

## Matthew 17:14-22

### **Big Idea; Faith must be in Christ alone, not in our own ability!**

I wonder if you realise how often you place your faith in things.

You know, every time you get into your car and turn the key to start the car, depending on your cars breakdown history you will unknowingly have faith that the car will start and get you to your destination.

Just going to work each day takes faith, faith in your ability that you can get your job done well.

When I asked Kate for an example of how she has faith in things in her everyday life she said that she has faith that the coffee machine will work each morning.

Having faith in things, in people and in ourselves helps us function, imagine how anxious you would be if that car you drive each day just stopped being reliable and randomly broke down.

Imagine the fear of going to work with an uncertain feeling that you are not quite sure you know how to do your job anymore.

Having faith helps us more than we think, but what is faith?

A classmate in my first year at bible college thought he could demonstrate to the class what faith was.

In a subject on faith, when asked by the lecturer what we all thought faith was, my classmate stood up and told everyone that faith could be shown in the example of the chair that he had just been sitting on.

He said that it took faith to sit in the chair, a faith that had been built on the belief that the chairs design was sturdy and trust which had been built over time when he sat in the chair.

His simplistic explanation of what faith is, using the chair as the object of faith, looked pretty good right up till the point that he sat down in the chair and the leg broke making him fall off the chair on to the ground.

The only thing my classmate taught us is that when it comes to faith, our standard of faith in the things we have, people or even in ourselves can only lead us to be disappointed.

And the disciple's disappointment is where today's reading in Matthew starts. Let's read.

**<sup>14</sup>When they came to the crowd, a man approached Jesus and knelt before him. <sup>15</sup>“Lord, have mercy on my son,” he said. “He has seizures and is suffering greatly. He often falls into the fire or into the water. <sup>16</sup>I brought him to your disciples, but they could not heal him.”**

It might seem that the main characters in our passage today are the man and the demon possessed boy, they have come to Jesus begging for help.

But in fact, the main characters are the disciples, they are the ones who have just been thrown under the chariot, so to speak, when the man said to Jesus **“I brought him to your disciples, but they could not heal him”**

And we read that straight after this very embarrassing event, the disciples most likely out of shame at Jesus very public rebuke towards them and disappointment at their lack of ability, come to Jesus in private and ask.

**“Why couldn’t we drive it out?”**

Jesus simply replies **“Because you have so little faith.**

Jesus response leaves us with a very big question. If Jesus is claiming that the disciples have so little faith, where did their faith go?

I mean these are the same disciples that have followed Jesus around for over 2 years now, the same disciples that back in Matthew chapter 10 had been sent out by Jesus with power to heal all kinds of sickness and disease and drive out demons.

The gospel of Luke refers to the same power that Jesus gave to the disciples, Luke says

**When Jesus had called the Twelve together, he gave them power and authority to drive out all demons and to cure diseases, 2 and he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal the sick. 3**

**So, they set out and went from village to village, proclaiming the good news and healing people everywhere**

As far as the gospel writers are concerned, not only did the disciples have faith in Jesus but they were also given the ability by Jesus to heal every kind of sickness, and to be able to drive out every kind of demon.

So, without a doubt the disciples have faith but what is their faith in?

About 3 months ago I had asked an old school mate who lived in San Francisco if he would like to read the bible with me.

My mate Darren was a self-proclaimed atheist and he turned me down, but I still had faith that through prayer he would one day say yes to reading the bible with me.

Well 3 weeks ago Darren died riding his motorbike home.

In the first few days after his death I found myself asking God, why didn’t you work in Darren’s heart, even though he was an atheist and make him want to read the bible with me?

It might sound like I was chucking a tantrum to God, but I was disappointed because it wasn’t what I had planned for Darren.

I had so much faith that Darren would get to hear about Jesus because I was praying for it to happen.

I had even more faith, that when we did start reading the bible together, that there would be no question too hard for **ME** to answer.

I had faith, that one day, due to **MY** efforts, Darren would be saved.

You might not have picked up on **MY** faith problem yet, but basically my faith was in **MY** ability. Not in Gods ability.

The amount of faith I had was fine, overflowing even. But the object of my faith was me, not God.

My standard of faith had shifted from Gods ability to my own ability.

It’s the same problem that the disciples are having.

Their faith has gone from being in Jesus power to heal and drive out demons to having faith in their own ability to do the same work and their ministry has come to a halt.

What about for us, what happens when we just like the disciples have a faith that focussed on us, how is our spiritual life affected by this kind of faith?

Well.

I wonder if you have you ever been too afraid to take the opportunity to share your faith with someone close to you or been too fearful to ask someone to read the bible one to one with you.

Afraid because you don't know how to start the conversation, or how you would answer their hard questions. Maybe you were just fearful that they might be offended if you asked them.

If you have been in that position before then you should ask yourself, what was your faith in?

Was it in Jesus who can overcome all those kinds of obstacles?

Maybe you baulked at taking the first step to serve in ministry here at church.

You might have convinced yourself that doing ministry is outside your set of skills or comfort zone, if that's been your experience then maybe you could ask

What is your faith in?

Is it in Jesus who can equip you and give you confidence when you are lacking in areas of competency?

You may be serving in ministry right now, maybe things are not going as well as you thought they would, there seems to be no growth, you may have lost the joy you had for ministry and you just want to chuck it in.

If that's the case what is your faith in?

Is it in Jesus who alone can give power, joy and growth?

When we place our faith in ourselves, when we rely on us to get through difficulties or overcome obstacles, we seem to get nowhere.

The disciples have the same problem when they come to Jesus in private.

Jesus response to them is.

**I tell you the truth, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you."** <sup>[21]</sup> [\[a\]](#)

As we have just seen, this is not a quantity of faith issue for the disciples, they have lots of faith, it's just in the wrong thing.

And so Jesus response, knowing that it's not a quantity of faith issue, but an object of faith issue, is to say to them, gents if you just had the tiniest bit of faith in me, you would be able to move mountains, actually nothing would be impossible for you.

Jesus wants his disciples to know his standard when it comes to faith is very different to their standard.

Jesus standard of faith means that if HE is at the centre of their faith, even if their faith was small, they would be able to move spiritual mountains, and that everything in the spiritual world would be possible.

Now I'm hoping that because you come to this church, that you would agree with our vision statement which stand at the centre of everything we do.

One of the main elements of our Vision statement is this.

**We want to see everyone in Peakhurst and beyond transformed by the good news of Jesus.**

Peakhurst is a huge suburb right, how will we fit in all those people into this little church?

And beyond, surely, we have enough to do in Peakhurst, right?

How will we fund it anyway?

Our vision statement is monumental. We might as well be saying we as a church want to move a spiritual mountain in Peakhurst.

But I wonder, what was the first thing that popped into your mind when you saw or heard our vision, to see everyone in Peakhurst transformed by the good news of Jesus?

Did you think, about logistics, maybe about the physical impossibility of the task, maybe you quietly muttered good luck with that one.

I wonder what would happen if we looked at our vision statement for Peakhurst and beyond through the lens of Jesus standard of faith instead of our own standard of faith.

Picture this

Imagine if all of us just had faith in Jesus power to do this mission of reaching Peakhurst and beyond and remember Jesus standard of faith is not about quantity but instead about the object of faith.

Imagine that our faith which is now solely in Jesus, gives us the confidence to go out and ask people we love to read the bible with us, knowing he is working powerfully through us.

Imagine now that people are coming to know Jesus. That stories like Deans fishing story from last week are the weekly norm in our church.

No longer are we a church that is limited because our faith is in our own ability, but we are now a church that has complete faith in Jesus ability and power to transform Peakhurst and beyond.

The comment from Jesus about Moving mountains might seem harsh, but it's not. Jesus is just correcting the disciples; he is allowing them to see that when faith is in him and his power then nothing is impossible.

Now you might be here today investigating who Jesus is so that you can decide for yourself about having faith in him.

It might seem to you that Christians have a blind type of faith when it comes to Jesus, you may be thinking how anyone could have faith in a man who lived 2000 years ago.

Can I say that Faith in Jesus, in his power and authority, in his life, death and resurrection isn't blind.

Faith in him is built on the belief that is found when Christians open Gods word each day, it's built through the trust of answered prayers and the peace God instils in our hearts when we call out to him.

A Christians faith in Jesus is built on the certain understanding that faith in our own ability leads to disappointment.

You know the last thing Jesus says in our reading today when the disciples meet him in Galilee is this.

**“The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men. <sup>23</sup> They will kill him, and on the third day he will be raised to life.”**

I don't know how many funerals you have been to, but I'm guessing you haven't seen anyone get up from their casket and walk away.

Jesus did, he got up out of the tomb after 3 days of death, he had the power that we don't have, to be made alive after death. You know it's convenient to just keep placing your faith in yourself, you might even put it with the disappointments that brings.

But we can't possibly have faith in our ability to save ourselves from death, it has never and will never happen.

The only hope for us to place all our faith in Jesus because he has shown the world that he does have the power to save us from death.

So, what does Jesus really think about our standard of faith, what would he say to us if he heard a spectator say that we were unable to do the ministry work that Jesus has given us to do in Peakhurst?

What would he say if he was standing here right now, knowing that we have in some way placed our faith in ourselves instead of in him?

Would he be meek and mild and say don't worry guys, just try a little harder next time?

This is what he says in front of his disciples to everyone that can hear.

**<sup>17</sup> “O unbelieving and perverse generation,” Jesus replied, “how long shall I stay with you? How long shall I put up with you?”**

If you are wondering why Jesus is so worked up, consider this.

Jesus understands the cost of his ministry, he already knows that when he enters Jerusalem in the next few months that he alone would deal with the betrayal, beatings, humiliation and finally his death by crucifixion.

He alone understands the cost of his death, that it means that he will have to pay the punishment that we all deserve, that he will be abandoned and separated from his own Father.

Why is he worked up, because his life, his death and his resurrection came at a great cost to him. And he deserves honour not our or the disciple's forgetfulness when it comes to the object of our faith.

As we finish, I want to acknowledge that most of our attention today has been on the disciple's ministry or at least the problem they have in not being able to do the ministry Jesus gave them because of their lack of faith in him,

This has certainly flavoured the direction in the way I have given examples of how our standard of faith can affect our ministry life.

Can I acknowledge to you that there are many more spiritual mountains or obstacles that seem impossible to overcome in our daily lives?

Debilitating depression or mental illness break downs of relationships, abuse that you are suffering with. Even financial hardship and just general struggles.

I wanted to be careful to add these things as examples in the main section of my talk because there is a danger that Jesus words to the disciples, about faith as small as a mustard seed allowing them to move mountains may very easily be taken as message, that if you just have faith in Jesus everything will be fine, you will be able to overcome all obstacles.

There are churches today that will spread that false message of prosperity.

It's not the truth, believing in Jesus doesn't automatically mean that cancer goes away.

Faith in Jesus doesn't automatically put you into a competition where the first prize is riches beyond your wildest dreams.

Jesus is, as far as I can see not that interested in us having worldly wealth or high positions, he is only concerned with your position in front of his Father.

Jesus wants us to place our faith in him alone, he wants us to stop relying on the faith we place in ourselves even when it comes to the very personal spiritual mountains we live with each day.

Jesus message 'to us offers us deep hope in the face of adversity whether in ministry or our general life, we just need to be careful we see the message through his plans not ours.