

Dependent on Jesus

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[0 : 00] It's really amazing actually that God's kindness, we've just got a week of prayer and it just so happens that our sermon this morning is all about one of the things that centres on this prayer.

Amazing kindness for us to be thinking about this as we do that. One of the things it's really all about, which is kind of central to prayer, is dependence.

It is dependence. Now dependence in the world, it is not always seen as a good thing. It is to have to be dependent on others in our world is routinely seen as a bad thing.

People celebrate, don't they, being independent. Being able to go it alone in the big wide world you might say is kind of something that we, is promoted.

And don't get me wrong, before we, I'm not going to hammer that, that is a good thing. It's a good thing that we, you know, particularly with young children, that we, they become more and more independent.

[1 : 07] Kids should grow at being able to do some things on their own. You know, you know, at certain ages you'll have, those who are parents or even, you remember when you were growing up yourself, you'll remember the time you were taught how to cook your own tea or do your own laundry or earn your own money.

It's necessary to have those steps of independence away from the family home. It's necessary to become an adult. So, but the danger with independence, I think, is when, and we can, we can say this in our world, is when society takes that one step further and, and, and asking for help or being needy, it's that word nobody likes, being needy is look down on.

Being needy is, it's inconvenient. It's, it's inconvenient to society, it's inconvenient to, to, to, to, and people feel that level of inconvenience.

They don't want to inconvenience others. People find it embarrassing to ask for help, to be in need. One of the reasons is, we think, I think, and I think this is true, we think that if, if we come across as needy, then it, we think that it reflects on us, to others, that we can't cope in our world.

We can't cope. And we want to be showing to others that we can cope. We want, so we want to do things ourselves. It shows that we're strong, that we don't need anyone else.

[2 : 41] We don't want to hassle people, don't want to cause a fuss. We think, oh, they've got enough on their plate, without me adding more. That's what we tell ourselves. What is all that, what's that really all about?

Well, deep down what's going on in our heart, it is the most common sin that's going on. It is the sin of pride. It's wanting to be seen, it's having it all together, to be seen as a cover.

The real danger here is that because we think, when we think that way, it affects us, but also it affects our relationship with God and with each other.

In our reading this morning, what we're looking at really, it said it's about prayer. It's all about being dependent on God, about being dependent on Jesus Christ. The first thing that we see that we're going to look at is when we see self-dependence in the disciples and in, I think in the Pharisees as well, self-dependence.

Last week, you'll remember, we did the transfiguration. Jesus has been up with his three close friends, shining in all his brilliance, wanting them to fear him, to listen to him and to know that he would be the suffering king that brought that great glory about.

[4 : 00] When Jesus comes down from the mountain, from having been transfigured, we see that self-dependence and pride. Perhaps it should remind us of what Moses found down.

You might remember when he came down the mountain after meeting with God and receiving the Ten Commandments. What did he find? He found Aaron and his elders in full-blown idol worship with a golden calf at the centre.

They had been tempted by pride to make a God in their own image that they thought best. And whilst it's very different, it is striking that Jesus finds not a golden calf, but he does find them trying to do things without him.

Look what Jesus finds. Verse 14. When they came to the other disciples, they saw a large crowd around them and the teachers of the law arguing with them.

They're arguing with one another. The disciples, Jesus' disciples, are the teachers of the law.

Everyone runs to Jesus, they're delighted to see him. But he asks, verse 16, What are you arguing with them about?

[5 : 08] Notice how they don't actually answer him. They don't have an answer. It is the father, the dad, of the boy, that perhaps is why there's such commotion, that steps forward to tell Jesus what's going on.

He gives a detailed account of his son's suffering. His son has been possessed by an evil spirit, a demonic spirit. The boy can't speak and has suffered no end of torture.

But he informs Jesus of the problem that is causing the argument. End of verse 18. This is what he says to Jesus. He says, Jesus, I asked your disciples to drive out the spirit, but they could not.

And Jesus is not too happy with it. He's not too happy about the news. Verse 19. The word for unbelieving there, it's connected to the word for faith.

It can be translated as faithless. He's calling the whole group of the people that are faithless, without faith, in their circumstance, they are without faith in God.

[6 : 28] The disciples, and presumably others, what we come to, I think, realise, is that they've attempted to drive out this demonic spirit without faith in God.

That's what they've tried to do. They've attempted to do it on their own, thinking that they had what it takes. They had it, what they needed within themselves to drive out this evil spirit.

Maybe they thought they had enough spiritual power or the right spiritual technique. You know, they thought it was like, for us, when we hear of driving out evil spirits, I don't know if you've seen it, but it might draw our heads to films like The Exorcism or things like that, like incantations, something from a horror movie that if they say the right words and do the right technique, then hey, presto, it's like a magic trick and out comes the evil spirit.

They trusted in themselves to save this boy from evil. At some point in our life, we all have to learn new things.

I don't think you have to do this anymore because most kids' shoes seem to have Velcro, but I remember having to learn to tie my shoelaces. Before we learned how to tie your shoelaces, somebody else had to do it for you.

[7 : 58] But, once you mastered it, you didn't keep on asking for help to tie your shoelaces. That's how it goes, isn't it? Once you master something, you then don't need to ask for help for the same thing that you can do.

That's normal, isn't it? Once you can do something, you just get on with it. We approach life like that, and it's entirely right, but we can approach spiritual life like that.

Now that I know it, I can just get on with it. I can go alone, trusting ourselves, sort out life's problems.

Maybe even, maybe in different places at some points, there could be the temptation even to grow the church that way. Maybe even change people's hearts.

Maybe if we just have the right self-help program, or the right kind of, the right words, the right techniques, we can do that, and maybe that's the way that we are drawn to that.

[9 : 08] Deep down, this is why it's all, I think, I think we go in on this to grab our hearts, is that deep down, the reason we want to go out alone is because deep down, we want to be praised for the good things in our life.

we love to be admired. We love to be admired. And so don't we want to do things that without help, or without being in need, so that we gain other people's admiration?

Because we love to be, I mean, we all do, project an image of ourselves that people will admire.

Look what I've done. I did it all by myself. The disciples, what they reveal is that they don't actually care about this book.

They care about having, you know, the crowds of admiration. And, as I mentioned, we can try and do life without Jesus, we can try, we can use the right spiritual sounding words and soundbites, and sound like it's all for him when it's actually all about us.

We've got to be careful as a church. And we've got to be careful that we guard against that. Because it doesn't actually happen in ourselves, or in a church, or in any way. It doesn't actually happen.

[10:24] It doesn't happen through a technique, or a strategy, or a method. It happens through Jesus Christ. He does. He does it. And if that gets hold of the church, and we don't guard against that, it is toxic.

It is toxic. It is toxic for us, and it is toxic for a church. So that's one reason why we might enjoy self-dependence, is if we desire admiration.

We see that in the disciples. But I want to touch on something else. There is a second reason we might desire to be self-dependent, and it's not the desire to be admired.

Perhaps it can be because we don't trust people. And I think that's what we see in the doubts of the Father. This is also something that will probably be common to each of us.

Everyone at some point or another will be let down by somebody else. Somebody that you trust. Maybe we've been hurt by someone, and the response after we're hurt by someone that we trusted is to put up words that stop us from letting other people in.

[11:36] Stop us from being vulnerable and asking for help. You think, I've been let down too many times and it was too painful. I'm not going to ask for help from anyone else. I'm just going to, I know I can trust me, so I'm just going to help myself.

I'm going to stop being vulnerable and putting my trust in others. Stop from letting anyone else in. We fear being let down, we fear trusting people. And if that has happened in your life, there's every possibility that we project and carry that fear of being let down again into our relationship with the Lord.

We doubt, because we have doubts about what other people can do for us, we doubt whether He can really come through for us. And we choose to depend on ourselves because we doubt everyone else including Jesus Christ.

Now it's normal to have doubts. I don't want to say, I don't want to, everybody has doubts. We've all been let down by someone in the past. Yet what we see in the father of this poor boy is quite fascinating actually.

It's that we see that it is possible to trust in Jesus, to have faith in Him and to have doubts at the same time. We realise that faith is a complex issue, it's not black and white.

[12:55] Just look with me, verse 20. We read, the evil spirit continues to throw the boy around, he's foaming at the mouth, we read. And we see it, we see it here that it is possible to believe and doubt.

There's desperation in the father's voices. It's not a confident hope. The end of verse 21, he says, but if you can do anything, take pity.

that word for pity is that deep compassion. It is that gut-wrenching sort of the bowels of mercy. Gut-wrenching compassion.

Have that compassion on us, help us, he says. If you can, it suggests doubts. He probably has been let down in the past.

And Jesus is aghast. Everything's possible for the one who believes. And then we see, verse 25, the complexity of a person, of this man.

[13:57] The father's faith and the doubt on display. Verse 24, I do believe. Help me overcome my unbelief. It only takes, I mean, this guy's going through a lot.

So you can kind of expect it. When we think about ourselves, it can only take one challenging situation to unnerve us. We question ourselves and question God.

The doubts arise. What if he won't come through for me this time? You know it only takes something small.

I'm not a great cook. Annabelle does most of the cooking. And I, my experiences in the kitchen are few. But I, and I've, I've tried, but I've often made disasters.

And you can, you can make a beautiful meal. You can use all the ingredients, rich in flavours, it tastes wonderful. You add that bit too much salt.

[15:07] That one powerful ingredient. And it can ruin the whole meal. I, that has happened to me. I've not, not known how I can fix it. Just one small thing can ruin.

Just one small circumstance can unnerve. It's one challenge situation that can make us wobble. The Father's faith, beautiful faith, he prays, if you can have, if you can, have pity on us, help us.

It is a prayer of faith because he goes to Jesus. He is different to the disciples. He knows he can't do it. At that moment he demonstrates active faith and belief.

He, he definitely knows that for his son to be rescued, to receive some relief from his torment, that having Jesus, having faith in Jesus, must be some sort of answer.

Yet at the same time he doubts. He doubts, he says, if you can, if you can, he says. His son has been so long with the torture, the torment, that he's perhaps close to giving up hope.

[16:20] Maybe he's asked others. We know the disciples have tried and failed, if you can. And so, and then he prays that prayer.

I do believe. Help me overcome my own belief. What we see in the Father is familiar to us all. We believe that Jesus is the only answer.

Yes. Faith that he will save us and deliver us from darkness. And yet, we have doubts. We believe that Jesus rescues, yet sometimes doubt his goodness.

Doubting that Jesus will come through for us. And when we doubt, it can lead to, it can, well frankly, it can lead to patterns of sin. You think, you think, just let's just take one example.

Even just a small thing. Maybe you're telling a story and you exaggerate the truth. Or you tell some lie, lie. Or even, maybe you struggle to be open about the fact that you're a Christian and you hide your Christian life from others that know you.

[17:34] They don't realise that you come to church or you hide it from them. At that moment when you're doing that, what that demonstrates is doubt that Jesus is going to come through for you.

you believe that he rescues you but you're doubting in that moment that Jesus has got what it takes. You think, I need to present, I need to lie, or I need to, what if this happens, what if that happens, what if I'm open about this and they don't like me?

believe, we believe but we doubt that Jesus is going to come through for us in that moment. It's true for all those who believe in him but we carry unbelief in him too at some level.

It is especially true, it's true on small areas of life like that, but it is also true through difficult, especially true through difficult moments. Why is he allowing all this to happen?

Surely the father asks. you can bet that's what his dad thought, I believe Jesus is good but I struggle with my son being tormented since birth. Maybe we've been waiting to see him answer our prayers and it feels like he is.

[18:51] We've been diligently going to him yet still we wait. This prayer, this prayer from the father is for all of us today. It's for all of us to pray. It's a prayer for every day I think, to pray, to keep at the forefront of our mind.

Jesus, I believe in you, I trust in you, I have faith in you. Help my unbelief. Where I have doubts, where I struggle, where I think wrong thoughts and fall into sin, where I doubt that you're going to come through to me and choose another way of life.

Help every part of my soul, my mind and my strength in you. Help my belief. I do believe. Help them believe.

And so, we've seen the self-dependence of the disciples. We've seen the overcoming of doubts really, in many ways, of the Father.

And we see that the prayer of the Father is answered by Jesus. He has doubts, but he still has faith. This is an important point, that we're complex in this sort of wrestling with faith and doubt.

[20:05] We get things mixed up, our thinking is disjointed, but the living God, we must remember, is overflowing and full with generous, lavish grace and kindness.

Any doubts we may have do not cancel out the faith that exists. I'll say that again, any doubts we may have, that Jesus will come through.

It doesn't cancel out the faith that exists, even if it's just a small faith. It's not calmer or a weighing scale. God doesn't wait until our faith outweighs our doubts and then answer prayer.

He looks for faith. The Father's faith might have been small and the doubt massive, but it doesn't outweigh it. How much faith, we remember what Jesus said, how much faith do you need like that of a mustard seed.

The smallest seed, the tiniest amount, I've said before, if I had a mustard seed here and blew it, you would never find it. That's how small it is, impossible.

[21:08] You can have the smallest amount of faith, and the biggest else, but you have faith in Jesus. Jesus responds to the Father's faith, his belief, and the prayer for more faith is what he's asking.

Verse 25, when Jesus saw that the crowd was running to the scene, he rebuked the impure spirit. You deaf and mute spirit, he said, I command you, come out of him and never enter him again. The spirit shrieked, convulsed him violently and came out.

Just interestingly, we say the same language here used with this boy, as when Jesus raised Jairus' daughter, after she had died, Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up.

That word for lifted is the same word as raised, it's the same word that's used for when Jesus is raised, and he got to his feet and he stood up. The boy has been raised from being spiritually tormented by evil.

If he'd have stayed in that position, his life was over. He was as good as dead. The evil had such an effect on his life. He looked dead, said the crowd.

[22 : 14] Yet Jesus raises him, raises him to have a new life, free from evil. And it reminds us that our spiritual life is dependent on him as well.

We can't save ourselves, we didn't. Spiritually, we were just like this boy. Maybe not possessed by evil, but certainly we bought the lies of the evil one.

We bought his lies, that we didn't need Jesus, that we do better without him. The first act of turning to Jesus' prayer, the first thing we did as a Christian was showing our need and dependence on him, knowing that we couldn't save ourselves and saying, save me, forgive me.

He's able, he takes all our mess away, dies in place, and gives you life in his name. He is mighty in power, full of compassion. the evil spirit only comes out through prayer.

The prayer of the Father to Jesus shows complete dependence on him. What we see is that the Father, in many ways, schools the disciples as to what true Christian living and ministry, you might say, really looks like.

[23 : 30] They still don't understand. They've seen it there before and they still don't get it. Verse 28, why couldn't we drive it out, they asked Jesus. This can only come out by prayer. You have to be connected to the source of power.

Prayer is, you might call it activated. If you have a lamp and you don't plug it in, it doesn't matter what bulb you screw in, it doesn't light up the room, but it won't light up.

Yet, you can get the lowest wattage bulb, the cheapest, the one that most people don't buy that stays on the shelf, you plug it, if it's screwed into the lamp and it's plugged into the socket, it will still brighten and lighten in darkness.

Even if you have small faith, if you're connected to the power source, if you're connected and you're praying and you're dependent on Jesus Christ to bring light into darkness, then he will dispel it.

He'll dispel it. Dependence on Jesus, connection to him, is a must, you must depend on him to do the work only he can do by asking him to do it. Let's repeat this, there's no technique, no agenda, no strategy, no special words that are used to bring people to sin and faith, it needs the power of the Holy Spirit.

[24 : 54] It's the spirit of Jesus connecting the truth of the gospel to people's heart which changes them. It can only happen through dependence on him. But we're involved in each of us, in ministry to ourselves and ministry to one another, shows us that Jesus' work has not stopped.

This is not the, we might say it's the work of the church. The work of the church is the work of Jesus. Jesus is still at large. He's as active now as only walked the earth.

And so we depend on him just as large. prayer causes things to happen but wouldn't happen if you didn't pray. Prayer causes things to happen but wouldn't happen if you didn't pray.

Because it gives all the glory to Jesus. That's why. It gives all the glory to him. So, we're coming for landing.

Faithful prayer to Jesus. We're mixed up. We have mixed up ideas, we have faith and yet sometimes we live as if we don't believe and we struggle.

[26 : 11] There's things going on in life where we don't see answered prayer and we wonder why we're still waiting. We have doubts and even on small things we wonder whether Jesus is going to come through for us.

Yet we have faith. Faith in Jesus. Just to us to us, what we need. You pray to them and you're connected to the power of us and he will answer your prayers in more ways than we could possibly imagine.

Let's pray. Almighty God, it is amazing to know and reflect on this gift of prayer that we are connected in a very special way to the one who is all powerful.

