

The Lord Heals a Demon-Possessed Boy

Mark 9:14-29

Mark 9:14-29 – “And when He came to the disciples, He saw a great multitude around them, and scribes disputing with them. ¹⁵ Immediately, when they saw Him, all the people were greatly amazed, and running to Him, greeted Him. ¹⁶ And He asked the scribes, “What are you discussing with them?”

¹⁷ Then one of the crowd answered and said, “Teacher, I brought You my son, who has a mute spirit. ¹⁸ And wherever it seizes him, it throws him down; he foams at the mouth, gnashes his teeth, and becomes rigid. So I spoke to Your disciples, that they should cast it out, but they could not.”

¹⁹ He answered him and said, “O faithless generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I bear with you? Bring him to Me.” ²⁰ Then they brought him to Him. And when he saw Him, immediately the spirit convulsed him, and he fell on the ground and wallowed, foaming at the mouth.

²¹ So He asked his father, “How long has this been happening to him?” And he said, “From childhood. ²² And often he has thrown him both into the fire and into the water to destroy him. But if You can do anything, have compassion on us and help us.”

²³ Jesus said to him, “If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes.” ²⁴ Immediately the father of the child cried out and said with tears, “Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!”

²⁵ When Jesus saw that the people came running together, He rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it: “Deaf and dumb spirit, I command you, come out of him and enter him no more!” ²⁶ Then the spirit cried out, convulsed him greatly, and came out of him. And he became as one dead, so that many said, “He is dead.” ²⁷ But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up, and he arose.

²⁸ And when He had come into the house, His disciples asked Him privately, “Why could we not cast it out?” ²⁹ So He said to them, “This kind can come out by nothing but prayer and fasting.”

Background Notes

The setting for this miracle was near the Mount of Transfiguration. Along with Peter, James, and John, the Lord had just descended from the mountain. When they came to the other disciples, they found a great crowd gathered around, and the scribes (the lawyers of the day) were arguing with the disciples. We're not told what the argument was about, but most likely it had something to do with the fact that the disciples were unable to cast out an evil spirit from a demon-possessed boy.

When the Lord arrived on the scene, the people were greatly amazed. Why? It has been suggested that some kind of afterglow from the Transfiguration remained with the Lord, and that may be so. On the other hand, maybe they were amazed that the Lord suddenly and unexpectedly appeared at just this opportune time. As the father of the demon-

possessed boy described his symptoms, the poor boy suffered one of his seizures, convulsing and foaming at the mouth. This description sounds very much like a “grand mal” epileptic seizure. In fact, in the parallel account in Matthew 17, some translations call his condition epilepsy. However, it would be very wrong to jump to the conclusion that all epilepsy is caused by evil spirits. No, epilepsy is a medical disorder, but certain kinds of demon possession can cause epileptic-like seizures. That was true then and today.

Certainly we see here the devastating designs that the demonic kingdom has on humanity. Look at verse 22. “*Often he has thrown him both into the fire and into the water to destroy him.*” The demonic kingdom is out to destroy humanity. Only in Christ is there full deliverance!

When the Lord cast the demon out of the boy, he referred to it as the deaf and dumb spirit (v25). Apparently the evil spirit caused the boy to be deaf and dumb as well as to suffer epileptic-type seizures.

Notice the Lord commanded the demon never to enter the boy again: “*I command you, come out of him and enter him no more!*”(v25). It is possible for demons to come and go in demon-possessed people. It’s possible that in some cases of “multiple personalities,” that may be exactly what’s going on – certain demons coming and going.

In any case, there is full deliverance in Christ, both then and today.

Doctrinal Points

1. Full deliverance from demonic effects is found in Christ.

Notice, by the way, that the deliverance is not painless. Verse 26: “*Then the spirit cried out, convulsed him greatly, and came out of him. And he became as one dead, so that many said, “He is dead.”*” In fact, to the casual onlooker, the boy appeared to be in an even worse condition than before the Lord began dealing with him.

This pain was part of the healing process, just as a doctor may have to cause pain with the surgical scalpel in order to bring about healing. The situation appeared worse than when it started, but it was actually part of the healing process. Full deliverance from demonic effects is found in Jesus Christ - and in Christ alone.

2. Spiritual power is always available, but it is not always appropriated.

In verse 18, the disciples could not cast out the evil spirit. Why not? It was not because spiritual power was not available. When the Lord appointed the twelve, Mark 3:14-15 says: “*Then He appointed twelve, that they might be with Him and that He might send them out to preach, and to have power to heal sicknesses and to cast out demons.*” Also in Mark 6:7, “*He called the twelve to Himself, and began to send them out two by two, and gave them power over unclean spirits.*” So spiritual power was available, but in this case it was not appropriated. The disciples could not cast out the evil spirit.

From this portion in Mark we see at least two reasons why they were not able to appropriate the spiritual power that was needed:

a. First of all, *they had no faith*. The Lord said to them, “*O faithless generation*” (v19)! Apparently the disciples thought they could cast out the demon with their own power, or possibly that the spiritual power that had been given to them was now their own. They were wrong. Spiritual power belongs to God. Spiritual power is not ours. It’s available to us, but that power must be appropriated from God by faith.

b. Second, *they hadn’t prayed*. The Lord said, *This kind can come out by nothing but prayer and fasting*” (v29). Spiritual power cannot be appropriated without prayer, and they hadn’t prayed. “This kind”, by the way, may refer to a certain kind of demon, or it may just refer to demons in general. In any case, prayer is a *must* for the appropriation of spiritual power.

The phrase “*and fasting*” at the end of verse 29 is found in some translations, but not in others. There is a question here as to the early manuscripts. If “*and fasting*” is part of the original manuscript of the Gospel of Mark, it would show that another principle for appropriating spiritual power would be self-denial.

Spiritual power is always available to us, but it’s not always appropriated because of ***no faith, no prayer, and no self-denial***.

3. God honors an imperfect faith if it is a genuine faith.

In verse 22 the father said, “*But if You can do anything, have compassion on us and help us.*” The Lord answered, “*If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes.*” In other words, the question was not, “Is there enough faith?” The question was, “Is the Lord able to do anything?”

By the way, when the Lord said, “*If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes*” He was **not** saying that we can have anything we want if we believe hard enough! There’s no idea here of “the power of positive thinking”! The Lord meant that God’s power is great enough to meet any need. As we will read in Mark 10:27, “*With men it is impossible, but not with God, for with God, all things are possible.*”

In verse 24, the father responded, “*Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!*” Have you ever prayed that prayer? I know I have. You see, our faith is never perfect. Doubts and questions can arise. Belief and unbelief are sometimes mixed. But the good news is this: God knows our imperfect faith, and God honors an imperfect faith - *if it is a genuine faith*. As long as the faith is genuine and placed in the Lord Himself, God honors an imperfect faith. The Lord healed the boy. Thus God honored that father’s faith, even though it may have been weak and small, and maybe even doubtful. So it is in our lives as well. God honors an imperfect faith if it is a genuine faith. What an encouraging truth!

Practical Applications

1. We can't stay on the mountaintop.

Peter, James, and John had just enjoyed a great mountaintop experience on the Mount of Transfiguration. But now they had come down from the mountain and were involved in a very messy situation – a boy convulsing on the ground, in uncontrollable spasms and foaming at the mouth. What a difference from the mountaintop experience! And yet this was God's will for them.

The same is true for us, and we have a picture of that principle here. God gives us wonderful mountaintop experiences - spiritual experiences that are pleasant and that can recharge us spiritually. But we can't stay on the mountaintop! There's work to be done, and it's not all pleasant. There are many needs to be met. Are we willing to get our hands dirty?

When I worked with the Young Life ministry, I loved the pleasant mountaintop experiences of summer camp where we would be exposed to the beauty of God's creation on the literal mountaintops of Colorado. But other experiences in that ministry were not so pleasant. Back in the city, dealing with the problems of kids who had been abused or had come from broken homes was not pleasant, but it was necessary. We can praise the Lord for the mountaintop experiences that He gives us, but remember - we can't stay on the mountaintop.

2. The Lord can help you when His disciples fail you.

Can you imagine the frustration of the boy's father before the Lord arrived on the scene? He had brought the boy to the disciples - and they couldn't help! They were arguing with the scribes, and it looks like they didn't have much compassion as well.

Have you ever turned to fellow believers for help, but help just wasn't there? They let you down. They seem more interested in winning theological arguments than in caring for you. Well, be encouraged. The Lord can help you when His disciples fail you!

Notice that the Lord had compassion for the man and his son. The Lord was concerned: *"How long has this been happening to him?"* And then He helped!

The Lord is concerned about your needs. He cares about you - and He can help. Are you in a situation right now, where fellow believers have let you down? Turn to the Lord for His help. Remember, the Lord can help you, even when His disciples fail you!