

A Demon-Possessed Boy is Healed and Teaching on Discipleship

Luke 9:37-50

Luke 9:37-43: Now it happened on the next day, when they had come down from the mountain, that a great multitude met Him. 38 Suddenly a man from the multitude cried out, saying, "Teacher, I implore You, look on my son, for he is my only child. 39 And behold, a spirit seizes him, and he suddenly cries out; it convulses him so that he foams at the mouth; and it departs from him with great difficulty, bruising him. 40 So I implored Your disciples to cast it out, but they could not." 41 Then Jesus answered and said, "O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you and bear with you? Bring your son here." 42 And as he was still coming, the demon threw him down and convulsed him. Then Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit, healed the child, and gave him back to his father. 43 And they were all amazed at the majesty of God.

Background Notes:

In these verses we have the record of another case of demon-possession - a demon-possessed boy. The evil spirit caused the boy to suddenly convulse, foam at the mouth, and lose physical control. Demons may cause people today to have physical problems, including children. While we realize this truth, there are two unbiblical and incorrect extremes that believers can take on this subject - and they do.

One extreme is to attribute every illness, disease and physical problem to the activity of demons. People who hold this incorrect view believe that a sick person is either demon-possessed or demon-oppressed, and that demons are the cause of every physical problem. However, back in Luke 4 we saw that such a position is unbiblical. Many times in our Lord's ministry, physical illnesses were differentiated from demonic possession. Luke 4:40-41: "*When the sun was setting, all those who had any that were sick with various diseases brought them to Him; and He laid His hands on every one of them and healed them. And demons also came out of many, crying out and saying, "You are the Christ, the Son of God!"*" Illnesses, diseases or physical problems are *not* always caused by demons.

The other unbiblical view denies the reality of demon possession. In this view, all "demon possession problems" are actually the result of psychological disorders or emotional stress. Many biblical scholars today hold this view. They say New Testament accounts of demon possession are 1st century culture's explanation of psychological and emotional disorders. This is certainly not a biblical position. Psychological disorders don't cause pigs to stampede and run into the Sea of Galilee! And the demon-possessed boy's father knew that his son didn't have a "psychological disorder" or emotional stress. He brought his son to the right person - to the Lord Himself. The Lord healed the boy and gave him back to his father. What joy for a parent!

Why couldn't the disciples cast out this demon? The context indicates that they may have tried to exorcise the demon in their own power, with not enough prayer and not enough faith. Maybe they were filled with pride because of the new power and authority over demons that the Lord had given them. Perhaps they needed to be humbled. We don't know for sure, but it does bring us to our doctrinal teaching points.

Doctrinal Points

1. Discipleship involves mountaintop and valley experiences.

Notice, *"it happened on the next day."* The next day! What a difference a day makes! The day before they had enjoyed a mountaintop experience with the Lord at the Mount of Transfiguration. What an awesome time that must have been - Peter, James, and John saw the Lord in His glory!

But now they were no longer alone with the Lord on the mountaintop. Now they were down in the valley with crowds of people – people who had problems, and not easy problems, or problems that could be avoided. Here was a father with a demon-possessed son who convulsed, foamed at the mouth and caused physical damage to himself. They couldn't just walk away from a problem like this, especially when the father was desperately calling out for help. I can imagine the thoughts of the disciples after they were unsuccessful in helping with his problem. "What are we doing here anyway? Let's go back to the mountaintop - it was so much more pleasant there. We don't like people problems and we don't like problem people." Sound familiar? But God's will at this point was to deal with the problems in the valley, not to retreat back to the mountaintop.

Discipleship involves mountaintop and valley experiences. We all love the mountaintop experiences: wonderful times in the Word when we sense the presence of the Lord, or great Christian retreats where we experience good ministry and encouraging fellowship. But we are also called to serve the Lord "in the valley" - and that is not always a pleasant experience. Discipleship includes "grunt work" for the Lord, "grit your teeth" work for the Lord, and "get your hands dirty" work for the Lord! Doing unpleasant tasks is part of discipleship. Helping people who have been ravaged by sin - mentally, emotionally and physically - is hard, and draining, and unpleasant. But discipleship involves both mountaintop and valley experiences.

2. Discipleship demands humble and tolerant attitudes.

Verses 43-48: And they were all amazed at the majesty of God. But while everyone marveled at all the things which Jesus did, He said to His disciples, 44 "Let these words sink down into your ears, for the Son of Man is about to be betrayed into the hands of men." 45 But they did not understand this saying, and it was hidden from them so that they did not perceive it; and they were afraid to ask Him about this saying. 46 Then a dispute arose among them as to which of them would be

greatest. 47 And Jesus, perceiving the thought of their heart, took a little child and set him by Him, 48 and said to them, "Whoever receives this little child in My name receives Me; and whoever receives Me receives Him who sent Me. For he who is least among you all will be great."

In verses 44 and 45, the Lord once again reminded the disciples that even though the people were marveling at His miracles, the leaders of the nation were going to reject Him. The disciples still could not understand what the Lord was saying and were afraid to ask Him for clarification. Instead, they began to argue about who should be the greatest in the Kingdom! (We would never do anything like this, would we?) Unfortunately, we're too much like the disciples at this point! So often we're thinking, "What's in it for me?" or "How can I make a name for myself?"

The Lord knew exactly what the disciples were thinking, and He used a little child as an object lesson in humility. *"And Jesus, perceiving the thought of their heart, took a little child and set him by Him, and said to them, "Whoever receives this little child in My name receives Me; and whoever receives Me receives Him who sent Me. For he who is least among you all will be great" (v47-48).* The point of the object lesson is obvious. If we want to be great in the Kingdom, we must be willing to humble ourselves and identify with the least and lowliest of God's children. We must be willing to humbly serve people whom our culture views as insignificant, or despised, or weak (as illustrated by the child). Discipleship demands humility.

We have a further lesson in discipleship in verses 49-50: *"Now John answered and said, "Master, we saw someone casting out demons in Your name, and we forbade him because he does not follow with us." But Jesus said to him, "Do not forbid him, for he who is not against us is on our side."* We're not sure what triggered John to recall this incident. Maybe it was the mention of "My name" (v48). In any case, the Lord used this occasion to teach the disciples another lesson in discipleship: tolerance. In Christian service, **he who is not against you is for you.**

What's the difference between this statement and the Lord's comment in Luke 11:43: *"He who is not with Me is against Me."* The difference is the Person and Work of Jesus Christ. In the matter of salvation, there can be no neutrality. A person who is not with Jesus Christ in regard to His Person and His Work on the cross is against Him.

In reference to Christian service, however (and that's the topic here in Luke 9), a person who is doing some service in the name of Christ is "for you" – on your side - even though they're not part of your ministry, or you're not part of their ministry. It's a matter of tolerance. We can agree to differ in some areas of life or practice **as long as we are united in the doctrine of Christ.** Discipleship demands humble and tolerant attitudes.

Practical Application

1. Your heart speaks louder than your words or actions.

We all know the saying, “Actions speak louder than words” - but the Bible goes one step farther. Verse 47 says that the Lord perceived the thoughts of their hearts. Only God can do that. Words and actions can mask a person’s real motives and hidden agendas, but God is omniscient. He knows everything, including the thoughts and motives of our hearts. To God, your heart speaks louder than your words or actions!

2. Don’t let self-importance keep you from Scriptural insight!

In verse 44, the Lord said to His disciples, *“Let these words sink down into your ears, for the Son of Man is about to be betrayed into the hands of men.”* The disciples did not understand His words. The meaning was hidden from them so that they didn’t perceive it, and they were afraid to ask Him what He was saying.

Why didn’t the disciples have insight into what the Lord was saying here? The key is in verse 46 - they were thinking about who was going to be the greatest in the Kingdom! The disciples didn’t have insight into what the Lord was teaching them about His coming death and resurrection because they were selfishly thinking about who would to be the most important person in the Lord’s coming Kingdom.

This same moral principle is true today. The more we think about ourselves, and “what’s in it for me?” and our own personal importance, the less insight we’ll have into the meaning of the Scriptures. Do you want to understand the Bible? Don’t let self-importance keep you from insight into Scripture!