

The novelist, Julian Barnes, who describes himself as an agnostic leaning toward atheist, opens his memoir, *Nothing to Be Frightened Of*, "I don't believe in God, but I miss him." It's the confession of a man standing on the outside of faith who can't quite shake this deeper ache that he feels, a pull towards God. It's the confession of a man who finds unbelief itself not quite as liberating but rather comes with a grief. Not to overstate it, but when I read that line, it feels like something that accurately describes the very age in which we live.

For many generations, there's been, within the sociology world, an assumption made called the secularization thesis. If you took Sociology 101, you may have encountered those proponents of this "secularization thesis," like Emile Durkheim, Max Weber, or Peter Berger. The basic assumption was that as the world modernized, religion would decrease. The theory was that it is just a matter of time before we "progress beyond religion." But that isn't quite what has happened in the generations to follow.

What we found is that there's this lingering longing—what we as believers would say is eternity placed in the heart of mankind from God that we can't quite squelch as much as we think we've progressed past it. People walk away from God for many reasons, but they tend to discover there's a remnant of faith somewhere buried within them.

Last week, we talked about that thirst, that desire that seems to just be at the core of what it means to be human. "I don't believe in God, but I miss him." It's a cry for our generation and our time. If we're honest, that sentence cuts in more than one direction, because the ache isn't only for those outside the faith. If you'd followed Jesus for any length of time, you've discovered that faith is rarely as straightforward as we'd like to believe.

I was just consumed with that little hymn *Tis So Sweet to Trust in Jesus*, "Tis so sweet to trust in Jesus, just to trust him at his word." Read the line at the very end, "Jesus, Jesus, oh, for grace to trust him more." Right in the midst of that hymn, the very author is writing about this bold faith that it is true and good to trust in Jesus, and yet, God, would you give me grace to trust in him more?

The Christian life is often lived in that tension between belief and unbelief, between trust and uncertainty, between confidence and question. We don't usually live at the poles of either belief or unbelief, but rather in the gray area on the road between the two.

We come to a story in John where we're seeing this man, a royal official, who's living and quite literally walking a long road between belief and doubt. As we've been going through these first four chapters of the Book of John, we have found these stories of people coming to faith. All the way back to Nicodemus, this perennial insider who was trying to muster

up the ability to believe of his own accord, and yet he could not come to faith. Then we see the Samaritan woman, this perennial outsider who was searching for God amongst all these other places, who does come to faith.

Now we come to this royal official who almost stands as a paramount example of what it means to have faith. It, in some ways, lays what I'm calling the architecture of faith. We're going to see three pillars of what all faith has, what it looks like to walk the long road of faith, and we're going to see it in this man.

After the two days he left for Galilee. (Now Jesus himself had pointed out that a prophet has no honor in his own country.) When he arrived in Galilee, the Galileans welcomed him. They had seen all that he had done in Jerusalem at the Passover Festival, for they also had been there. John 4:43-45

Jesus was making his way from the very south of Palestine to the very north. He cut through Samaria, and that's where he had the encounter with the Samaritan woman. So last week was the side quest, if you will, in Samaria. He left there after a few days and is now in the north, where the people had begun to hear the stories about Jesus, and it says that in Galilee they welcomed him. Okay, a different reaction than it was necessarily in Samaria, even though Jesus was welcoming the Samaritans.

Once more he visited Cana in Galilee, where he had turned the water into wine. And there was a certain royal official whose son lay sick at Capernaum. When this man heard that Jesus had arrived in Galilee from Judea, he went to him and begged him to come and heal his son, who was close to death. vv. 46-47

John intentionally names the very first miracle that he cites as the first sign, which was when Jesus turned water into wine at the wedding in Cana. The reason he brings it up here is partially that he's creating an inclusio, meaning he names this bookend, but also names this other bookend. So there's a sense in which we're coming to a completion of an introduction, and this inclusio is hinting at us that all that's happening here functions as somewhat of a whole. We're supposed to be thinking of everything from the wedding at Cana until now.

It says there was a certain royal official. It's someone who was likely working in Herod's court, of which he would've been an outsider as well, not quite as severe as the Samaritan, but they were not fond of Herod. If you know the Christmas story, you'll recognize maybe why some of that is the case. But this official, this royal official, is a man of nobility. He's an aristocrat. He's from the upper echelon of society. And Jesus is quite on the opposite end. He's a villager. He's one who's

a wanderer. He's a carpenter. He's a peasant. Yes, Jesus has a growing reputation, yet he is still on the outside looking in.

When we meet this man, he's in the midst of a severe crisis. The text says his son is sick and on the verge of death. So this man makes the decision to go from Capernaum, where he is, all the way to where Jesus is. That would've been about twenty to twenty-five miles. We don't think of it in such long terms, but to state the obvious, there were no cars in the ancient world. This would've been a much longer journey, one taken likely by foot, which probably meant it was a multi-day journey. So here is an elite member of society who's now traveling twenty miles by foot to, what the text says, beg Jesus to intervene in his son's life.

Listen to the way William Barclay writes of this. "There could be no more improbable scene in the world than an important court official hastening twenty miles to beg a favor from a village carpenter." The picture is obvious. He's a father grieving in fear of the loss of his son, and the most logical thing for this man to do is to hightail it 20 miles to encounter Jesus, and maybe Jesus will intercede. It's his desperation that drives him to Jesus. Now let's see how Jesus responds.

"Unless you people see signs and wonders," Jesus told him, "you will never believe." The royal official said, "Sir, come down before my child dies." "Go," Jesus replied, "your son will live." The man took Jesus at his word and departed. vv. 48-50

This first part appears almost a bit of a harsh reply from Jesus. We get in this story a recap of a larger thing going on. We don't know how long he was begging there, but John goes out of his way to say the man was begging Jesus to go down and save his son, a rational response given the official's circumstance.

And Jesus responds, "You people won't believe unless you see signs and wonders." Now, there's some debate on whether this man is included within this scene, as in, is this official part of the you people? There's a case to be made both ways, where he's questioning his belief, but at the same time, the man's there with belief. He's like, "No, Jesus, you can come and save." So there's some tension here on exactly who Jesus is addressing. Is he addressing this official, or is he using this moment to address the whole crowd around him? I honestly don't know, and it may not make that big of a difference.

Jesus' point is this. You must see these signs in order to believe, yet here is a man who had belief prior to that. So he comes to him in his desperation, and there seems to be a persistence in this man. He was begging. Jesus says, "Unless you see signs," and the man says, "But if you come, could you just heal my son?"

There's a persistence in him in which he keeps bringing this need back to Jesus, and it's in response to that persistence that Jesus says, "Go, your son will live." It's really interesting in the Greek language here; the phrase in English that you have before you is, "Your son will live." The word "will" implies a future understanding. It seems that if you read this at face value, Jesus is saying, "Your son will be healed. Just go back, and it's fine." The healing had already "taken place." But in the Greek language, the word "will" isn't there.

It can be interpreted as that, so it's not that the biblical translators translated it wrong. But at a very literal reading, it simply says, "Go, your son lives." So this man, when he hears this, is left in this moment of tension to say, "Did he mean will live as in the future? Or does he mean like he's currently alive, go and say your last words?" We don't really know.

The ambiguity there is simply important to recognize that when this man departs from this scene, he is not departing with all these loose ends tied neatly together. He had to take that 20 to 25-mile journey back with this ambiguity. We tend to want faith to be this airtight thing in which we construct these arguments and proofs, and we come to it thinking everything is neat and tidy. Could you blame him for desiring that? His son is on the brink of death. But Jesus doesn't always offer that. He offers this interesting response in which he's inviting this royal official into a deeper level of trust to say, "Go on your way. Go and return."

Here's the point. The official's response in faith is not anchored in the "Your son will live"; it's anchored in the go. He was responding in obedience to what Jesus had said, "Go, your son lives." Not with the answer solved, not with everything cleaned up and tidy, but rather taking Jesus at his word, he departed on the road.

While he was still on the way, his servants met him with the news that his boy was living. When he inquired as to the time when his son got better, they said to him, "Yesterday, at one in the afternoon, the fever left him." Then the father realized that this was the exact time at which Jesus had said to him, "Your son will live." So he and his whole household believed. vv. 51-53

To me, this is such an interesting exchange. He just had this moment where he spent multiple days getting to Jesus, begging for him to heal his son. He's on the way back, and you would think then, if the son's alive, you would, like, directly equate it to Jesus' actions. What was the whole thing for, unless you assume that was why. But when the servant comes, he's like, "Well, tell me when he was saved. Can you tell me exactly when the fever left?" And then you see this almost rationality in which he's deducing, okay, that was about 1:00 in the afternoon. That's when Jesus said it. He was right.

What it's pointing to is that this man was never rock solid in his faith, but rather had this ambiguity, this trust and doubt, this belief and unbelief, in which he's holding this, and says, "Could it be that Jesus actually did heal my son?" So he, in some sense, questions the servants and says, "Well, what time did this healing take place?" And he puts it together and says, "Yeah, this was the exact same time that Jesus said, 'Your son will live.'" So he and his household all believed. There was enough here, as he was living in that ambiguity, that gray area between belief and unbelief, that the father puts the pieces together, and his faith is encouraged and propelled to a different level.

"This was the second sign Jesus performed after coming from Judea to Galilee" (v. 54). We bracketed that verse because John's doing something specific here. This is the second sign. He's naming these signs. The first was the water to wine, and now we advance forward, and we get the second

one. So, that begs the question, "Why is he naming these signs?" That's a literary device, a tool in which he's angling for us to understand.

John's doing something in the way he's retelling this story. He's not the documentarian. He's not Ken Burns. He's more like Scorsese or Christopher Nolan. He's taking these things and weaving them together to draw this beautiful picture. All true stories, but they're not always crafted in a linear timeline that we like. Rather, what he's doing is bringing these things together.

So why then is he naming these signs, and why was this the second? We don't have to guess much. We're going to flash forward all the way to chapter 20 because John names explicitly why he's writing his gospel.

Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name. John 20:30-31

"That you may believe," which is the same Greek word as faith; it's the same exact word. It's *pisteuo*. It's the same thing. So you may have faith, and that faith may well up in you a life with God. Belief and life in God, that's what's going on here.

What I want to do now is pull back a little bit. This may feel a little more philosophy 101 than theology, but hopefully they wed together. I want to take this story and review what the architecture of faith is. If the reason that John is writing these stories and these signs is so we may have faith that swells up into life, let's explore the baseline things we've learned across these three stories of Nicodemus, the Samaritan woman, and now the royal official.

Faith Begins With Reason

What am I calling the of faith? Well, it all begins at the very beginning with this: faith begins with reason, and by reason, I mean the intellect, the mind, the evidence of reality around us. Of reasoning, not just reasons, although that is true as well. At first glance, you may see this as contradictory. Isn't faith what fills the gap when reason falls apart? That tends to be how our culture views faith. That's why we have this common vernacular of blind faith, or you just have to take a leap of faith. That's all assuming that there's no rationality behind the reasons we have faith, but that's something we've imposed upon this idea.

The New Testament never talks of faith in those terms. Go back all the way to verse 47 at the beginning of this story, and one of the reasons I harped on it and spent a little more time is so we could pick it up later. "When this man heard that Jesus had arrived in Galilee from Judea, he went." Okay, what does that mean? It means he had heard the testimony.

To use a more modern word, he had picked up evidence that was going on about this man Jesus, and then decided to buck every cultural trend and say, "I'm on the upper echelon of society, but I will lay all that aside. I will endure the embarrassment," which that would be to walk 20 miles to come before Jesus and beg him that he would heal his son. This was

not a flippant, off-the-cuff decision. This was one that was balanced by reason. This is also where it is prefaced in the beginning part, where they had heard the story of Jesus turning water into wine.

The royal official does not come with blind faith or some leap of faith. He is reasoning in his head about all of these signs that he had seen. They seem to make sense, so much so that he will go and put his belief in him. That's what John said in chapter 20:30, "*But these signs are written that you may believe.*" If signs weren't needed for belief, then why did Jesus do signs? Wouldn't he just say, "Believe"!

It's not a test of the faith, because what you'll see here is that every single belief that you hold is actually upheld by faith, whether that's religious or not. Every single human who's ever existed builds their entire life off of faith in someone or something. You cannot avoid the idea of signs given, what I would call the evidence that fosters belief. The Christian faith has never been one that says, "Check your brain at the door." It invites us to think, wrestle, reason, and consider. It invites us to do that in the way that you do in every area of your life.

I know there are some skeptics in the room, and you're thinking, "You can't actually prove Christianity. You're just saying you have to take a leap of faith, and you're mapping that on every belief because that's just an easy way out." Maybe I'm doing that, but let's explore, because I would assert that you can't prove Christianity or prove the existence of God any more than you can prove that God doesn't exist. You are trapped behind this veil in which, if you are to claim that God doesn't exist, you can't prove that either, in the same way that I cannot prove God does exist.

The problem is, 500 years ago, the default setting for all of human history was that the divine existed, and yet that shifts radically sometime around the Age of Enlightenment, to where we wake up in a default mode that God doesn't exist. There's an ache that we all feel at some point. There's still something we can't quite shake. Don't forget, Barnes, when he wrote those words in the first line of his memoir, he describes himself as an agnostic who's probably an atheist, but said, "I don't believe in God, but I miss him."

What about empirical evidence? We live in an age of science. That seems to be rock solid. Well, yes and no, but you can certainly prove things through that, and I'm not against science at all. You can prove a lot of important things through the scientific process, but the problem is, every deeply rooted substantive belief that you've based your life on, cannot be proven in a petri dish.

Sure, you can prove that there are about forty to fifty native species of trees in the Bay Area. You can go out, explore that, and prove that. You can also prove, objectively, there are a hundred-plus species of native fish in the Bay. But talk to me about how you can prove you're ready to get married to that person. These things we cannot prove, and most of the things that you cannot prove empirically are the very things you've based your whole life on. You can't put it in a petri dish and figure it out.

Here's the problem. If you base all of your understanding of proof on empirical reasoning, you have to make two claims that are built on faith.

The first is that you are relying on your senses. But the only way you rely on your senses is by using your senses, and that is called circular reasoning. You're proving the existence of things by touching them, but you're assuming that the touch is reliable and actually true. Now, that's a good assumption to make. I believe in objective reality, and so that's a good thing to do. But when I say it's a good thing to do, I'm taking a step of faith, because how do I prove my senses without using my senses?

The second presupposition is built on memory. It's the idea that I can believe, based on history, that all these things are true; so there's a reliability to that fact. But you run into the same circular reasoning because you have to trust that your memories are reliable, and that one is a little easier to disprove because I have a terrible memory. But you see what I mean.

At some point, you must take a step of faith, and we do this all the time. We trust historians when they tell us that something happened in the past. We reason and believe what makes the most sense. We step into that and affirm what the historians say. That's a good, healthy thing to do, but don't forget, you're putting faith in that. We trust that scientists explain what is beyond our expertise and understanding. We trust friends when they tell us something that happened. We trust doctors and surgeons when it's time to operate. We're trusting and putting our faith in their abilities.

All of those very good things. I believe in everything I've just described as true and accurate and objective reality. I'm just trying to say that you need to doubt your doubts in the same way that you believe your beliefs. We all take a step of faith.

I alluded to it earlier, but Blaise Pascal, many generations ago, said, "In the end, no one can prove God exists, but no one can prove that God doesn't exist." So either you go about your life believing God exists and then it turns out he doesn't, or the opposite. You go your whole life believing God doesn't exist, and he turns out to exist. That's okay. It's just the choice before us. Faith, my friends, is built on reason. That's where it begins.

This royal official looked out across the world in his moment of desperation and said, "What's the right next thing? I've heard of this guy who turned water into wine." This reputation had grown around Jesus, and he made a reasoned choice to say, "Maybe he is who he says he is." It was not built out of blind faith. It wasn't a leap into the unknown. It was a reasoned, rational decision.

Christianity is no blind jump. There are many, many valid reasons for faith. A thoughtful faith that is reasoned and sound is necessary because when life beats you up, and it will, if the only reason you believe is that you grew up in a house that believed, your faith will fall apart because it's flimsy. At some point you have to start engaging the intellect that God gave you.

So why do I believe these things? For me, it's built on a lot of these things rationally, but then I also look historically. I look at the encounters I've had with God that seem beyond what I can comprehend and explain, yet they're so real. There were experiences of God's love and grace that

transcend the empirical evidence. I can't explain why God met me in my brokenness and space, but it enlivened something deep within me. Those are reasons for my faith. Faith begins with reason.

This is one last thing before we move to the next one. Hebrews 11 says, "*Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.*" We often read that as like a blind faith thing, because it has that phrase of do not see. But older translations change those words, confidence and assurance, to the idea of substance. Now, faith is the substance of what we hope for, meaning it's the confidence, conviction, assurance, and substance. That's not something you just float into. There is reasoning and rationale behind it, in which it makes sense to step in that direction. You have to base your life on faith. The question is, what will you choose?

Faith Develops Through Trust

Rationality is not the end of the road. Faith must move beyond that. That's where it begins. So the second beam of the architecture of faith is this: faith develops through trust. At some point, the intellect must give way to the will. In the summer of 1859, a man named Charles Blondin was a world-renowned tightrope walker. He dazzled crowds by stringing an 1,100-foot cable across Niagara Falls.

It was about 160 feet up, and he would walk across it and do all sorts of different stunts that would draw thousands of people around him. He'd do it blindfolded. Other times, he'd take a chair and balance the two legs, not like in between the legs, but like the two legs on the rope, and he would sit there. Other times, he'd take this stove out, and he literally went out there and cooked an omelet in the middle of the rope and ate it. It was this powerful example because he would continually do these sorts of tricks, and the crowds would erupt.

At one point, he took a wheelbarrow, loaded it with weights, and walked it across and came back, and the crowd just went nuts. Then this is a story that may or may not be true, as there is no evidence, where he came back and said, "Who believes that I could do it, but this time with a human sitting in the wheelbarrow?" And the crowd erupts, and they're like, "Yeah, yeah, you can absolutely do it." Then he asks the follow-up question, "Okay, who wants to volunteer to sit in the wheelbarrow?" The crowd falls silent. No one volunteered to hop in the wheelbarrow.

Now, the point is obvious. You understand where I'm going with this. It's one thing to have faith and reasons. It's a whole other thing to live and get into the wheelbarrow. Faith and action must interlock. Faith and the will must, in fact, align. Those two things are connected.

Dallas Willard stated one of the best definitions of faith: "Faith is the readiness to act as if what you believe is true." Meaning, if you believe that two plus two equals four, then you are ready to behave accordingly if you're trying to count the number of apples in your house or whatever it is. But if you believe that two plus two equals six, it won't be long until you're hit with the trouble of dealing with that thing, acting as if it's true, and yet it does not match up with reality. This is the importance of knowledge. I would guess it would only take until the next time you file your taxes for you to get hit with reality.

Willard would later define reality as this: "Reality is what you run into when you're wrong." It's a good definition. Meaning, if I choose not to believe in gravity and I jump off this building, reality will hit me when I hit the ground. Belief is the readiness to act as if something is true. Belief and action are intrinsically linked. For this man, it was the moment that he took Jesus at his word and marched the 20 miles back.

Here is a silly example that's a bit more trite, but it'll make the point. Every single one of you right now in this exact instant is living out faith that you expressed when you walked into this room. You walked into this room, and looked at the chair you're sitting on and thought, "Chairs typically hold people up." That's built on a whole lot of reason. It's built on years of experience of sitting in chairs. But you cannot prove before you sit in that chair that it will hold you up. You could look at it and think, "It looks about right. It looks like it should hold me. But I'm a pretty big guy, so while the majority of the time they hold me up, they do not always. Sometimes they buckle under the pressure. But what happens in that moment is me reasoning.

Now, it's all subconscious and under the surface, but you all assumed that chair would hold you up, built on reason. But if you refuse to sit in that chair, I question if you believe it will hold you. It had to move into the will and intellect, in which you would then trust what you understand in your head, your knowledge about reality, and then you sit in the chair.

This man begged Jesus, reasoned that this was the right place, and then Jesus said, "Go." With an ambiguity of uncertainty, he went. He didn't know that Jesus would heal his son, but he turned and walked. He chose to take Jesus at his word, to trust that Jesus is who he says he is. Faith is built on reason. It develops through trust over time, which gives way to the life that John talked about in chapter 20. It gives way to belief that gives way to life with God because trust and faith are relational words.

So as you come to Jesus using your intellect, you step into trust, allow faith to develop, and what happens is that slowly over time you enter into a relationship with God that communicates that he's a good Father, he's a good God, and he will not lead you astray. Even though at times he may do things that don't make sense, you trust that he is good. That trust, over time, fosters a deeper connection and relationship with God.

Faith Matures Through Suffering

The third and final beam of the architecture of faith is that faith matures through suffering. It's the uncomfortable truth of this story. It's the very thing that animated this father to move towards Jesus. It was his suffering. It was that his son had the very real possibility of dying. I would imagine he left for that 20-mile journey, and if I'm this official, I probably said my goodbyes to my son, uncertain of what would be on the other end of my return.

Suffering is the crucible that forges a mature faith because it shakes us to our core. And what suffering does is take that architecture of a life you've built and shake it and expose what you've built your life on. That's often why you hear the testimonies of people who, when the bottom dropped out of their life, did one of two things. It either drove

them further from God or it drove them to God because it has a crucible effect. It refines, as if it were gold being placed in the fire to burn away the impurities and expose what it is. Although it is uncomfortable to know that faith matures through suffering, the scriptures have been telling us this all over the place. Think of James 1.

Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. James 1:2-4

Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us. Romans 5:3-5

In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. 1 Peter 1:6-7

It is the agony of this man's suffering that drives him to Jesus. And all you do in this moment, the only thing that you have to do for your faith to mature through suffering, is simply open your pain to God, which is a challenge. It's much easier for me to stand on a stage when my life is going seemingly well and to say that.

All this man did was reason and decide that maybe this was the right choice. He trusted that Jesus was who he said he was, and then he opened his pain to God and said, "God, I don't know what to do with this." Faith matures through suffering because it rattles you to your core. Faith almost requires suffering to mature. I say almost because I don't think God necessarily will enforce that or impose it, but rather he's gracious in a broken world when suffering comes to then take that suffering and turn it into something good.

But the reason that happens is that until that point, you're a little bit more like Nicodemus. You're pretty self-sufficient. "Why would I need anything outside myself if I've got my life together?" If you talk to anyone who's lived with Jesus for any amount of time, it won't be long before they start to tell of those moments where it seemed like the bottom dropped out, and they say things like, "That's when I met with Jesus."

It may take time. Sometimes it's a long, winding road. His road was 20 miles. He didn't just jump around the corner; rather, it was a long, arduous road. Some of you are here this morning, thinking the whole time, "I'm with you, Kevin. I've constructed an architecture of faith. I've seen God do incredible things. I've walked through the crucible of suffering," and I would just say, "Keep going."

Others of you are here, and you're saying, "Kevin, I too have built what I thought was the architecture of faith, but God didn't save my child. I

prayed and wanted the cancer to go away, and it didn't leave. What do I do with that?" I don't quite know the answer, but the story I kept coming back to this week is the one from John 11. It's the story of when Jesus' friend Lazarus dies, and he encounters Mary and Martha.

They both ask Jesus the exact same question, which is John trying to add some literary beauty there. But Jesus responds quite differently. First, Mary goes to Jesus and says, "Lord, if you'd only been here, my brother would not have died." And Jesus responds rather harshly by saying, "Listen, your brother will rise again." And there's this whole interchange in which she's like, "But God, I know what you mean by the resurrection of all things, but yet here I am." And again, Jesus is strong and abrupt and almost downright rude.

Then immediately after that, Martha goes to Jesus and says, "Lord, if only you had been here, my brother would not have died." The exact same phrase, and Jesus responds dramatically differently. He steps into that moment, and all it says is Jesus wept. Why the difference between the two? It's not because one had more faith than the other. The only thing I can understand is that he is the Good Shepherd who knows how to walk with what you need, and that's not a comfortable truth.

But I don't know any other way than to just allow my faith to develop in trust with Jesus that says, "Jesus, I trust that you will do what is good and true and what I need, because I also don't know what I need." So sometimes Jesus will weep with you, because that's what you need. Other times, he may be more direct. But can we trust that he will do what we believe is right in the midst of all of this broken world?

There's one other story to end with, and it's not even necessarily a story, but it helps. It's in Mark 9, in which another father is dealing with a different issue with his son, and he runs to Jesus. He's talking about how his son is possessed by this impure spirit, and he's crying, saying, "Jesus, can you do something about this? If you could do anything, Jesus, could you do something?" To which Jesus responds, "If I can?" He says, "With belief, anything is possible." The father looks back at Jesus and says, "I do believe. Help me overcome my unbelief."

It is not about the strength, quality, or quantity of your faith. It is about the object of your faith. It doesn't matter how much you feel you can muster. It doesn't matter if you feel like it's strong or weak. It is not about that at all. It's about the object of your faith. That's what this father understood. He said, "I believe, but Lord, help me with my unbelief."

"Tis so sweet to trust in Jesus, just to take him at his word...Oh, for grace to trust him more." Church, that's the prayer that we come to when we build this architecture of faith. You don't build it on your ability to construct it alone. You build it with your mind, develop it through trust, and then as you suffer, you allow God to do the deep, maturing work within you by opening your pain to him. That's the invitation.

"I don't believe in God, but I miss him." I don't know if you're in the space where faith is beginning with reason for you. Maybe that's where you begin to pray. Lord, what does it mean? What are the reasons for what you've done? What is the work you've done in my life and around me that makes this more rational? Maybe you're in the trusting mode and you know God's asking you to do something, but if you're honest with yourself, you're not quite ready. Or maybe there are some of you who are in the painful process of suffering. And the invitation for you is to just open your pain to God.

Overall, wherever you find yourself in this moment, I pray that you continue to think and pray and offer whatever it is to God. Do not rush away from this moment. But the prayer for every single one of us is that of the father whose son had the impure spirit: "Lord, I believe, but God, help me with my unbelief?"

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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