

22. The Healing of a Boy with an Evil Spirit

Luke 9:37-50

Luke: A Walk Through the Life of Jesus

In the last study, we looked at the Transfiguration of Christ, which took place while Jesus and the three disciples were praying during the night. Luke records that it was the next day that they came down from the mountain. What a contrast we are given by Luke! The disciples are given a heavenly perspective and a glimpse of the glory of God while on the mountain top, and they then descend into a situation where they are face to face with the enemy through demonic activity. There are times in our lives when God will give us more of His presence, and we want to stay there and maybe even build a booth or tent as Peter did (v. 33).

However, God's heart for us is that we move on from our mountain top experiences, taking what we have received by God's grace to give to those in the valley of the shadow of death. We will have plenty of time to rest and enjoy the glories of our King and one another when each of us makes the transition into eternity, leaving our earthly body behind. For now, while we are in this temporary tent (2 Corinthians 5:1-10) of the body, we are to serve Christ by reaching into human need with the power and love of Christ. Our Lord is a wonderful example of this. As soon as He came down from the mountain, human need in the form of a crowd met Him. Luke singles out just one person in need to display for us again the power of Christ:

³⁷The next day, when they came down from the mountain, a large crowd met him. ³⁸A man in the crowd called out, "Teacher, I beg you to look at my son, for he is my only child. ³⁹A spirit seizes him and he suddenly screams; it throws him into convulsions so that he foams at the mouth. It scarcely ever leaves him and is destroying him. ⁴⁰I begged your disciples to drive it out, but they could not" (Luke 9:37-40).

The Condition of the Demonized Boy

Question 1) Using Luke's account as well as Mark 9:14-29 and Matthew 17:14-20, describe the condition of the boy. What would it be like to have a son in such a condition? If there was a situation like this in your neighborhood, how do you think the authorities would deal with it?

In a parallel passage, Mark gives us a bit more information as to what was going on when Jesus arrived. When they came down to the place where the other disciples were to meet them, the scene that they encountered was one of great turmoil. They walked into the middle of a large crowd and a bitter argument:

¹⁴When they came *back* to the disciples, they saw a large crowd around them, and *some* scribes arguing with them. ¹⁵Immediately, when the entire crowd saw Him, they were amazed and *began* running up to greet Him. ¹⁶And He asked them, "What are you discussing with them?" (Mark 9:14-16).

We are not told what the argument was about, but it was probably focused around the methodology of casting a spirit out of a man's son. Perhaps, they were arguing against the

father's bringing his son to be ministered by Jesus. The religious leaders had said that Jesus healed by the power of Satan (Mark 3:22). Because the Lord Jesus was not available, the man tried to get the disciples to solve the boy's problems, but they could not. It is possible that the scribes were arguing with the disciples as to how they should cast out evil spirits. When he saw Christ, in his desperation, the father of the boy ran to Jesus. If only we would all have this attitude of heart! He said to Jesus, **"Teacher, I beg you to look at my son, for he is my only child"** (v. 38). The Greek term translated *look at* means to look with a view for him to receive mercy and grace from God, i.e. to pick him out of the crowd and give attention to him. His only son was being tortured by an unseen evil spirit.

When we collectively put together descriptions of the boy's condition from the other Gospel writers, we get a more complete picture. When the spirit came upon him, it tried to kill him by throwing the boy into fire or drown him in water: **"He has seizures and is suffering terribly. He often falls into the fire or into the water"** (Matthew 17:15). The evil spirit waited until he was near a campfire or the home cooking fire before throwing the boy's body into the flames. Burns, scratches, and cuts were likely seen all over his body as a result. Likewise, whenever there was a river or a well, the spirit would throw the boy into the water with a view to destroy him. The boy could never be left alone, not for a second.

Can you imagine the torture this father endured? He never had a moment of peace! Someone had to be alert at all times in order for his son to be protected. It must have been an extremely exhausting, draining, and horrible existence for the entire family, coming face to face with demonic activity on a regular basis! It is no wonder the father would not give up his search for a solution. His hopes were dashed when the disciples were not able to confront the demon and deliver the boy from his plight.

At the beginning of the seizure, the boy screamed at the top of his voice (Luke 9:39). How terrifying this is not only for the father but also for those individuals around the boy to hear the torment in his voice as the demon began to afflict him. After the scream, the demon threw him to the ground in convulsions (Luke 9:39). The demon took control of the boy's vocal chords and sense of hearing so that the child became mute (Mark 9:17) and deaf as well (Mark 9:25). Aside from the terrible screams, the demon would not allow the boy to communicate his condition. Think of what this must have been like for him; he was totally isolated. He could not express what was going on inside him to his father or hear any words of comfort from his family.

Mark tells us more: **"It slams him to the ground and he foams at the mouth, and grinds his teeth and stiffens out"** (Mark 9:18). The Greek word that is translated into English as *slams him* is a very violent word. This was a frightening demonstration of a dark supernatural nature. When the boy is brought to Jesus, he is thrown to the ground having convulsions. He **"rolled around, foaming at the mouth"** (Mark 9:20), grinding his teeth while becoming stiff as a board. The father's testimony about his son goes further: **"Only with difficulty does it leave him, mauling him as it leaves"** (Luke 9:39).

When the father describes the mauling, what was he seeing? More than likely, he sees bruises appearing all over his body as the evil spirit tears him before leaving him until the time of the next attack. We are not told the boy's age, but Mark tells us that it has been happening since

childhood (Mark 9:21), we can presume that it had been happening for several years. Imagine what it was like to have this happen to him at any time, un-expectantly, against his will, not able to fathom what was happening, and on top of that, having the scars and pain of the after-effects of each tryst with the demon.

Luke doesn't mention it, but Mark tells us that the father said;

²²“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.” ²³“If you can’?” said Jesus. “Everything is possible for one who believes.” ²⁴Immediately the boy’s father exclaimed, “I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!” (Mark 9:22-24).

This father expressed the thoughts that many of us have. How refreshing to hear someone declare in honesty the state of his heart. He was desperate, and this was no time for brave empty words. He believed, but he felt like he was holding on by a thread, and he says so! Have you ever felt like this man? We believe, but there is a part of us that has difficulty believing that faith in God will be enough. We wonder if our faith is strong enough. Jesus is about to reward this man’s faith. You see, even though he felt that his faith was weak, he came to the right source for the healing! He was not trusting in his faith, but he was throwing himself and all that he was, doubt included, at the mercy of God! There is no need to hide our doubt and unbelief as the Lord knows our hearts.

We would do well to pray as this man did: “Lord, I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!” How can we do this? To strengthen our faith, we should continually feed our minds with the Word of God and act upon what we read. This will strengthen our faith “muscles.” Faith is believing that God has spoken through His Word even though our logical mind or circumstances tells us something different. Our Worldview should be one based upon the Scriptures. Our faith is not in faith itself, and that is why knowing the heart of God and His will revealed in His Word will put our focus on the One who is in authority over all the power of the enemy. We look to Him, not to our own faith or to the power of positive thinking! This is an important distinction, especially with some of the “faith ministries” we see in operation today. If the focus is not on Christ, who is getting the glory? Jesus is about to bring the glory of God into this dark situation. The Father is going to be exalted here!

We should not think that this was an epileptic fit, for Luke is a doctor, and I’m sure he knew about such things. We are to take Jesus at His word that it was an evil spirit causing this. As we read the various accounts, this was more than a physical phenomenon. The mauling of the boy before their eyes, the foaming of the mouth, inability to hear, the suicidal tendencies, and the way the spirit reacts to being confronted with the presence of Jesus should be evidence enough that this was not epilepsy. Neither should we make the mistake in thinking that all epileptic fits are demonic in origin. Mark adds that, when the boy is brought to Jesus, the spirit grabs hold of the boy and threw him into convulsions before their eyes as he began rolling around and foaming at the mouth (Mark 9:20). Demons cannot stay hidden before the presence of Christ. When Jesus was told by the father that he had brought his son to the nine disciples and that they could not cast it out, there was a response from Jesus that may surprise you.

The Rebuke of Christ

⁴¹“O unbelieving and perverse generation,” Jesus replied, “how long shall I stay with you and put up with you? Bring your son here.” ⁴²Even while the boy was coming, the demon threw him to the ground in a convulsion. But Jesus rebuked the evil spirit, healed the boy and gave him back to his father. ⁴³And they were all amazed at the greatness of God (Luke 9:41-43).

Question 2) With whom do you think Jesus was frustrated, and why?

We cannot be dogmatic without clear evidence from the Scriptures, but it could be that His frustration and words were directed toward the whole crowd, the father as well as the disciples.

First, demonic activity sometimes comes about by parents being involved with the occult, and children often suffer the results of the parent’s idolatry and offering of their children to false gods. This is what King Manasseh did 500 years previously with his sons (plural). He offered them to the god Molech, and as an example to other parents following him, he burned his sons in the fire as well as gave himself to sorcery, divination, and witchcraft (2 Chronicles 33:6). There are strongholds that occur when people open the doors to evil in this way. Children can make the choice to follow the ways of their parents into the occult, and thus they open themselves to the entrance of demons. We do not know what caused this boy’s condition or what may have opened the door to this demonic activity.

Secondly, Jesus’ rebuke could have been leveled at the nine disciples for their lack of faith and power. This is the most likely target of Jesus’ frustration and rebuke. He said to them that they were “unbelieving” (v. 41). It is often so with us. We are confronted by so many needs, and we are conscious of our own inadequacy to deal with such things, but the power and authority is not ours. It is delegated authority, and that is what we should trust that each believer has been given by the Lord (Matthew 28:18). In the minds of the nine disciples, this was an extreme case of demonization, and they did not believe that they had what it took to cast it out. This was a much stronger spiritual entity than what they had previously encountered, i.e. a very powerful demon which had made inroads into this boy’s life.

However, Jesus had given them power and authority over all demons (Luke 9:1), not just some. He was, perhaps, frustrated with them, as He knew that His time of teaching was coming to an end. He was trusting them with the ministry, with the kingdom principles He had taught them. If they were not reproducing His ministry to carry it on when He was gone, who would? They were His only plan for extending the kingdom of God after His death and resurrection. If they could not operate in faith now while He was physically with them, then how would they operate in power when He was gone? They would, indeed, have the power of the Holy Spirit present with them, but they would have to walk by faith and not by sight. I see in Jesus’ words, the longing of the Son to see the work finished on earth.

At this point, He had been training the disciples for nearly three years. He had already begun to prepare them for His death, burial, and resurrection, but here they lacked faith to minister deliverance in this heartbreaking situation. He called them “unbelieving and perverse” [or

distorted]. This is what the Fall has done to the human race, making us an unbelieving people, having a distorted view of God and His ability to use us in ministry toward those who are held in bondage to sin and the evil at work in this world. A person's frustration, and remember that Jesus was fully man, is often visual evidence for what people really feel. Jesus really cared about the disciples being able to minister in the power of God to deliver men and women from bondage. As disciples of Jesus, each of us is to learn to exercise the ministry of Jesus on the earth in the name of Christ. The nine disciples had taken the time to pray for the boy, but they had moved from trusting the power and authority of Christ to believing that it was faith in the process. The presence of Christ on us is the key, not the process or system on which we tend to lean.

The boy was not in sight but had to be brought to Jesus. There was a visible manifestation as soon as the demonized boy came into the presence of Jesus. Mark tells us, **“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”** (Mark 9:20). Mark also gives us additional information by saying that Jesus asked questions about the boy's condition (Mark 9:21). This is always good to do in a ministry prayer session. Often, we can gain vital clues as to how to pray by finding out how the condition first originated.

While the boy was being thrown onto the ground by the demon, even though the boy was dumb to the words of Jesus, the Lord spoke to the demon. **“But Jesus rebuked the evil spirit, healed the boy and gave him back to his father”** (Luke 9:42). With all of the crowd looking on, what did they see? We are told the boy was healed. The spirit that had tormented the boy left. What then took place in front of their eyes? The boy's scars, burns, and cuts were healed instantly while they all looked on. No wonder Luke records that, **“They were all amazed at the greatness of God”** (v. 43). I would have loved to have seen their faces and the amazement that they had. I hope there are re-runs in heaven! I would love to have witnessed this deliverance and healing!

Afterwards, the disciples had big questions. Mark tells us Jesus' explanation as to why the nine could not deliver the boy:

²⁸When He came into *the* house, His disciples *began* questioning Him privately, “Why could we not drive it out?” ²⁹And He said to them, “This kind cannot come out by anything but prayer” (Mark 9:28-29).

In about a week's time, the disciples had gone from depending on Christ to pray for the sick and cast out demons to prayer that was less and dependent on forms and systems. They lacked the power that only comes through a lifestyle of prayer. The King James Version adds the words, *and fasting* to Mark's testimony (Mark 9:29). In most English translations this is sometimes reflected in a little number added to the text with the words *“and fasting”* added to the bottom of the page. In some English translations of the Bible, a whole verse is taken out of Matthew's Gospel, i.e. ²¹[**“But this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting”**] (Matthew 17:21).

The problem is that some Greek manuscripts have *fasting* and some do not. Personally, I think it should be in the text, for it is our flesh that does not like to fast, but fasting and prayer together are a powerful force in the kingdom of God. There are some situations into which one is thrust where one does not have the time to spend in fasting, so it is likely that Jesus is talking about a

lifestyle of prayer and fasting. If we incorporate regular times of fasting with the daily discipline of prayer and mulling over Scripture, we will have power from God for every eventuality into which we are thrust in our daily lives. Fasting and prayer brings a greater anointing, i.e. a greater presence of the Spirit of Christ to one's life. In our day, there is a great need of men and women who are filled with the Spirit and exercising the power and authority of Christ for the needs of the lost and bound by demonic spirits. The further we go as a society into sin and degradation, the more demonic spirits will manifest. Men and women of faith who know who they are in Christ are a great threat to demons.

Jesus Again Foretells His Death

While everyone was marveling at all that Jesus did, he said to his disciples, ⁴⁴“Listen carefully to what I am about to tell you: The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men.” ⁴⁵But they did not understand what this meant. It was hidden from them, so that they did not grasp it, and they were afraid to ask him about it (Luke 9:43-45).

In the midst of their amazement at the greatness of God (v.43), Jesus brings them quickly back to reality. He again tells them of what is soon to happen to Him, i.e. He will be betrayed into the hands of men. Verse 45 then goes on to say that they did not understand what He meant.

Question 3). Why does Luke tell us that it was hidden from them? What keeps spiritual realities hidden and unable to be grasped by us?

All the great crowd that were listening and looking at what took place in front of their eyes were amazed at the greatness of God. They were left aghast and dumfounded by what they saw. There was no logical explanation. We are not told, but it is likely that the disciples started dreaming of being seated in the chief seats of what they thought would be the kingdom of God coming as soon as Jesus got to Jerusalem. The Lord brought them back to earth by reminding them again that He would be handed over into the hands of men. Their problem was that they had not conceived of a suffering Messiah and were focused on who among them would occupy the greatest seats alongside Jesus in the Kingdom of God.

Who Will Be the Greatest?

⁴⁶An argument started among the disciples as to which of them would be the greatest. ⁴⁷Jesus, knowing their thoughts, took a little child and had him stand beside him. ⁴⁸Then he said to them, “Whoever welcomes this little child in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. For he who is least among you all—he is the greatest.” ⁴⁹“Master,” said John, “we saw a man driving out demons in your name and we tried to stop him, because he is not one of us.” ⁵⁰“Do not stop him,” Jesus said, “for whoever is not against you is for you” (Luke 9:46-50).

Question 4) What is it about a child that was such an object lesson for Jesus?

When my son was around three years of age, I remember that Simeon was up on the kitchen counter. I told him to jump into my arms, and I would catch him. He loved that! Children are so

trusting. He would never look down and think to himself that it was a bit risky. He always trusted that I would catch him. Our Father in heaven wants us to trust Him and walk with Him in innocence and purity in the same way as children. We can learn much in our observance of our children. The enemy would like to convince us of our own self-importance. Remember, Satan's primary fault and sin was one of pride. If he cannot tempt us into sin by our actions, then his next strategy will be to tempt us to sin in our thought patterns. The sin of pride is such an ugly sin to the Lord, and it will keep us from experiencing the purity of a Christ-like life and the power that accompanies it. It is difficult to see the sin of pride in ourselves but so easy to see in others. The enemy wants nothing more than to affect your thought life because he knows that, if he wins that battle, sin will soon follow. Dependence on Christ will always deal a fatal blow to pride.

Jesus brought a child into their midst. Children were a waste of time to the religious leaders of the day according to the Talmud, a Jewish commentary on the Scriptures that was in use in the time of Christ. Later in the Book of Luke (18:15), the disciples were trying to keep children away from Jesus, but He rebuked them and said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these" (Luke 18:16) The key to what He was saying is found in His words "For he who is least among you all—he is the greatest" (v.48). "A man's pride shall bring him low: but honor shall uphold the humble in spirit" (Proverbs 29:23).

If you are facing an impossible situation, whether it is brought about by demonic activity or just a result of living in this fallen world, do not lose hope! Do not place your trust and your hope in your own faith, in the faith of another person, or in a ministry. Put your faith (expectation) in God himself to deliver you, and look to Him. Appeal to Him in prayer as this boy's father did. Appeal to Him in total honesty and supplication, taking Him at His Word and bringing His words before Him.

Always give Him the glory when the answer comes! He will use you. He has revealed in His Word that it is His will to use you to extend His kingdom. We pray "Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven!" Begin by trusting Him in whatever situation in which you are, and you will grow in the exercise of faith as you continue to look to Him. Jesus will continually glorify His Father when we give Him the opportunity. He longs to demonstrate to us love through our everyday struggles, whether they be extreme or mundane.

Prayer: Father, please help us to be all we can be in You, but in whatever we do, keep us humble and free from a spirit of pride. One day, we will cast our crowns at Your feet. Amen.

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