

The Memoirs of Peter
No Faith, Weak Faith, Little Faith, Part 1

Mark 9:14-29

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Tom Pennington, Pastor-Teacher

Countryside Bible Church

I enjoy a little painting from time to time but nothing like the great masters. Raphael was one of the greatest of the Renaissance, baroque master painters, and his last painting was called *The Transfiguration*. (You see it behind me.)

What makes this painting interesting is that it is really two distinct scenes from the life of Christ woven together as they were in real life. On the top you see the story of the transfiguration, obviously told through the lenses of Raphael's own interpretation of the events. (I don't think Jesus floated, but you get the picture.) It's hard to capture the glory that was described in the transfiguration, and this is his attempt.

The bottom captures another scene. It captures the disciples trying to cast a demon out of a desperate boy with no success. In the lower portion, the scribes are there arguing with the disciples about their inability to cast out the demon. The focal point, the two focal points of the painting are Jesus Christ in the upper center, and then in the lower right, a desperate father clutching his terribly troubled son. It's an indication that these two main characters are about to meet, and the glory and power of Jesus Christ will triumph again over the powers of evil.

At the transfiguration (we studied together in the beginning of this chapter, verses two through ten) three disciples, Peter, James, and John, got a chance to see the glory of Jesus Christ. They ascended, probably, to Mount Hermon, the highest point in Israel, some 9000 feet above sea level. And there on the summit they got to see by sight what we only see by faith: they saw the glory of Christ.

Matthew tells us that He was transfigured before them. He was metamorphosized before them. He was radically altered, and His face shone like the sun. Mark says in verse three, "His garments became radiant and exceedingly white, as no launderer on earth can whiten them." In other words they were supernaturally white. Matthew says they were "white as light," and Luke says His clothing was "gleaming." It's a word that is "lightening, to flash like lightening."

So the Gospel writers together compare the brilliance of Jesus and His clothes to the three brightest forms of light that they knew in the ancient world: the sun, the stars, and lightning. It's possible that it was evening or nighttime when the transfiguration took place. It may have taken them most or all of the day to ascend up the slopes to whatever part of the summit they arrived at. And if that was true (if it was night, or if it was evening) then the brilliance of Jesus that's described in these accounts would have been even more spectacular with the backdrop of the dark night and the stars.

For those minutes or hours (we're not told how long) the veil of Jesus' humanity slipped away, and those around (just Peter, James, and John) got a glimpse of His true personal glory. The shekhinah glory cloud then engulfed the top of the mountain, and out of that cloud in the midst of the fog that's now enshrouding the mountain, they hear the voice of God just like at Sinai. But this time God isn't thundering out the Ten Commandments; instead, He simply says, this is My unique Son, My one-of-a-kind Son with whom I am well pleased, the Son I love—listen to Him. Amazing.

The next passage, beginning in verse 11, records a brief discussion that the four of these men (our Lord and the three disciples) had on the way down the mountain. And we looked at that discussion last week, a discussion about the messenger that was supposed to come, Elijah; and we found out it was really John the Baptist. The messenger did come; the messenger was John.

Now in all three Gospels that record the transfiguration, when the four get down the mountain, Jesus encounters a demon possessed boy. Like in Raphael's painting, the contrast between the two scenes, between the two stories, the contrasts are truly remarkable. Think about just a couple of them with me.

One of the stories takes place on the mountain, the other the valley below. One is a story of glory, the other a story of the deepest tragedy. One is a story of supernatural beauty and light, the other is a story of supernatural ugliness and darkness and evil. One is a story of an only Son who is His Father's greatest joy and delight, the other is a story of a father who loves his son deeply, but for whom his son has been nothing but a source of heartache without end and without hope. That's the contrast that Mark brings us to, that the life of Christ brought in the next event that we come to in Mark's Gospel.

Look with me at Mark 9:14,

“When they came back to the disciples, they saw a large crowd around them and *some* scribes arguing with them. Immediately, when the entire crowd saw them (sic), they were amazed and *began* running up to greet Him. And He asked them, ‘What are you discussing with them?’ And one of the crowd answered Him, ‘Teacher, I brought You my son, possessed with a spirit which makes him mute; and whenever it seizes him, it slams him to *the ground* and he foams *at the mouth*, and grinds his teeth and stiffens out. I told your disciples to cast it out, and they could not *do it*.’”

And He answered them and said, ‘O unbelieving generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring him to Me!’ They brought the boy to Him. When He saw him, immediately the spirit threw him into a convulsion, and falling to the ground, he *began* rolling around and foaming *at the mouth*. And-and [Jesus] asked his father, ‘How long has this been happening to him?’ And he said, ‘From childhood. He [sic] has often thrown him both into the fire and into the water to destroy him. But if You can do anything, take pity on us and help us!’”

And Jesus said to him, ‘If you can? All things are possible to him who believes.’ Immediately the boy’s father cried out and said, ‘I do believe; help my unbelief.’ When Jesus saw that a crowd was rapidly gathering, He rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, ‘You deaf and mute spirit, I command you, come out of him and do not enter him again.’ After crying out and throwing him into a terrible-into terrible convulsions, it came out; and *the boy* became so much like a corpse that most *of them* said, ‘He’s [sic] dead!’ But Jesus took him by the hand and raised him; and he got up. When He came into *the house*, His disciples began questioning Him privately, ‘Why could we not drive it out?’ And He said to them, ‘This kind cannot come out by anything but prayer.’”

Truly remarkable story. If we could reduce the point of this passage to a single statement, it would be that in the healing of a demon possessed boy, we have illustrated for us the importance of faith in our own relationship to Christ. This is a story not about the boy, primarily. This is a story about faith.

It’s a story about the faith of the scribes in the crowd. It’s a story about the faith of this father who brings his demon possessed son. And it’s a story about the faith of the disciples. In one

case there's no faith. In another case there's weak faith. And in the last case there's little faith. But it's a story about faith. The main human characters in the story of this demon possessed boy all evidence the true state of their relationship to Christ by their faith—or their lack of it.

The first group identifies those who have no faith. We see this in verses 14 to 19. Look at verse 14. “When they came back to the disciples, they saw a large crowd around them, and some scribes arguing with them.”

Luke tells us that it was the next day this happened. So it's the day after the transfiguration. Presumably, early the next morning after the transfiguration, Jesus and Peter and James and John began their descent of Mount Hermon, or whichever high mountain it was if it wasn't Hermon. But when they had come down—We don't know how long it took. We're not told how high they went or long it took them to come down.

But when they had arrived down off of the mountain, they went to find the other nine Apostles. And when they arrive at wherever they had left them the morning of the previous day (It's been now a little more than 24 hours, probably, since the four left them.) they find a large crowd has gathered. And as they got closer they saw that in the middle, the center of attention, were, in fact, the nine Apostles who had been left, and they were locked in this intense argument with some scribes.

Now although the area of Caesarea Philippi (where all of this is taking place on the north of the Sea of Galilee, up a number of miles north) although this area was primarily Gentile, there were also some Jewish communities, and somehow the scribes like a magnet had found Jesus' disciples. So there's the scene. They're arguing. The scribes are arguing with the disciples. The Greek word for “argue” can refer to a “discussion” or a “debate among friends.”

But based on the interchanges that Jesus and His disciples usually had with the scribes, it's probably best to see this as an aggressive debate, intended primarily (as they always were) to discredit Jesus and to discredit His disciples. In fact, this same word is used back in 8:11, obviously with intensity and evil intent. The Pharisees came out to argue with Him, to test Him, to trap Him. That seems the best way to understand what's going on here.

So Jesus and three disciples find the other nine in an intense debate or argument. And apparently the crowd that's gathered around this event is so intent on listening to the sort of blow-by-blow between the scribes and the disciples, that they don't see Jesus and the other three approaching.

So He takes them by surprise.

Look at verse 15. “Immediately, when the entire crowd saw Him, they were amazed and began running up to greet Him.” Some say (there have been commentators who’ve said) that the crowd was amazed because like Moses at Sinai, the face of Jesus was still sort of glowing from the experience of the transfiguration. As preachers are prone to say, that might preach, but you won’t find that in the text. There’s nothing here about any sort of glowing, and Jesus Himself had told His disciples to keep this whole thing quiet.

It seems a bit of a contradiction to that, to come down the mountainside with His face glowing. Wouldn’t you think? If you want to know why they were amazed when they saw Jesus, just try to remember the last time you were hearing an intense discussion about someone else and suddenly that person walked up. You were amazed too—a little uncomfortable. So they’re startled. The crowd all begins to run to greet Jesus, no doubt to even try explain what’s going on.

Verse 16, “And He asked them, ‘What are you discussing with them?’” I love this. Again, it’s amazing what’s hidden in the grammar of Scripture. Notice in this verse there are two pronouns: them, two “thems.” It’s hard to know which is which, but it’s clear that the antecedent of one of those pronouns is the disciples, and the other is the scribes. In light of what happens next, it’s more likely that Jesus expresses this question to the scribes. So He asks the scribes, what are you discussing with My disciples?

Now, I think the evidence points in that direction. And if that’s true, I love that. Because here is Jesus coming down the mountain, seeing His disciples are in the middle of trouble, and coming to their beleaguered aide. He loved them, and He comes to their defense. What are you arguing with My disciples about?

There was apparently a sort of uncomfortable silence that followed this question. The scribes say nothing, and then suddenly another voice speaks up. It’s the father of the boy who had caused all this commotion, who had caused the argument. Verse 17: “And one of the crowd answered Him, ‘Teacher, I brought You my son.’”

Stop there. “I brought You my son.” This man speaks to Jesus with great respect: he calls Him teacher. According to Matthew, he even referred to Him with the very respectful title “Lord.” By the way, the man may have used both of those titles in his conversation with Jesus. Somewhere

along the way, he called Him both Lord and called Him teacher. Or remember that when Jesus interacted around the land of Israel during His day, for the most part He spoke in the language of Aramaic. He knew—I believe, I think the Scripture's clear that He knew two other languages, Hebrew and Greek, but most of the time He spoke in Aramaic. But our Gospels were written in Greek.

That means, under the inspiration of the Spirit, the disciples (and in this case Mark listening to Peter) has to translate out of Aramaic into Greek under the influence and direction of the Spirit. So that's why you occasionally, you get a slight variation. Because this isn't the original language in which the words were spoken, but under the direction of the Spirit we have the Truth.

So he calls Jesus "Lord" and or "Teacher," and in fact, he even knelt before Christ. Matthew 17 says, "When they came to the crowd, a man came up to Jesus, falling on his knees before Him." Luke tells us that he "cried out with a loud voice." Why? Remember, they're in the middle of a crowd, a crowd that's pretty excited at this point that Jesus' had just come.

There's a sort of hubbub going on. An argument's just been going on, and in the midst of that this man wants desperately to be heard. Luke adds one other very interesting detail, just an amazing human interest detail. Luke 9:38, "Teacher, I beg You to look at my son, for he is my only boy."

Very interesting. In Greek, he said he is my "monogenes." If you recognize that word, it's because it's a word that's used of Christ again and again. It means "only begotten," and that's how we often translate it when it speaks of Jesus. He is my only begotten son. He is my "monogenes."

Matthew adds, he said, "he is a lunatic." That word has come to mean something else than it meant originally. You recognize the word "lunar" in it refers to the moon. Literally, it's "moonstruck." The ancients believed that this kind of bazaar behavior could be caused by evil spirits brought on by a certain stage of the moon, but the bottom line problem here is the demon. That's clear in all three accounts.

Now, why did this man bring his son to find Jesus? Notice this boy's disturbing condition. Verse 17, "Teacher, I brought You my son, possessed with a spirit." So again, the key issue here is, he is demon possessed, possessed with a spirit that makes him mute. "And whenever it seizes

him, it slams him to *the ground* and he foams *at the mouth*, and grinds his teeth and stiffens out.” The key point to note here is that the man immediately attributes his son’s problem to an evil spirit. He is convinced in all three Gospels that his son is demon possessed.

Now, we’ve already encountered a number of demon possessed Gospel—er, excuse me—a number of demon possessed [sic] people in our study of Mark’s Gospel. But it’s been a while since we’ve reviewed what demon possession is, and some folks have joined us since then, so I don’t want to take a lot of time here, but let me just very briefly remind you of what we are talking about.

There are individuals in the New Testament who are clearly dominated and controlled by a demon. The New Testament uses three primary expressions to identify these people—calls them “having a demon.” This is the most common in the New Testament: some 16 times, four times in Mark’s Gospel.

Another expression is “demonized”—is literally the Greek word. Demonized: 13 times in the New Testament this expression is used. Our Bibles, the New American Standard, most often translates this expression (11 times) as “demon possessed.” It occurs four times here in Mark’s Gospel. This expression speaks of a couple of realities. It speaks of indwelling: terms like “the demon entered into,” “the demon goes out of,” or is “cast out of him.” So it refers to a demon, a fallen angel, a spirit being taking up residence in a human body, a human host. It also speaks of control and domination.

The third expression that’s used to describe this is, a person being “in an unclean spirit.” This is used only twice in the New Testament, but both of them are here in Mark’s Gospel. This also speaks of being under the control of a demon. Now, those three expressions are used synonymously. They all mean the same thing: to be under the dominion, the control, of a demon; to be indwelt by a fallen angelic being and your body under his control and direction.

By the way, just as an aside, I dealt with this when I dealt with demon possession in more detail back a number of months ago, but I know a question that often comes up is, “can a Christian be demonized?” The answer is no. The Spirit of God indwells a believer, and the Spirit that’s in you is more powerful than the spirit that is in the world. So no, a believer cannot be. Can a believer be influenced by, be tempted by, demons? The answer’s absolutely yes, and we’ll have a chance to talk more about that in the future.

Now what are the common traits of demon possession? Wherever there's demon possession, what do you find? You find physical and mental torment. It expresses itself in a variety of ways. It might be wildness, or violence, or inability to speak, or deafness (inability to hear), or screaming, or crying out, might be self-mutilation or convulsions. All of those are qualities—if I could use that word—that go with the torment, along with just general torment that goes with demon possession. There is physical and mental torment of the host victim.

Secondly, there is rational personality present, distinct from the human host. There is another being occupying the body. There are two beings occupying the tent that is the body. There is the human host, and there is this rational personality who speaks and uses the person's vocal chords to express what he wants to express.

Thirdly, there is occasionally supernatural knowledge, or we might say clairvoyance—you see in a couple of occasions. So those are the ways demon possession expresses itself.

Why some people? Why were some people possessed and not others? Not because some people were more evil than others; in fact, here we find a boy possessed from his youth. So why? It appears to sometimes (not all the time) have some degree of willingness, at least initially, on the part of the human host. There is some willingness on the part of the host.

Where does this come from, this willingness? Two possible entrance points—and again, I talked about this in more detail when we studied it, but just to remind you—one of them is idolatry. Most of the New Testament examples of demon possession are connected to areas that were more connected to paganism and idolatry than to the worship of the true God. There seems to be, and certainly in Deuteronomy 32 and Psalm 106 there are, connections of the idols of the nations with demons. And so that seems to be one entrance point: idolatry.

The second entry point is involvement with the occult. You see that in Acts, both Acts 16 and interestingly enough in Acts 19 with the believers in Ephesus. Regardless of how it happened to this particular boy, this was the condition in which he found himself.

Now I want to take you back to Mark and look at the specific shape of this boy's demon possession. Verse 17: “[He's possessed of] a spirit which makes him mute; and whenever it seizes him, it slams him *to the ground* ... he foams *at the mouth* ... [he makes his teeth-he] grinds his teeth and stiffens out.” So first of all, it made him unable to speak. Secondly, it made him deaf, according to verse 25 (which I didn't read just then), but Jesus will call him a deaf spirit

which means that's the way he effected the host.

And thirdly, it made him have epileptic type symptoms. The spirit would grab or seize this young man, and the young man would scream out. And then as we read, the demon would slam him to ground.

Later, the father tells Jesus that this would happen often: when the boy was in situations where he could be badly hurt, intentionally: when he was near fires for cooking or to keep warm, or when he was near water which was very common in the first century (wells and rivers and lakes and streams and even the ritual baths, the mikvehs, that were so common in Israel). This was not accidental. This was not some illness. This was intentional. He didn't just fall, he was slammed down. The demon meant to produce as much human misery and suffering as he possibly could. In addition, verse 18 says that he would foam at the mouth, grind his teeth, and become rigid or stiffen out.

Now let me give you two very important warnings when you read this. Don't assume that all Biblical records of demon possession are primitive ways of describing brain disorders. There are some modern skeptics who read the Bible that way: well, that's all they knew then, there's no such thing a demon possession, they were just trying to describe common disorders and were using these terms and ascribing them to demons.

That's not at all what's going on. Jesus Himself will eventually diagnose this boy's problem, and He will say "it is a demon." A second danger to avoid is, don't assume that what we know as epilepsy is demon possession any more than you would assume that all inability to speak or all deafness is caused by demons. There is a physical cause of these things. In the case of this boy there was not a physical cause, there was a spirit being behind it and causing it. What you have is a demon possessing this boy and creating, only as part of his presence, symptoms that resembled those produced by an electrical disturbance in the brain.

Try for a moment to imagine the horror of being this boy. He was aware of what was happening. He was conscious many times, often able to live a somewhat normal life. But he was locked in a kind of cocoon: unable to speak, unable to hear, fully aware that a horrible being was in control and watching as that being controlled him and made his body go where his mind didn't want it to go, watching as that being tormented him.

Try to imagine the horror of being this boy's father. For many years his only son has been

possessed by a demon: a demon that rendered him unable to speak, unable to hear, and that produced these horrible symptoms (frequently, the Scripture tells us), a demon that often tried to maim him and to terrorize him by throwing him into water and into the fire.

And now this father at the very end of his rope has brought his undoubtedly badly scarred son to Jesus, hoping that He would cast out the demon; but to the man's great disappointment, Jesus wasn't there. He was away with the three Apostles on the mountain for the transfiguration. So this father is somehow pointed to the nine Apostles who are there. Look at verse 18, the end of the verse. "I told your disciples to cast it out, and they could not do it."

All three Gospels make this point. Matthew 17:16, "I brought him to Your disciples, and they could not cure him." Luke 9:40, "I begged Your disciples to cast it out, and they could not." Notice that in every case, in all three Gospels that record it, this man pleaded and the disciples tried, but they "could not;" that is, they did not have the ability, the power to do it.

Now this would have been shocking to the disciples. Because when Jesus had chosen them, he had given them His own authority to cast out demons. Look at chapter 3. You remember this back in 3: 14? He goes up the mountain (verse 16). He summoned those He wanted. They came to Him. Verse 14, "He appointed twelve [of them, the Apostles], so that they would be with Him and ... He could send them out to preach, and [verse 15 says] to have authority to cast out ... demons."

Look over in 6:7. Now He's going to send them out to teach and preach, and verse seven says, "He summoned the 12 and [He] began to send them out in pairs, and [He] gave them authority over the unclean spirits." So Jesus had given them His own authority to do this, and He never failed; and in fact, the Apostles themselves had successfully used this authority many times before. Look at 6:13. "They went out [verse 12 says] and [they] preached that men should repent. [verse 13] And they were casting out many demons and were anointing with oil many sick people and healing them."

So this was not an ordinary, common, everyday experience to the disciples, but it wasn't new to them either. This was something that they had done many times before, but in this case, without Jesus present, they were unable to do what they had done many times before. I'm sure if, you could put on a little sanctified imagination, you could imagine what this looked like. He brings his boy to them, and of course the disciples are on the spot. A crowd begins to gather as it often did around Jesus and His disciples. The scribes show up, "Did you hear what's going on in the

center of town? Let's go look." And they're put on the spot.

The father explains the problem. He was looking for Jesus, couldn't find him. But I hear you have the power to cast out demons. Would you cast this demon out of my boy? And one of the disciples, whichever one sort of simulated the role of Peter when he wasn't around, stepped up and said we can do this. We've done this before. And he prepares himself and undoubtedly said whatever it was he was accustomed to saying, copying our Lord in his words when He cast out demons, and nothing happened.

So he thinks well, maybe I said something wrong. Let me try that again, and he tries it again. And then maybe one of the other disciples thinks, you know, this guy, something must be wrong. He must not have had his devotions this morning or something, so I'll-I'll try. And you can just see this, the disciples becoming more and more frustrated with this experience: the crowd gathering, the laughter of the scribes growing, nothing seemed to work.

That's what the man's reporting. I pleaded with them, Lord. I pleaded with them to do this, and they could not. Verse 19, "And He answered them and said, 'O unbelieving generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring him to Me!'"

Now we have to be very careful here. We could easily misinterpret this whole passage. In all three Gospel accounts, the father describes to Jesus both his son's condition and the disciples' inability to cast him out. But notice the text doesn't say that Jesus answered "him." It says He answered "them." So Jesus turns from the father who's speaking to Him, and He speaks to "them." Who exactly are "them"? Who are they? That's not good grammar, but you get my point. To whom does the pronoun "them" refer? What is its antecedent? Now this is very important because it effects our interpretation of the whole passage.

There're only three possibilities. One is Jesus is speaking to the nine Apostles who couldn't cast out this demon. That's possible, and there are some commentators who take that view, but there're several (I think) insurmountable problems with this view.

Number one: it's hard to imagine Jesus referring to the disciples as a "generation." "O unbelieving generation." Maybe He included them, so you could argue that He's including them as well, but there's another problem. Notice that in verse 19, Jesus calls whomever He's talking to, "unbelieving." Now we're going to see this next week or maybe the following week, but Jesus at the end of the story says to the Apostles, it's not that you don't have faith, it's not that

you're unbelieving, it's that you have little faith. It doesn't seem to fit.

But I think there's a third problem that's really insurmountable. Mark uses the word "generation" five times, and the other four times it never refers to the disciples. And so it's very unlikely that here He's referring to the disciples. So that view is sort of crossed off. That's not the "them" He's referring to.

The second possibility is the crowd. Now this is possible. Jesus often rebuked the crowds who were more interested in a show and entertainment than anything serious. (Some things never change.) That's possible.

The third option is the scribes. This is also very possible. I think the best solution is a combination of the scribes and the crowd, because Matthew and Luke record Jesus' rebuke without mentioning the scribes, but here in Mark it's clear that the statement was at least partially directed at the scribes. So you've got both groups.

Apparently, when the nine Apostles had been unable to cast the demon out of this boy, the scribes chose this prime opportunity to ridicule them, to try to discredit Jesus and His disciples. So that was the argument that we started with. They are jumping on this opportunity to get at Jesus through the inability of His disciples. By the way, you really see the callousness of the scribes here. They claimed to have the ability to cast out demons, but they don't do that; instead, they get into a theological discussion and debate with their enemies. At least the disciples had tried.

The scribes lacked genuine compassion for people. Jesus said that in Matthew 23 when He castigated the Pharisees. He said you load them up with these heavy burdens, and you won't even move your little finger to help them. They didn't care about people. That's always true, by the way, of false teachers. It doesn't matter how warm and fuzzy they look on television—it's a show. They can cry on demand and say that they're concerned about you and they want your prayer request so they can pray for you; instead, some mail house is pulling out the checks and throwing away the prayer requests, or they pray over the prayer requests in bulk, on pallets at a time, so they can say they prayed over every prayer request that came in.

These scribes are just like them. They don't care about this father; they don't care about his son. So to them and to the crowd, Jesus makes this stinging indictment. Look at verse 19. "He answered them and said, 'O unbelieving generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring him to Me!'" By the way, Matthew adds, You unbelieving and

“perverted” generation; that is, “twisted.” You don’t believe, and you are morally twisted. How long shall I endure your unbelief? Jesus says. How long shall My patience last before I break loose in judgment?

Wow! That’s Jesus’ response to no faith, to unbelief in the face of all that evidence. So when we look at this first group, the group we’ve entitled “no faith” made by the crowd and the scribes, what are the lessons we can learn?

First of all, this first part of the story that we’ve read together is a vivid illustration of the heart of Satan. All he wants to do is to torment and to destroy. Jesus said he was a liar from the beginning, and he was a murderer from the beginning. All he wants to do is murder and destroy. It is hard to imagine the evil that fills the heart of the one who was once the greatest of God’s creation. He desperately wants, wherever he can, to destroy all traces of God, to destroy in man (even unregenerate man) what theologians call the “imago dei:” the image of God that is residual in man. He even wants to wipe that out. So everywhere he comes in and takes up a host through one of his demons, what does he do? He degrades; he torments. This is the heart of Satan.

Kent Hughes writes, “Whatever methods he uses, Satan finds ultimate satisfaction in the obscene twisting of lives.” We all know lives he’s twisted, don’t we? We’ve all seen the product of his handiwork. That’s what he loves to do. It’s our God who delights to rescue and to save, to make new, to make beautiful. Can I say to you young people, there’s a real temptation to believe the lie that all of this religious stuff is constraining, that God, like the prodigal son, the father just wants me around to do His work; the real fun is out there. It’s a lie.

This is what the devil wants to do. It’s what he did to this boy. It’s what he did to the prodigal son in the far country. He wants to destroy your life, and if he can do it by enticing you into sex, he’ll do that. If he can do it by enticing you into drugs and alcohol, he’ll do that. If he can do it by enticing you into prosperity and money and wealth and fame, he’ll do that. It doesn’t matter to him. He just wants to destroy.

A second application you see here is Jesus’ indictment of those who’ve been exposed to the truth, but are either like the crowd, and they’re unbelieving and just apathetic, they’re just sort of there to see the show, or they’re like the scribes, they’re unbelieving and they’re antagonistic to the message of Christ. If you fit into either group, if you don’t truly believe in Jesus Christ and you’re just apathetic like the crowd, or you’re antagonistic to the truth of the Gospel, here is Jesus’ indictment of you.

This is what He said, “O unbelieving and perverted generation.” That’s not my indictment. That’s the indictment of the Judge of all the earth. That’s the indictment of the One before whom you will stand alone someday. To sin against all the information He’s given us about Himself, to sin against all the revelation of His character and being, to sit in a church like this, to hear the Bible taught, to be taught in your Sunday School classes, to grow up in a setting where the Word of God is first and foremost, and to be unbelieving, is to invite the deepest indictment from the mouth of the One who will judge you.

A third lesson we see from this text is there is an end to the patience of God. In Jesus words you sense that the end is near. Listen to what He says. “How long shall I put with you?” You see this same spirit. And again, He’s talking here to the unbelievers, the unbelieving and perverted crowd of His day. It reminds me of Romans. Look at Romans 2:3. Paul says, “But do you suppose ... O man, when you pass judgment on those who practice such things...” In other words, you pass judgment on those who sin, but you “do the same *yourself*...” Do you think you’ll “... escape the judgment of God?” “Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and [His] tolerance and [His] patience, [Do you take those things lightly?] “not knowing that the kindness of God [is intended to] lead [sic] you to repentance?”

Listen, if you don’t respond to His kindness with repentance, here’s what you’re doing, Paul says. Verse 5: “Because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God.” It’s as if every sinner who’s experiencing God’s goodness and kindness but refuses to repent and turn and believe in Christ, it’s like he’s purchasing every day of his life another storage shed; and he’s just storing and stockpiling God’s wrath until someday at the judgment it will break loose. That’s what Paul says.

In 2 Peter, Peter makes this same point, 2 Peter 3. There were those who were saying (verse 3)—Peter writes, “Know this first of all, that in the last days mockers will come with their mocking, following after their own lusts, and [they will] say [sic], ‘Where’s [sic] the promise of His coming? For ... since the fathers fell asleep, all continues just as it was from the beginning of creation.’” Uniformitarianism: it’s always been the same, therefore God’s never intervened in human history; He’s not going to intervene again.

Peter says, you’re forgetting He has intervened. What about the flood? Verse 9: “The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for

any to perish but for all to come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come.” There is an end to the patience of God.

It’s like Genesis 6:3. The Lord said, “My Spirit shall not strive with man forever, because he also is flesh; nevertheless, his days shall be 120 years.” He says I’m going to give 120 years for Noah to preach, and then it’s coming. Same thing is true today. God is patient. He’s so amazingly patient with sinners, but His patience doesn’t last forever.

And you see it in the response of Jesus to the scribes and the crowd. “How long will [sic] I put up with you?” It’s the only time that I know of in the Gospels where Jesus uses the word “O.” O! unbelieving, perverted generation! You sense the emotion from His heart—How long will I put up with you?—in a righteous anger. Powerful lesson.

To end on a really encouraging note, the glorious compassion of Jesus Christ for anyone who sincerely approaches Him for help, that’s what we see in this passage. Do you notice the last word, the last passage in this section? Look at verse 19. It ends with “Bring him to Me!” Here’s this father, desperate for the Lord to save his son. The Lord is angry with those who will not believe, but He still has a heart of compassion for those who will come.

We just saw Jesus—think about the context of this. We just saw Jesus in His glory talking with Elijah and Moses on the mountain. He’s just come down. It’s the next day, and He’s not too busy to express His genuine love and compassion for one poor father and his son. Here’s the good news: He’s always like that. He will always show the same heart of compassion toward all of those who will sincerely approach Him—whether you belong to Him or whether you don’t. Let’s pray together.

Father, thank You for this wonderful story. Thank You for the beauty of our Lord. We’re always so amazed and so overwhelmed with His character, with His insight into human nature as He knows immediately what’s going on with the scribes, with His majesty that causes the crowd to find Him and seek Him out. But Father, we’re most amazed by His unimaginable compassion on every poor, desperate sinner who approached Him.

And Father, thank You that the same is true today as it always has been: Jesus Christ our Lord, the same yesterday, today, and forever. Lord, may we find ourselves often, as those who believe, coming to Him in our desperation and finding Him filled with compassion. And Father, for those who are here who’ve never truly come to Christ in saving faith, may they see themselves in this

father: at the end of themselves, at their wits end, nowhere else to turn, coming in desperation to Jesus and finding Him with a heart of compassion, responding “Bring him to Me!”

Father, I pray there will be someone in this room tonight who before they go to bed would find that heart of compassion to be true for them. We pray in Jesus name, Amen.