

“The Devastation of Unbelief”

When I was a teenager, I worked on the maintenance crew of a large 5,000-member church. The campus was around 17 acres and there was plenty to do. The full-time maintenance crew consisted of a manager, one person over the 1400 seat sanctuary/offices, one person over equipment, two people over the Christian school, and one person for landscape. This church was obsessed with first impressions. We washed every window weekly. The front of the stage was painted every week. The carpet of the entire sanctuary was shampooed every week. The church held a class for new volunteers in the sanctuary and part of the training was showing a video of how Disneyland keeps their park pristine. Are you understanding how important first impressions were to the pastor? Well, one day a couple of us were in the back parking lot dealing with something. I don't remember what it was. It couldn't have been a large item someone dumped in the parking lot as trash, etc. While we were dealing with this issue I look over at some of the well-manicured bushes and say out loud, “Are those watermelons?” We all go over to the bushes and sure enough, there were about seven watermelons growing under the bushes. Multiple staff members came out of the church office to see the bush watermelons like it was the burning bush in Exodus. The facility manager demanded that the watermelons be ripped out. I mean how embarrassing when your church cares so much about first impressions. There could have been people coming to church on Sunday morning saying, “Are those watermelons?” Turns out our landscape staff member decided one day that that little area was perfect for growing watermelons. He was quite sad when his little garden was found out. Watermelons are not supposed to grow in mega-church bushes.

I share that story with you today not just to give you a funny story of my past, but to illustrate something. Jesus said in Matthew 12:33 that you will know a tree by its fruit. A good tree produces good fruit, and a bad tree produces bad fruit. What you intentionally plant in your garden will produce that crop if you take care of it. Gardeners know that it is important to water, prune, and pull up any weeds that would steal water and nutrients from the good plant. Now, in Luke 6:44-45, Jesus compares gardening with your heart. He says, “A good man from the good treasure in his heart brings forth what is good...for the mouth speaks that which fills the heart.”

In the garden of your heart, you will either plant seeds of faith or seeds of unbelief. Today I want to share a message with you titled, “The Devastation of Unbelief.” I believe that today's generation has a greater fight against doubt and unbelief than any other generation that has lived. Why do I believe that? Because of modern technology. On our phones we have instant access to every bit of information we would want to know in real time. The news is on 24/7, social media is a never-ending supply of amusement, Tv if filled with drama and vanity, and the list goes on. I looked up multiple sources this past week and found that Americans spend an average of 7 hours a day looking at a screen. And it's even worse in parts of African and Asia. We have access to more information in a single minute than our ancestors had in their lifetime. Here's the problem: The media today wants to make money, period. The way you make money on media is to sell fear. Create a villain and sell fear. Even though we know the media isn't telling the whole truth we still binge watch it. Isn't sad how much unbelief we have in God's ability yet have so much faith in what the news or media says. A.W. Tozer said this about unbelief:

***Unbelief is actually perverted faith, for it puts its faith not in the living God, but in dying men.
-A.W. Tozer***

You may have heard before that a little bit of fear is healthy. Fear keeps you from falling off a cliff or getting yourself in danger. That's a lie, because wisdom can accomplish the same thing. Unbelief is no different. A little unbelief is not only unhealthy, but also extremely dangerous. James 1:6 says, "Let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind." Hebrews 3:12 says that an unbelieving heart can lead you to fall away from the living God. The bottom line is that unbelief will hinder your relationship with God and cause you to miss out on the power of God. Look at the account in Matthew 13:57-58:

And they took offense at Him. But Jesus said to them, "A prophet is not without honor except in his hometown and in his own household." 58 And He did not do many miracles there because of their unbelief. – Matthew 13:57-58 NASB1995

Unbelief requires no faith...therefore it is safe and easy, which is the temptation. Unbelief is a guarantee. That's why people like it so much. It gives them power. They can say, "I told you so" when the miracle doesn't happen. This thinking exposes another lie. The lie is that if you have faith in something impossible, you are responsible to see it through. The truth is that we have faith in what God and only God can do.

We are all going to struggle with unbelief from time to time. But one pastor said, "There is a vast difference between a struggling faith and a stubborn unbelief." Here's the good news: we don't have to live with unbelief. In the garden of our heart, we can be intentional to plant faith and uproot unbelief. As we are going to see here in just a second in our main Scripture, you don't need a lot of faith...you need a pure faith. If you have your Bibles, go with me to the Gospel of Matthew chapter 17. We are going to begin in verse 14. For context, Jesus, James, John, and Peter are greeting a crowd after the transfiguration on the mountain. As they are entering the city they are immediately hit with what seems to be an impossible situation. Let's pick up in verse 14:

14 When they came to the crowd, a man came up to Jesus, falling on his knees before Him and saying, 15 "Lord, have mercy on my son, for he is a lunatic and is very ill; for he often falls into the fire and often into the water. 16 I brought him to Your disciples, and they could not cure him." 17 And Jesus answered and said, "You unbelieving and perverted generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring him here to Me." 18 And Jesus rebuked him, and the demon came out of him, and the boy was cured at once. 19 Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, "Why could we not drive it out?" 20 And He said to them, "Because of the littleness of your faith; for truly I say to you, if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible to you. 21 [But this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting.]" – Matthew 17:14-21 NASB1995

There is so much packed into this short passage of Scripture. First off, I love the dedication of the father in this scene. Think about it...you have a suicidal, demon possessed child, who could die at any moment. I wonder if this father lost business because he had to keep such a close eye on

his child. The father is smart enough to take his child to Jesus' disciples. They represent the power of God. But when he takes his son to the disciples, they couldn't cast out the demon. Does this stop the father? No. He waits for Jesus Himself and brings the need to Jesus. I hope you caught that. Sometimes we put our faith and trust in pastors, professors, and doctors forgetting that they are mere human. If humans fail us and let us down, it is ok because the Lord never will. We cannot allow the failure of humans dictate our perspective of a perfect God.

Now, Jesus' response to this father is a little rough. He says, "You perverted generation how long shall I put up with you?" But here's what I think Jesus was trying to convey. Jesus used the words "unbelieving" and perverse." Out of all the people there...pharisees, religious leaders, the disciples, no one could handle this demon. They were not fully believing the power of God, and they were perverting grace by bringing the Law back in. Grace says, "Be made whole." The Law says, "You are sick because you are a sinner." Then Jesus says, "How long shall I put up with you?" Ouch. Now, I don't believe Jesus was frustrated here and was so done with people. Think about it...what was the promise for believers when Jesus was to leave earth and go be with the Father? The promise was that the Holy Spirit would come and dwell in believers. What does the Holy Spirit give us? Wisdom, the fruit of the Spirit, supernatural power, anointing, comfort, and so much more. Jesus said in John 16:7, "It is better that I leave you so that the Holy Spirit may come to you."

You and I need to remember we belong to the Kingdom of God. Our entire faith rests on the resurrection of the dead. We need to stop thinking of physical and worldly limitations and believe for bigger things in the Spirit. Let me illustrate it this way. This is a chair. If I were to ask one of you to come up to this stage and sit in this chair, none of you would have a problem with it. You are all sitting in a similar chair right now. No one questions the chair. No one stops before sitting in a chair with trembling fear thinking, "I hope this chair supports me and doesn't break." You have total trust and faith in this chair holding you up. Now if the chair that I put up here had three legs...you would have cause for concern. But you see, that's all physical and logical. Do you know that kind of faith we are supposed to have? It is this kind of faith...I actually want you to sit in this chair (points at nothing on stage i.e. invisible chair). "Pastor Rudy, there is no chair there. I don't see a chair to sit in." "Trust me, there is a chair there, you just can't see it. Only believe." You would think I was nuts. We are to walk by faith and not by sight. Supernatural faith is trusting in something you can't see.

I believe that what Jesus is trying to point out here is not a faith issue. It is an unbelief issue. Jesus said it Himself...you only need faith the size of a mustard seed to move a mountain. A mustard seed is half the size of the sesame seed on your burger bun. You only need a tiny amount of faith to move an entire mountain. So, the question then is "why are we not moving mountains?" Even though it only takes a tiny bit of faith to move a mountain, it only takes a tiny bit of unbelief to move you. We have to deal with the issue of unbelief. We cannot tolerate unbelief. If you were settling into to bed and then you see the biggest spider of your life on the wall, would you just go to bed? What if that spider ran behind some furniture? Well I guess you are rearranging the room before you go to sleep. We need to treat unbelief like it was a baby rattlesnake that made its way into our bedroom. We cannot afford to tolerate any amount of unbelief in our lives. I want to encourage you this morning with some practical application so if you are taking notes please fill our point number one:

How to Overcome Unbelief:

#1 – Fast and Pray.

I love that the disciples came up to Jesus and asked Him why they failed at casting the demon out. The disciples were no strangers to healing the sick, casting our demons, and other supernatural things, but they couldn't deal with this specific demon. Jesus said, "This kind only comes out with prayer and fasting." Jesus wasn't legalistic. Jesus wasn't a pharisee. I believe Jesus wasn't saying here, "You failed because you don't pray enough, fast enough, study enough." I believe Jesus was saying, "If you had been fasting and praying this demon wouldn't have intimidated you." I believe that somehow the disciples got fearful and began to doubt. Jesus and the inner three disciples were away on the mountain, and they were left behind to deal with this demon. And in the midst of this failure, Jesus teaches a message of faith. Jesus tells us of the power of fasting.

Why is fasting so important? Fasting is not a hunger strike until God does what you want Him to do. Fasting is a discipline that puts the flesh in its rightly place. Fasting starves the flesh. Fasting tells the flesh to shut up. Physically, fasting does wonders for the body. When you go on a water fast longer than a day, your body switches from seeking food as fuel to eating toxins, bad cells, and it literally flushes your body of harmful things. But more than the physical benefits, fasting does wonders for the soul. It causes your spirit man to rise up and not be intimidated by the enemy and not be deceived by lies. If you want to overcome unbelief in your life, add fasting to your regular Christian disciplines. Get in the habit of telling the flesh to shut up. The second point is this:

#2 – Deal with Doubt.

In Mark 5 Jesus goes to heal a little girl who is gravely ill. She dies and they send a message to Jesus that the little girl is gone. This doesn't throw Jesus off. He says that she is only sleeping and will live. That's when unbelief started to try and take over the party. They started laughing at Jesus. How could anyone laugh at a time like this? So, what does Jesus do? He removes the mockers. Jesus physically removes the unbelief in the room and brings only those who would believe. You can't allow doubt to remain on your heart and sometimes you need to remove physical things or people in your life to do so.

If you are going to deal with doubt you are going to need to be ok with mystery, doubt your doubts, and then stand on truth.

#3 – Exercise your Faith.

Romans 12:3 we have all been given a measure of faith

EXAMPLE – New computer. Frustration at first over all the new things. Only took about a week before it was like breathing. It's not that it was difficult work, it was consistent work. Things become easy and natural when you are consistent with it.

I pray this week you take an honest evaluation of your heart. I pray you seek the Lord this week and ask Him if there is any unclean way in you. If you were to somehow take the prayers you have been praying and transcribe them word for word, how much of those prayers would be in faith and how much would be reciting unbelief?