maniac. Peradventure, there is one here, this morning, who had grown hopeless of salvation; he has felt as if his case was one out of the catalogue of mercy; he has written bitter things against himself, and supposed that God has sealed those bitter things and made them true; but you see the father in the presence of Christ believed over the head of his despair, 'in hope believing against hope,' and I pray that you may do the same. In the presence of Christ the man's confidence came back to him. Hast thou, my hearer, a hope that can do the same? I never could have believed it was possible for me to be delivered from my sins till now I see that he who came to save me is my Maker; he who came to redeem me is he who bears the earth's huge pillars on his shoulders and sustaineth all things by the word of his power. With him nothing can be impossible. I see his pierced hands and feet, and feel that if he stooped to suffer in the sinner's stead, the merit of his sacrifice must be beyond conception great. In Jesus the hopeless one hath hope, he who had despaired else now bids his heart be of good cheer. Oh, that is true faith which will not suffer itself to be any longer the slave of doubt and despondency now that it sees Jesus the Lord drawing near. It is a mighty faith which refuses to sit any longer in the valley of the shadow of death, but arises and shakes itself from the dust, and puts on its beautiful garments.

The father had another trial for his faith in the fact that he had just then tried the disciples. He brought his child to Christ, and Christ being absent, he asked the apostles who were in the valley what they could do. They tried their best, but having lost their Master's power they utterly failed; and this must have been a very violent trial to the father's confidence. He knew that on other occasions Christ's power had passed through the apostles, and he had wrought his miracles by them; but here was a complete cessation of their healing energy. If Jesus did not choose to work by them on this occasion, the suggestion would arise in the man's heart, 'Perhaps his own power also has become lessened.' But he put the thought aside, and believed notwithstanding all. And, O soul, hast thou tried ministers and tried God's people, and hoped to get comfort, and hast thou found none? Hast thou gone to the ordinances and found them like dry wells? Hast thou resorted to the hearing of the gospel and found even it to be barrenness to thy spirit? Yes, yet suffer no shadow of suspicion to cross thy mind as to the Lord's ability or willingness to save thee. Come to the feet of Jesus and still believe in him. Whatever reason may say in thy soul to excite thee to despondency on account of past defeats, believe thou firmly that his power is still invincible; his arm is not shortened that he cannot save, neither is his ear heavy that he cannot hear. It was meet that thou shouldst see the failure of man that thou mightest glorify the grace of God; it was meet that the servants should be unable that the Master's ability might be the more conspicuous. May the Lord help thee to believe that though no man can do thee good, though all the pastors and bishops of the church, and all the martyrs and confessors of past ages, and all the apostles, and all the prophets, are unable to find a balm in Gilead that can meet thy case, yet there is a hand, a pierced hand, which can heal thy wounds and bleed a balm into thy soul which shall effectually restore thee. Yes, true faith believes over even such a discouragement as this.

I would have you notice, also, once more, while we are upon this point, that this father believed in Christ and his power to save, though the child was at that very moment passing through a horrible stage of pain and misery. The spirit which possessed this poor child was accustomed to throw him sometimes into the fire, and sometimes into the water. Just our condition; for our spirit has sometimes been thrown into the very fire of presumption, and at another season into the floods of despair. We have alternated between the cold of melancholy and the heat of self-conceit. We have at one time cried, 'I love pleasure, and after it I

will go;' and at another time we have said, 'My soul chooseth strangling rather than life; I would not live always.' When Satan is in a man, and he is full of despair, he goes to all extremes, and resteth nowhere, walking like the unclean spirit himself through dry places, seeking rest and finding none. At the moment while the father was speaking, the poor boy was on the ground wallowing in dreadful paroxysms of his disorder, foaming at the mouth, and gnashing with his teeth. Satan had great wrath, because he knew that his time was short. When the Savior spoke, and bade the devil come out of him, the fiercest struggle of all took place; for the unclean spirit rent the child, and the most terrible cries were heard. Still the father said, 'Lord, I believe.' Now, it may be, dear hearer, you are this morning yourself full of great trouble, vexed and tormented with innumerable fears of wrath to come; a little hell burns within your soul, anguish unutterable has taken hold upon you, your heart is like a battle field torn by contending hosts, which rush hither and thither, destroying on every side. You are yourself an embodied agony; you are like David when he said, 'The pains of hell get hold upon me, I found trouble and sorrow.' Can you now believe? Will now accept the word of the Most High? If thou canst, thou wilt greatly glorify God, and thou wilt bring to thyself much blessedness. Happy is that man who can not only believe when the waves softly ripple to the music of peace, but continues to trust in him who is almighty to save when the hurricane is let loose in its fury, and the Atlantic breakers follow each other, eager to swallow up the barque of the mariner. Surely Christ Jesus is fit to be believed at all times, for, like the pole star, he abides in his faithfulness, let storms rage as they may. He is always divine, always omnipotent to succor, always overflowing with lovingkindness, ready and willing to receive sinners, even the very chief of them. Sorrowful one, do not add to thy sorrows by unbelief, that is a bitterness which it is superfluous to mingle with thy cup. Better far is it to say, 'Though he slay me yet will I trust in him.'

There must be power unbounded in him who deigned to die upon the cross. Come ye to Calvary and see! Can you look to that head crowned with thorns, and mark the ruby drops standing on his brow, and yet be doubtful of his power to save? Can you mark that sacred face, more marred than that of any man marred with our griefs and stained with our sins, can you gaze on it and remain an unbeliever? Survey that precious body tortured in every part for our transgressions, and can you yet distrust him upon whom the chastisement of our peace was laid? Can you behold those hands and feet fastened to the ignominious wood for the guilty? Can you look upon that spectacle of woe, and know that Christ is divine, and yet harbour doubts as to his power to save you? As for myself, I am constrained to cry, 'Lord, I believe, I must believe; thou hast thyself compelled my faith.' Let all things reel beneath my feet, but the cross of my Lord stands fast. If the Son of God has died for sinners, it is certain that the believing sinner cannot die, but must be saved, since Jesus bled for him. May God grant to every one of us to stand just there where the poor father did as to his faith, and say as he did, 'Lord, I believe.'

I am forced to leave this head incomplete, for the hour commands me to hasten on. The faith before us was earnest, it led the man to tears of repentance, it taught him to pray, it led him to open confession; in all these points may your faith be of a like character.

II. But, now, we must turn to the second part of the subject, for **HERE IS UNBELIEF**. 'Help thou mine unbelief,' said he. He had doubted the power of Christ, he had said, 'If thou canst do anything for us, have compassion on us and heal us;' but yet he had faith and he had avowed it; he had not kept it secret within himself as though he were ashamed of it; before the scoffing scribes he had confessed, 'Lord, I believe.' He avowed it, too, with remarkable earnestness, for he said it with tears, as though his heart saturated his confession, running over at his eyes to bedew the words, 'Lord, I do believe; do not doubt it, I lie not; I do believe in thee.' But, then, he went on to make the confession at the same time there was an unbelief

lingering in his soul. 'Help thou,' said he, 'mine unbelief.' Albeit that his faith had triumphed over the considerations which I just now mentioned, which appeared enough to damp, if not to quench it, yet these considerations may have had some effect upon his mind: they did not prevent his believing, but they hampered his faith with many questions. Some unbelief lingered, though faith was supreme. Learn from this that a measure of doubt is consistent with saving faith; that weak faith is true faith, and a trembling faith will save the soul. If thou believest, even though thou be compelled to say, 'Help thou mine unbelief,' yet that faith makes thee whole, and thou art justified before God.

I thought I would, under this second head, mention some reflections which often cause unbelief to trouble the heart which, nevertheless, has been enabled by the Holy Spirit to believe.

First, there are many true believers who at the first are tried with unbelief, because they have now, more than ever they had before, a sense of their past sins. Many a man receives a far deeper sense of sin after he is forgiven than he ever had before. The light of the law is but moonlight compared with the light of the gospel, which is the light of the sun. Love makes sin to become exceeding sinful.

'My Sins, my Sins, my Savior!

How sad on thee they fall;

Seen through thy gentle patience,

I tenfold feel them all.

I know they are forgiven,

But still their pain to me

Is all the grief and anguish

They laid, my Lord, on thee.'

The light of the promise gleaming in the soul reveals the infinite abyss of horror which lies in indwelling sin. In the light of God's countenance we discover the filthiness, the abomination, the detestable ingratitude of our past conduct. We loathe ourselves in our own sight. While we bless God that sin is pardoned, we are staggered to think it should have been such sin as it is, and the natural feeling resulting from our discovery is a fear that we cannot be pardoned. We ask ourselves, can it be that such sins are forgiven? Possibly the memory of certain peculiarly heinous sins becomes very vivid to our conscience: we had half forgotten them, but they start up with dreadful energy, and cast suspicions into our mind as to whether forgiveness is possible. Oh, that we could blot out those evil days! We have said, 'Cursed be the sun that it rose on such a day as that in which I so defiled myself with iniquity.' Thus, under a sense of sin, though there is the belief that we are pardoned, there may also arise the unbelief against which we need the Lord to help us.

Some have been staggered, at times, by a consciousness of their present feebleness. 'Yes,' saith one, 'I trust the past is blotted out, but then how can I hope that I am saved? What a poor creature I am. I try to pray, but it is not worth calling prayer. I go up to God's house vowing that I will praise his name, and I get talking on the way and forget all about it, and I am dull all through the service. Then I was tempted yesterday, and I spoke unadvisably with my lips, or I did not defend the cause of my Lord and Master against that skeptic as I ought to have done. Only, just lately, I hoped that I had found peace with God,

and yet I am behaving like this. Why I must be a hypocrite, it cannot be that I am a saved soul. Surely if my sins were forgiven me I should act very differently from this.' Now that is often the cause of unbelief. The soul still hopes in Jesus and rests in him, and she has nowhere else to go; but for all that the old monster unbelief gives her a desperate twitch, and she trembles while she hopes.

Some others have been made to shiver with unbelief on account of fears for the future. 'I am afraid I shall not hold on,' says one. 'Why, to be a Christian you must persevere to the end. With such a heart as mine, how can I hope to be steadfast: and in such a position as mine, surrounded by so many ungodly associates, how can I hope to persevere? I see so-and-so made a profession, and he is gone back; and I know such an one who said he was a Christian, and he is a worse man than he used to be. Suppose the last end of me should be worse than the first; suppose I should put my hand to the plough and should look back and prove unworthy of the kingdom.' Poor heart, it forgets that word, 'I will never leave thee nor forsake thee;' and remembers not that other word, 'I give unto my sheep eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of my hand.' Rightly filled with a holy anxiety to hold on to the end, it gives way to improper unbelief, for it ought to rest confident that Jesus changeth not; and, where he has begun the good work, he will carry it on and perfect it unto the day of Christ.

I have known some, again, whose unbelief has been excited by a consideration of the freeness and greatness of the mercy bestowed. I recollect how this staggered me once. I had believed in Jesus, and rejoiced in his salvation, but in meditating upon divine grace I was overcome with fear. What, pardoned, justified, a child of God, an heir of heaven, a joint heir with Christ, one of God's elect, secure of heaven, with a crown waiting for me at the last, and power to win that crown daily secured to me; why, it seemed altogether too good to be true. Unbelief whispered, 'it cannot be.' If such great grace had been shown to others I should not have marvelled. If men of great abilities, at high station, and of eminent character, had received such grace, I could have believed it; or even if that holy woman, who had so long been a patient sufferer, had been so blessed, it would have appeared an ordinary circumstance; but for such a sinner as I was to be thus favored appeared to be too strange a miracle of love. I do remember how the very grandeur of the divine mercy threatened to crush me down and bury me under its own mass of goodness. I could believe that the Lord would give me a little mercy, but that he should give me such mercy, such unexpected favor, almost exceeded belief. And yet, what fully is there in such ideas, for were we not told beforehand that 'as high as the heavens are above the earth, so high are his ways above our ways, and his thoughts above our thoughts?' Do we not know that we are dealing with a great God, of whom the prophet asks, 'Who is a God like unto thee, passing by iniquity, transgression, and sin?' Do we think that God will only give according to our stinted measure? Is God to take man for his model? Remember ye that word, 'He is able to do exceeding abundantly above what we ask or even think.' Instead of the greatness of the divine mercy staggering us, it ought to console us and assist us to believe, seeing that it is so congruous with his nature. Yet, oftentimes, on this sea of love poor leaky vessels have begun to sink.

I have known, too, not a few, whose unbelief has arisen through a sacred anxiety to be right—a most proper anxiety if not pushed beyond its sphere. The idea has been suggested to them: 'Suppose I should be after all presumptuous, and should deceive myself, by thinking I am saved, whereas I am not? What if I should film the wound, when it ought to be lanced, before there can be effectual healing.' How I wish that all hypocrites would be troubled with this sort of fear. It would be a great mercy for many boastful professors if they had grace enough to doubt. I think Cowper was right when he said'

'He that never doubted of his state,

He may, perhaps he may too late.'

But yet, this anxiety may be carried too far, and the soul may slide into despondency through it. I ought to be afraid of presumption, but it cannot be presumptuous to believe God's word. I ought to be afraid of saying, 'Peace, peace, where there is no peace;' but if peace comes to me through the word of Christ, I need never be suspicious of it, let it be as profound as it may. I may doubt myself; I may go further, I may despair of self, but I must not doubt the Lord. If he has said, 'Trust in me, believe in me, and thou shalt be saved;' if I believe in him, it is no presumption to know that I am saved. If he has declared that he that believeth in him is justified from all things from which he could not be justified by the law of Moses; if I have believed in him, I am justified from all my sins. There is far more presumption in doubting the Lord than there ever can be in trusting him. Faith is no more than God's due, it ought never to be looked at as too daring. If I believe in Jesus I have no right to say, 'I hope I am saved,' for that implies a doubt of God's declaration that the believer is saved. I have no right to say, 'I sometimes think I am safe.' I am so undoubtedly if I believe in Jesus. It is no matter of opinion, but a matter of certainty. There is nothing in this world about which a man may be so sure as about his own salvation, because other things come to us by the evidence of our own fallible senses, or by the testimony of men who may be mistaken; but the fact that the believer is saved is sealed to us by the testimony of God himself, who cannot lie. When the Scripture says plainly, 'He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved,' I, having believed, and having been baptized, ought not to question the divine declaration, but should be as sure that, if I have believed, I am saved, as I am sure that I exist. This assurance is attainable, and should be the common condition of the believer. Yet has it often happened, I say, that an anxiety, which was commendable in its outset, has ended in a censurable unbelief.

Once more, I have known unbelief arise in some souls through a most proper reverence for Christ, and a high esteem for all that belongs to him. You remember our text a few Sabbath mornings ago told us of John, who when he saw his Master in all his glory fell at his feet as dead. Ah, when the soul gets near to Jesus it perceives his perfection, and becomes conscious of its own imperfection; it sees his glory, and becomes aware of its own nothingness; it sees his love, and blushes at its own unloveliness; and then it is very, very apt to be tortured with mistrust, though it ought not so to be.

And I have even known when children of God just converted have come into the church, they have had such a high esteem for their brethren and sisters, that they have feared to be numbered with them. When they have heard some earnest brother pray they have said, 'Oh, what a prayer, I shall never be like that man;' and, perhaps, they have listened to the preachings of some servant of God and said, 'Ah, I cannot come up to that standard; the very existence of such a man as that condemns me.' It is beautiful so see the little children loving the elder sons of the family, and admiring what they see of the father in them; but even this holy modesty may be turned into unbelief, though it ought not so to be; for, O child of God, if Christ be so lovely, thou art on the way to be made like him; and if there be anything beautiful in any of his people, that same shall be given unto thee, for they also are as thou art, men of like passions with thyself; and God who has done great things for them will do the like for thee, for he loves thee with the self-same love.

I have thus set before you the unbelief which often will exist side by side with faith.

III. Now, let us notice very briefly THE CONFLICT BETWEEN THE TWO.

It is observable that this poor man did not say, 'Lord, I believe, but have some doubts,' and mention it as if it were a mere matter of common intelligence which did not grieve him. Oh, no; he said it with tears; he made a sorrowful confession of it. It was not the mere statement of a fact, but it was the acknowledgment of a fault. With tears he said, 'Lord, I believe,' and then acknowledged his unbelief. Learn then, dear hearer, always to look at unbelief in Christ in the light of a fault. Never say, 'This is my infirmity,' but say, 'This is my sin.' There has been too much in the Church of God of regarding unbelief as though it were a calamity commanding sympathy, rather than a fault demanding censure as well. I am not to say to myself, 'I am unbelieving, and therefore I am to be pitied.' No, 'I am unbelieving, and therefore I must blame myself for it.' Why should I disbelieve my God? How dare I doubt him who cannot lie? How can I mistrust the faithful promiser who has added to his promise his oath, and over and above his promise and his oath has given his own blood as a seal, that by two immutable things, wherein it was impossible for God to die, we might have strong consolation. Chide yourselves, ye doubters. Doubts are among the worst enemies of your souls. Do not entertain them. Do not treat them as though they were poor forlorn travelers to be hospitably entertained, but as rogues and vagabonds to be chased from thy door. Fight them, slay them, and pray God to help thee to kill them, and bury them, and not even to leave a bone or a piece of a bone of a doubt above ground. Doubting and unbelief are to be abhorred, and to be confessed with tears as sins before God. We need pardon for doubting as much as for blasphemy. We ought no more to excuse doubting than lying, for doubting slanders God and makes him a liar.

Then, again, having made a confession of his unbelief as you observe, the father, in the narrative, prayed against it, and an earnest prayer it was. It was, 'Help thou mine unbelief.' It is very noticeable that he does not say, 'Lord, I believe; help thou my child.' No, nor does he say, 'Lord, I believe; now cast the devil out of my boy:' not at all; he perceives that his own unbelief was harder to overcome than the devil, and that to heal him of his spiritual disease was a more needful work, than even to heal his child of the sad malady under which he labored. This is the point to arrive at, to feel that there is no deficiency in the merit of Christ; no lack of power in his precious blood; no unwillingness in Christ's heart to save me; but all the hindrance lies in my unbelief. There is the point. O God, bring thy power to bear where it is wanted. It is not because the blood will not cleanse me, it is because I will not believe; it is not because Christ's plea is not heard, but because I do not trust that plea. If I am not in the possession of full salvation, it is not because Christ is not mighty to save, but because I do not lean on him fully and entirely. O God, thou seest this is the center of the difficulty, bring, thy power to bear on that difficulty. I ask only this. No more do I cry, 'Help me here, or help me there;' but, 'Help mine unbelief.' That is the Slough of Despond; I carry that in my heart; that is the weak point. 'Lord, strengthen me just there.' It is well when, in addition to confession, we bring up all the great guns of fervent prayer to bear upon that position which needs to be carried by storm.

And, lastly, this man did well in looking for the help against his unbelief to the right quarter. He did not say, 'Lord, I believe; and now I will try to overcome my belief.' No; but 'Lord help,' as if he felt that the Lord alone could do it. No physician can cure unbelief but Christ. He is the physic for it, and he is the physician too. If thou hast any unbelief, take thou the blood of Christ to cure it with. Think of him, 'God in the glory of his person, tabernacling among men, working out a perfect righteousness, dying a felon's death upon the cross in the sinner's stead; think of him as rising from the dead, no more to die: think of him as ascending into heaven amidst the shouts of angels: think of him as standing at the right hand of God with the keys of death and hell at his girdle: think of him as always pleading the merit of his blood before the Father's throne; and, as thou considerest concerning him, in the power of the Spirit, thine unbelief will die, for thou wilt say, 'Lord, the thought of thee has helped mine unbelief; while I have been studying thee, and feeding

my soul on thee, and making thee to be as bread and wine to my soul, my unbelief has gone. I do believe in thee, and I will; for thou hast helped mine unbelief.' Go, any of you who are in trouble about this matter, go where you gained your first faith, go there to get more. If you first obtained your faith at the cross foot, go there again to end your unbelief. View the flowing of his soul-redeeming blood, and continue viewing it till thou shalt by divine assurance know; that he has made thy peace with God. God bless thee in Christ Jesus. Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON'Mark 9:1-37.

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