

## The Lord Heals a Demon-Possessed Boy

Matthew 17:14-21

Matthew 17:14-21 - *“And when they had come to the multitude, a man came to Him, kneeling down to Him and saying, <sup>15</sup> ‘Lord, have mercy on my son, for he is an epileptic and suffers severely; for he often falls into the fire and often into the water. <sup>16</sup> So I brought him to Your disciples, but they could not cure him.’ <sup>17</sup> Then Jesus answered and said, ‘O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I bear with you? Bring him here to Me.’ <sup>18</sup> And Jesus rebuked the demon, and it came out of him; and the child was cured from that very hour. <sup>19</sup> Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, ‘Why could we not cast it out?’ <sup>20</sup> So Jesus said to them, ‘Because of your unbelief; for assuredly, I say to you, if you have faith as a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you. <sup>21</sup> However, this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting.’”*

### Background Notes

While the Lord and the inner core of the disciples, Peter, James, and John, were on the Mount of Transfiguration, the other nine disciples were with the multitudes near the base of the mountain. During this time, a man brought his demon-possessed son to the disciples for healing, but the disciples could not cure the boy. In Matthew 10 the twelve disciples had been given power to cast out demons, but in this case the nine disciples were powerless to cast out the demon.

When the Lord arrived at the foot of the mountain, the man brought his son to the Lord and begged for mercy: *“And when they had come to the multitude, a man came to Him, kneeling down to Him and saying, ‘Lord, have mercy on my son, for he is an epileptic and suffers severely; for he often falls into the fire and often into the water. So I brought him to Your disciples, but they could not cure him.’”*

The demon caused the boy to have seizures. During the seizures the boy would often fall into the water or into cooking fires. The parallel account in the Gospel of Mark says that the demonic spirit caused the boy to convulse and foam at the mouth. *“They brought him to Him [Jesus]. And when he saw Him, immediately the spirit convulsed him, and he fell on the ground and wallowed, foaming at the mouth. So He asked his father, ‘How long has this been happening to him?’ And he said, ‘From childhood. 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’ (Mark 9:20-22).*

The boy's father said to the Lord, *"So I brought him to Your disciples, but they could not cure him. Then Jesus answered and said, "O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I bear with you? Bring him here to Me" (Matthew 17:16).* The Lord was not addressing this comment about the faithless generation to the man only, but to everyone in general, including the disciples. The people gathered around were a cross-section of a generation of people who should have shown more faith, but they doubted and questioned God's ability.

When the disciples asked the Lord why they had been unable to cure the boy, the Lord answered, *"Because of your unbelief; for assuredly, I say to you, if you have faith as a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you."* When the Lord talked about "moving a mountain," what did He mean? He was likening a problem or difficulty in a believer's life of faith to a mountain, and he contrasted the tiny size of the mustard seed of faith to the large-sized mountain of problem. His point was that if you have even a very tiny amount of faith, as long as it is genuine faith in the Lord's ability, you can see large problems and difficulties removed, if this is in the will of the Lord.

Are you facing any "mountains" in your life of faith just now? If you are a believer with genuine faith in the Lord Jesus, you can pray in faith and the Lord will give you the answer and solution to that mountain difficulty. The answer may involve some action on your part, but the Lord will definitely show you how to deal with your problem. This doesn't mean that every sickness, or "thorn in the flesh," or financial burden will be taken away - but the Lord will give you the grace to deal with the situation, and thus remove it as a difficulty or problem. His grace and guidance will sustain you, and the "mountain" will no longer be a problem to your walk of faith as a believer. In fact, your faith will be increased! That mountain barrier or obstacle to your life of faith as a believer will be removed.

The apostle Paul had a deep and difficult problem that he called *"a thorn in the flesh."* We don't know what that "thorn" was, but it was a problem for him in his life of faith. Paul begged the Lord three times that it would be taken away. *"I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. And He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Corinthians 12:8-10).*

Paul's "thorn in the flesh" was not taken away, but the Lord gave him the grace to deal with it, so that it was no longer a mountain barrier or obstacle to faith in his life as a believer. We too, can see the mountain barriers removed from our path of faith. The question is - do we have faith the size of a mustard seed?

*"However, this kind [this kind of demon] does not go out except by prayer and fasting" (Matthew 17:21).* Some Bibles omit this verse, and some Bibles put this verse in brackets. Why? Many ancient manuscripts of the Gospel of Matthew

don't have this verse. Manuscripts are hand written copies of Scripture that were transcribed before the printing press was invented, so we can't be 100% sure whether this verse was in the original text of Matthew or not. However, the fact that the parallel passage in Mark 9:29 has a similar verse as part of the text would indicate that the Lord did indeed make this statement. We just don't know for sure whether it was in the original text of Matthew, or added later.

## Doctrinal Points

### 1. There are peaks and valleys in the Christian experience.

As Christians, all of us can remember wonderful "mountaintop experiences" in our Christian lives. Maybe it was sitting around a campfire at a retreat, enjoying a time of worship and fellowship. Maybe it was walking alone on a beach, and experiencing the Lord's presence in a special way. Maybe it was at a retreat where the teaching from the Word was just what you needed. We've all had mountaintop experiences in our walk with the Lord.

For Peter, James and John, the Mount of Transfiguration was a mountaintop experience. Can you imagine their "spiritual high" of seeing the Lord revealed in His glory, and having seen Moses and Elijah? But this great mountaintop experience didn't last forever. Soon they were back down in the valley, and they were confronted with the problem of the demon-possessed boy. What a letdown, after that wonderful mountaintop experience!

There's a spiritual lesson here for us. There are peaks and there are valleys in the Christian experience. Not long ago I returned home from a week of teaching ministry. The people had enjoyed and learned from God's Word, and it was a joyful mountaintop experience for me. But I returned home to a stack of correspondence, including so many emails that I wished that we didn't even own a computer. Can you identify? That was a valley experience! Yet it was a necessary part of my Christian experience, because many of those emails and letters were from people who had important questions about the Bible and the Christian life.

You, too, will experience the necessary valleys of Christian experience, as well as the wonderful mountaintop experiences. There are peaks and valleys in the Christian experience.

### 2. There are cases of demon possession in the Christian experience.

Christians cannot be **possessed** by demons, but Christians may be confronted with cases of demon possession in their Christian experience. Here in Matthew 17, the boy's seizures were caused by a demon, but it would be wrong to conclude that all cases of seizures or unusual behavior are caused by demon possession. No! A medical evaluation for the possible causes should be sought.

However, there are cases of demon possession today that involve illness and other physical problems. Christians should be aware that they may be confronted with such cases, and may even be called on to deal with such cases. Dealing with

possible demonic influence should never be undertaken alone, but only with much prayer, and the support and counsel of godly, competent believers.

Notice the Lord's emphasis on prayer and fasting for casting out such demons. "...*this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting*" (v21). For these situations, fervent prayer involves earnestly laying hold on God for help. Fasting involves keeping self in check. **Both** are needed when confronting cases of demon possession. There may be cases of demon possession in the Christian experience.

## Practical Application

### Bring children to the Lord!

Notice the Lord's command: "*Bring him here to Me.*" What a great command from the Lord! We must bring our children to the Lord – not only when they're physically sick, but when their souls need healing from the disease of sin. Bring children to the Lord!

No one is born a Christian. We must become Christians as individuals -- and the sooner the better! I'm so glad that I became a Christian when I was a child, because who knows where I'd have gotten to, or where I'd be now without the Lord. We're so thankful that all three of our own children became believers when they were young - and now our six grandchildren have come to the Lord for salvation as well.

Bring children to the Lord! This practical application should be an encouragement to many of you who teach Sunday school or VBS or youth groups. Teaching children is a good work! It is following this command of the Lord in verse 17: "*Bring him here to Me.*" **Bring children to the Lord!**