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## Jesus Heals a Demon-Possessed Boy

### Matthew 17:14-20; Mark 9:14-29; Luke 9:37-43a

Jesus heals a demon-possessed boy DIG: Where was Jesus when the nine apostles were trying to drive out the demon? How did this contribute to His frustration? As the boy's father, how would you feel during the argument? How do the contrasts between this encounter and the transfiguration account for the Lord's teaching? Why does Jesus heal the boy before the crowd reaches them? After the healing, what does Christ teach His apostles? What does the phrase: this kind . . . can only come out by prayer and fasting mean? What is the significance of this teaching?

**REFLECT:** When has a glorious mountain top experience in your life been followed by a depressing valley incident? Which builds up your faith more? In which areas of your life do you long to see more faith? Do you sometimes feel the same way as the boy's father when he said: I do believe, but help me overcome my unbelief? What does that mean? Did he believe or not? What possibilities and what abuses come to mind when you think about the fact that everything is possible for one who believes?

The period of relative isolation was now coming to an end. **Jesus** had led **the Twelve** through the experiences of nearly six months, to a more intimate understanding of **His** nature and the true character of **His** Kingdom. **He** had brought **them** to a confession of **their faith** in **His** messiahship and divinity. Finally, **Yeshua ha-Mashiach** had taken the three best equipped and most spiritual of **the apostles** up on **Mount Hermon** for **them** to get a glimpse of **His** true nature so that **they** might have the courage to stand up under the persecution **they** would surely face in light of **His** coming crucifixion.

The scene shifts dramatically from **the mountain** of glory to the valley of despair. From the overwhelming splendor of the unveiled **Messiah** in the presence of **Moses**, **Elijah**, and **God the Father**, from a stunning preview of **the Lord's** Second Coming, **Yeshua** and **His** three **talmidim** descended into the reality of the sinful world at its worst. It is not surprising, therefore, that the first tragic situation our **Savior** encountered upon returning from **the mount** of transfiguration was a lesson about **faith**.

**The next day, when Jesus, Peter, James and John came down from the mountain, a large crowd met them** in the vicinity of Caesarea Philippi. **When they came to the other apostles, they saw a large crowd around them and the Torah-teacher arguing with them (Mark 9:14; Luke 9:37).** Mark has a more complete account of this story than either **Matthew** or **Luke**, and the vivid details suggest the input of **Peter's** eyewitness account. **The Torah-teachers** were arguing with the other nine **talmidim** who had been left behind, and **a large crowd** that had gathered. Since the transfiguration took place on **Mount Hermon**, the presence of **the Torah-teachers** so far north in Palestine indicated **their** concern in monitoring the teaching and preaching of **the maverick Rabbi**.<sup>884</sup>

The basis of the argument was that the nine **talmidim** had tried to drive out a **demon**, but **they** were unable to do so. This demonstrated that **they** still had much to learn. Thus, **the Torah-teachers** were using **their** failure as proof that **Jesus** was not **the Messiah**. It was kind of guilt by association. This was the hour of triumph for **the Torah-teachers**. **The Master** had refused the challenge in Dalmanutha (**to see link click Fv - The Pharisees and Sadducees ask for a Sign**), but, **the apostles** accepted it here, and had failed miserably.

This scene reminds us of Israel's temptation in the wilderness (see my commentary on **Exodus Gq - The Golden Calf Incident**). We should hardly be surprised if **the** nine remaining **talmidim** who were left behind questioned **Christ's** return, just as the Israelites questioned the return of **Moses**. **When the people saw that Moses was so long in coming down from the mountain**, they said: **As for this fellow Moses who brought us up into Egypt, we don't know what has happened to him (Exodus 32:1).**

At that very moment, **Jesus** appeared with **Peter, James** and **John**. **As soon as all the people saw Him, they were overwhelmed with wonder and ran to greet Him** because **He was** now well known from Dan to Beersheba (**Mark 9:15**). **He** came, as always, unexpectedly, and at the most opportune time to provide an answer for the question at hand.

There was an immediate calm. **Christ asked** the nine remaining **talmidim**: **What are you arguing with them about?** But, before **they** could answer, **a man in the crowd** approached Yeshua and knelt before Him begging: **Rabbi, have mercy on my son who is possessed by a demon that has robbed him of speech.** The condition of **the boy** was pitiful and **the father** expressed a personal need (see **En - Four Drastic Changes in Christ's Ministry**). **He** explained: **Whenever it seizes him, he suffers greatly. It throws him to the ground and he often falls into the fires or into the water. He foams at**

**the mouth, gnashes his teeth and becomes rigid (Matthew 17:14-15; Mark 9:16-18a).** It was an extremely violent **demon** and seemed like a hopeless case.

**The father** had come in search of **the Master Himself**, but only found the nine **apostles**. Doubtless the nine had fully expected to be able to **drive the demon out**. Had that not been a part of **their** commission (**Mark 3:15**), and had **they** not already been successful at it (**Mk 6:13**)? **He** explained to **the miracle working Rabbi**, **“I asked your talmidim to drive the demon out, but they could not heal him”** (**Mt 17:16; Mk 9:18b**). What had gone wrong? **Their** failure was not due to the fact that **Jesus** wasn't with **them**, because **He** had not been with **them** when **they** were previously successful. **They** still had **the Lord's** promise of **His** power, yet **they could not heal the boy**. The reason for **their** failure was simple. **They** failed to use the power available to **them**.

**The apostles'** faithless impotence not only grieved **the boy's father**, but **Yeshua** as well. Speaking to **the apostles** and **the large crowd** rather than **the man** who had just confronted **Him**, **the Lord** answered perhaps as much to **Himself** as to them: **You unbelieving and wicked generation, Jesus replied: how long shall I stay with you? How long shall I put up with you?** Here **the Galilean Rabbi** gives us a rare glimpse into the depths of **His** human emotion and divine soul. Having been accustomed from eternity past to having the angels instantly do **His** bidding, **He** was grieved at the spiritual blindness of **ADONAI's** people, Isra'el, especially **His apostles**, whom **He** had personally chosen, taught, and empowered with unique power and authority. The entire **generation** of Israelites were faithless; represented on this occasion by **the large crowd, the talmidim**, and the self-righteous **Torah-teachers** who were there to trap and discredit **the Lord** if they could.<sup>885</sup>



The next moment **Christ** turned to **the father** and said: **Bring your son here to Me.** Here the deadly conflict between **the Lord** and demonic powers is clearly seen. **Even while the boy was coming, when the demon saw Jesus, it immediately threw him to the**

ground in a convulsion. He fell to the ground and rolled around, foaming at the mouth (Matthew 17:17; Mark 9:19-20; Luke 9:41-42a). What a sad spectacle it was!

Messiah asked the boy's father: **How long has he been like this?** From childhood, he answered. **It has often thrown him into fire or water to kill him.** When the father left home to bring his son to Yeshua's apostles, he apparently believed his son could be healed. But, now he was not so sure and hopefully said: **But if you can do anything, take pity on us and help us (Mark 9:21-22).** He didn't doubt the Lord's ability, but rather His willingness. Was He stronger than His talmidim? He would soon find out.

**If I can do anything?** Jesus immediately turned the question around. The question was not if the Creator who spoke the world into existence could do anything. The question was did the father have enough faith! **Everything is possible for one who believes.** Due to the changes in Christ's ministry after His rejection, Yeshua needed a demonstration of faith. Immediately the boy's father exclaimed: **I do believe; I want to believe.** But he recognized that his faith was far from perfect. It was still mixed with unbelief. So he pleaded, please **help me overcome my unbelief (Mark 9:23-24)!** The father's statements are not as contradictory as they may seem because we all have experienced questions about the depth of our faith from time to time.

Jesus saw that a crowd was running to the scene. The mention of a crowd running to the scene seems strange in view of Mark 9:14, which states that a large crowd was already there. No mention is made of the large crowd leaving so we must assume that the crowd here is in addition to the first one.



Once again, due to the changes in **Christ's** ministry after **His** rejection, miracles were not meant to convince the masses that **He** was the **Messiah**. So **Yeshua** performed this miracle before **the crowd** arrived. **He rebuked the deaf and mute spirit** by saying: **I command you, come out of him and never enter him again**. **The demon** realized that **it** was going to be driven **out** and made one last attempt to destroy **the boy**; **the demon shrieked, convulsed him violently and came out of him**. **The man's son was healed at that very moment (Matthew 17:18; Mark 9:25-26a; Luke 9:42b)**. **Mark's** account also included an echo of the resurrection. **The boy looked so much like a corpse that many thought He was dead. But Jesus took him by the hand, lifted him to his feet, and as he stood up the Lord gave the boy back to his father. And they were all amazed at the greatness of God (Mark 9:26b-27; Luke 9:43)**. This **healing** should not be interpreted as a guarantee of **healing** for all followers of **Yeshua**. We cannot play **God** and demand that **He** heal us because **the Messiah Himself** endured great pain and suffering in order to fulfill **His** calling. However, the **healing** of this physical condition and **demon** possession is a beautiful example of **Christ's** power in this specific case.

**His apostles** must have been both **amazed** and perplexed, for **after Jesus had gone indoors, they came to Him privately** and asked: **Why couldn't we drive out the demon?** There are two basic reasons **Christ** gives. First, **He replied: Because you have so little faith**. Apparently **they** had taken the power given **them** or had come to believe that it was inherent in **themselves**. So **they** no longer depended prayerfully on **God** for it, and **their** failure showed **their** lack of **prayer**. Notice that it was **the apostles** who lacked **faith** - not **the man**. The second reason was that that **kind** of a **demon** could **only come out by prayer and fasting (Matthew 17:19-20a; Mark 9:28-29 NKJV)**.

When **Jesus** said: **This kind . . . can only come out by prayer**, what **kind** was **He** talking about? **It was a spirit that had robbed the boy of his speech (Mark 9:17)**. In other words, it was a **mute demon** (see [Ek](#) - **It is only by Beelzebub, the Prince of Demons, that This Fellow Drives out Demons**)! **Jesus** verified that **the driving out** of a **mute demon** was very different. The Pharisees could **drive out** many kinds of **demons**, but not a **mute demon**! Later, at the great white throne judgment those like them would say: **Lord, Lord, did we not drive out demons in your name (Matthew 7:22)?** Up to now **the talmidim** would simply **drive out demons** in **Jesus' name**. That was the only method **the Twelve** needed to use. But, a **mute demon** was different. **They** couldn't just **drive it out** . . . **they** had to **pray it out**.

To emphasize **His** point, **Jesus** shared an amazing truth of the Kingdom. In order to experience some of the **God's** great power, a person doesn't need to be a great spiritual



giant. Surprisingly, **He** continued, saying: **Truly I tell you, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, "Move from here to there," and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you (Matthew 17:20b).** Whenever the word **mountain** is used symbolically, it is always the symbol of a king, kingdom or throne. The kingdom they just encountered was the kingdom of Satan.

The lesson should be as clear to us today as it was to **His apostles** then. Even with a small amount of **faith** on our part, **God** can accomplish great things. The teaching was even more striking in the context of this encounter, as the three **talmidim** had just descended from the tallest mountain in Isra'el, Mount Hermon. From the smallest **seed** of spiritual faith even **this mountain** (the kingdom of the Adversary) could potentially be **moved**.

**Yeshua** even expanded the possibilities by emphasizing that nothing will be impossible for those who possess such **faith**. Once again, however, we must be careful to avoid interpreting more in a passage than is allowed by the context of the whole Bible. This statement is not license to impose our own foolish ideas over the mandate of **God Himself**. In another context **Jesus** said: **You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it (John 14:14).** It is not a blank check for our own desires, but answers will come, assuming we ask it according to **God's will** - as **Jesus Himself** modeled for us when **He** prayed: **Father, if You are willing, remove this cup from Me; yet not My will, but Yours be done (Luke 22:42 NASB).** Nonetheless, the **mustard seed** promise is beautiful and amazing in that it teaches us that incredible things are possible if we trust in **Messiah's** power and submit to **His** will in our lives.<sup>886</sup> **There are two lessons for us here:**

**First, Jesus was not only ready to face the Cross, He was also ready to face common problems of everyday people.** It is a characteristic of human nature that we can face the great crisis moments in our lives with honor and dignity, but, we allow the routine demands of everyday life to irritate, distract and annoy us. We can face the shattering blows of life with a certain heroism, but, we allow the petty pinpricks to upset us. Many of us can face a great loss in our family with a calm serenity and yet lose our temper if our service at a restaurant is bad or a bus is late. The amazing thing about **Jesus** was that **He** could serenely face the cross, and at the same time just as calmly deal with the day-to-day emergencies of life. But, **He** did not keep **God** behind glass, reserved just for emergencies like so many of us do. No, **He** walked the daily paths of life with **God the Father**.

**Second, Messiah came into the world to save the world, and yet, He could give His full and undivided attention to help one single person.** It is much easier to preach the



Gd - Jesus Heals a Demon-Possessed Boy Mt 17:14-20; Mk 9:14-29;  
Lk 9:37-43a | 7

Gospel of love for the whole world than it is to love single, individual, unlovable sinners. It is easy to be filled with affection for broad humanitarian causes, and just as easy to find some excuse not to help one person in need. **Yeshua** had the ability to give **Himself** fully to every person with whom **He** happened to be at the time.<sup>887</sup>

Do you have a burden in your life? Do you have a spiritually sick child? A physically sick spouse? An emotionally sick friend? Do you have financial problems? Do the trials of this life seem so overwhelming at times you just don't know if you can go on another day? Whatever the problems are in your life, you can hear **Jesus** say: **Bring your [burdens] here to Me.**