

## PRAYING THROUGH OUR DOUBT

<sup>14</sup> When they came to the other disciples, they saw a large crowd around them and the teachers of the law arguing with them. <sup>15</sup> As soon as all the people saw Jesus, they were overwhelmed with wonder and ran to greet him. <sup>16</sup> "What are you arguing with them about?" he asked. <sup>17</sup> A man in the crowd answered, "Teacher, I brought you my son, who is possessed by a spirit that has robbed him of speech. <sup>18</sup> Whenever it seizes him, it throws him to the ground. He foams at the mouth, gnashes his teeth and becomes rigid. I asked your disciples to drive out the spirit, but they could not." <sup>19</sup> "O unbelieving generation," Jesus replied, "how long shall I stay with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring the boy to me." <sup>20</sup> So they brought him. When the spirit saw Jesus, it immediately threw the boy into a convulsion. He fell to the ground and rolled around, foaming at the mouth. <sup>21</sup> Jesus asked the boy's father, "How long has he been like this?" "From childhood," he answered. <sup>22</sup> "It has often thrown him into fire or water to kill him. But if you can do anything, take pity on us and help us." <sup>23</sup> "If you can?" said Jesus. "Everything is possible for him who believes." <sup>24</sup> Immediately the boy's father exclaimed, "I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!" <sup>25</sup> When Jesus saw that a crowd was running to the scene, he rebuked the evil spirit. "You deaf and mute spirit," he said, "I command you, come out of him and never enter him again." <sup>26</sup> The spirit shrieked, convulsed him violently and came out. The boy looked so much like a corpse that many said, "He's dead." <sup>27</sup> But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him to his feet, and he stood up. <sup>28</sup> After Jesus had gone indoors, his disciples asked him privately, "Why couldn't we drive it out?" <sup>29</sup> He replied, "This kind can come out only by prayer."

Where are we to draw the line between presumption and doubt? It seems as if that little word "if" would be a suitable device for blurring that line and keeping us safe. After all, our faith was expressed by bringing the child to Jesus in the first place. Would it not be the height of presumption to "command" Jesus to do what we want? Or is that just a rationalization of our underlying doubt? In this case, Jesus sees it as the latter and first ferrets out the doubt in the father before dealing with the demon in the child.

I can't tell you how many times in my life and ministry I have prayed for healing in a person's life and then tacked on the words, "if it be your will." In retrospect, I can clearly see that I was not trying to avoid presumption, I was trying to shift responsibility off myself. In effect, that phrase was prayed to the individual or surrounding group rather than Jesus. Even if it wasn't caused by my doubt that Jesus could heal the person or that my prayers might not be effective, it was based on the possibility that Jesus might not physically heal the person.

It is a fact that 100% of us will die, so it should not be a surprise that we do not always experience physical healing in this life. That alone should inform us that our faith is not to be based on favorable outcomes. True faith, at its strongest, is the expression of belief in spite of the evidence to the contrary. When I think of faith, I remember the words of the author of the Letter to the Hebrews, *faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see* (Hebrews 11:1).

Perhaps our prayers should all begin with, "I believe, help me in my unbelief," instead of ending with, "if it be your will."

**Jesus, help Thou my unbelief. Amen.**