

Expel Some Only By Prayer

Great memories do not occur often in life; but when they do, they are treasures like gold. I have some wonderful memories such as marrying my wife, the birth of our children, and ministering for my Savior and Lord Jesus Christ on various occasions. But the greatest memory occurred in my youth when I finally realized that I was spiritually dead and going to spend an eternity in hell. That was not the wonderful part of my memory, in case you are wondering. The wonderful part came later when I realized that I had deceived others and myself into believing that I was spiritually alive - a follower of Jesus Christ. The wonderful memory occurred in a classroom at my high school when I bowed my head and asked God to forgive my sins and take control of my life. I was weeping with tears flowing down my cheek. I felt alive for the first time in my life. I had peace and contentment inside. I was happy and looked forward to serving my God.

DISCIPLE'S GREAT MEMORY. The gospels reveal that only three disciples - Peter, James and John - had a great experience on Mount Hermon when Jesus was transfigured. Peter, an eyewitness, wrote about this later in his letter of 2 Peter,

For when He received honor and glory from God the Father, such an utterance as this was made to Him by the Majestic Glory, "This is My beloved Son with whom I am well-pleased"—and we ourselves heard this utterance made from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain. 2 Peter 1:17-18 (NASB)

The golden memory of the transfiguration surely continued as the three walked down the mountain and talked about Elijah and John the Baptist, who

was a partial fulfillment of Elijah's future coming. I suspect that their greatest memory, however, was probably like mine.

It occurred on the day they discovered Jesus was their Messiah. But on this occasion after they had walked down the mountain, they had another wonderful memory.

Our study (Matt. 17:14-21; Mark 9:14-29; Luke 9:37-43) is about an event that these disciples experienced as they walked onto the plain below the mountain. Luke 9:37 tells us that after they had come down from the mountain, on the next day a large crowd met them.

On the next day, when they came down from the mountain, a large crowd met Him. Luke 9:37 (NASB)



Jesus Casts Out Demon

We are also told that some scribes were arguing with the nine disciples who did not go up onto the mountain with Jesus.

When they came back to the disciples, they saw a large crowd around them, and some scribes arguing with them. Mark 9:14 (NASB)

Mark adds in verse 15 that the crowd came running to Jesus as soon as they saw Him. I wonder how Jesus and the other disciples felt when they saw this large crowd running towards them. I wonder what Peter, James and John thought.

THE ARGUMENT. This crowd did not run to Jesus because they wanted to know Him or to sit at His feet and learn spiritual truth. They ran after Him because they were curiosity seekers who wanted an experience - to see a miracle. Some believers today are also trying to find meaning in their spiritual life through miracles and spiritual experiences rather than truly seeking a relationship with Jesus. When some of the runners came close, Jesus asked, "What are you arguing about?" Mark 9:17 says that a man answered Him. If we examine both Mark 9:15 and Luke 9:38-40 we discover that the man was shouting while he was running and then finally kneeled (Matt. 17:14) even while answering Jesus' question. Here is the man's reply,

... "Teacher, I beg You to look at my son, for he is my only boy, and a spirit seizes him, and he suddenly screams, and it throws him into a convulsion with foaming at the mouth; and only with difficulty does it leave him, mauling him as it leaves. I begged Your disciples to cast it out, and they could not." Luke 9:38-40 (NASB)

Matthew 17:15 adds that his son was often falling into the fire and water. Mark 9:17-18 says that the demon made the son mute, slammed the son to the ground, caused him to foam at the mouth, grind his teeth, and he became stiffened. That is, the demon tortured his son. The demon was abusive. This occurs sometimes in demon possession. Demons are powerful. The father wanted relief for his son. He had tried everything he could, except for coming to Jesus. So when

Jesus' disciples came near his home, he went to them thinking they could help. They couldn't.

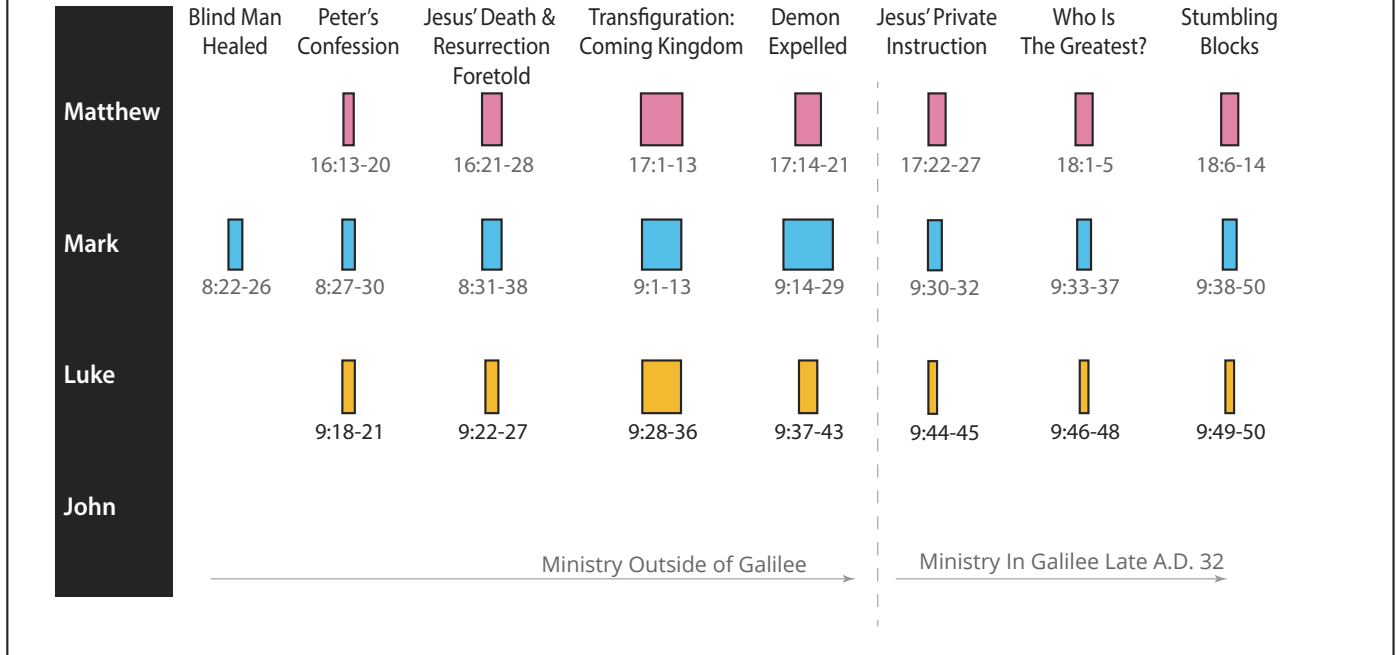
Then the father explained to Jesus that he had begged Jesus' disciples to cast out the demon, but they could not. The Greek word that is translated as "begged" in Luke 9:40 is *deomai*. The word means to urgently beg. That is, this father had urgently or seriously begged the nine disciples to heal his son, but they just could not. How would you have felt? He was probably emotional, feeling desperate, and he must have pleaded all the more when they could not help. What a disappointment and probably a sense of despair had occurred until Jesus came. I would have begged too if one of my children was screaming, convulsing and foaming at the mouth and I had tried everything with no success. We are told that the scribes along with the crowd had gathered to watch and listen. It must have been quite an event to experience better than a hot television program.

HUMANISTIC EXORCISM. Before we go further, it is important to note that the father had said some individuals had already tried to expel the demon, but they were successful only "with difficulty." But the sad news was that the expulsion was not permanent. Earlier in Matthew 12:27, Jesus had already revealed that the Jews were able to cast out demons on their own. How did they do it? Jesus never explains; the gospels never explain, and the rest of the New Testament never explains. The sad part of the father's story is that the former demon(s) returned. Whatever method the Jewish priests used was not effective because it was not permanent. But Jesus' exorcisms were permanent.

Today, many people attend healing meetings seeking healing. They just assume that the healer or the one casting out the demons is filled with the Holy Spirit. But do they know for sure who is doing what? Do they know for sure that the man is truly filled with the Holy Spirit or that perhaps he or she is just like those Jewish priests who temporarily helped this father's son? The real test of a demon exorcist is does the demon return? There are a lot of false "ministers of the Lord" these days.

THE GREAT NEED. It is clear that the nine disciples were inadequate to perform the miracle. But according to Matthew 10:1-8 and Mark 6:6-13, they had been able to expel

Life and Heart of Jesus



demons earlier. So what happened on this occasion? The book of Acts reveals that the apostles had power later to perform such miracles after Jesus' ascension (Acts 3:4-6; 5:12-16) but not this time. Did the father know that they had been able to cast out demons earlier, or did he just assume they could because they were associated with Jesus - His disciples? Whatever his reasons, we are told that he repeatedly begged the nine disciples, but they could not help his son. Consequently, the father came begging and shouting for help.

And a man from the crowd shouted, saying, "Teacher, I beg You to look at my son, for he is my only boy, and a spirit seizes him, and he suddenly screams, and it throws him into a convulsion with foaming at the mouth; and only with difficulty does it leave him, mauling him as it leave. Luke 9:38-39 (NASB)

Imagine the father's emotion and earnestness. Then Jesus responded with what must have been a discouraging statement followed by a flicker of hope.

And He answered them and said, "O unbelieving generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring him to Me!" Mark 9:19 (NASB)

In this simple statement Jesus reveals that He knew the heart of the man. The man had doubts about Jesus. Did the man have doubts because Jesus' disciples couldn't cast out the demon? It is not uncommon for men to doubt teachers and pastors because of the behavior of their followers. The disciples' behavior reflected upon their leader. The disciples could not, but he hoped Jesus could. As a result, Jesus said, "O unbelieving generation, how long shall I be patient with you?" Luke 9:41 adds that the people were "perverted" or "misled." Jesus was surrounded with unbelief. Yet He still healed and showed mercy.

Have you wondered if you needed faith in order for God to heal? If so, read James 5:13-18. There we are told that it is the faith of the elders and not the faith of the one being prayed for that results in healing, Lord willing. In this historical account, the doubting person is the father who awaits Jesus' reply. Will Jesus heal? Can Jesus heal? The man heard

the beautiful words, “Bring him to Me.” The father must have been thrilled.

THE WONDERFUL MIRACLE. Mark 9:20 (Luke 9:42) tells us that while the boy was being brought to Jesus, the demon that possessed him threw him into a seizure.

They brought the boy to Him. When he saw Him, immediately the spirit threw him into a convulsion, and falling to the ground, he began rolling around and foaming at the mouth. Mark 9:20 (NASB)

Imagine the surprise of the disciples, the religious leaders and the crowd. This was the real thing. The father told the truth. The father was not lying. Then Jesus spoke.

And He asked his father, “How long has this been happening to him?” And he said, “From childhood. Mark 9:21 (NASB)

This was a routine event. The passage describes a convulsive seizure - an epileptic seizure. The “foam” is actually increased amounts of saliva that occurs during a seizure. The boy had been having these since birth. The seizures were demonically induced. Why? Check out Mark 9:22.

It has often thrown him both into the fire and into the water to destroy him. But if You can do anything, take pity on us and help us! Mark 9:22 (NASB)

The father adds that the boy was being thrown into fire and water purposefully or intentionally - by a demon. Finally, the father expressed his hidden doubt. He asks, “. . . if You can . . .” The Greek word translated as “can” comes from the Greek word *dunami* which means “to be able or to have power.” That is, the man was asking if Jesus was “able” or had “the power.” If so, please help. But Jesus knew the man had doubts already about His ability to cast out the demon even before the man said it. Once again Jesus displays His deity. Then Jesus responded to the man. When He does, Jesus makes it clear that the issue between them is - can Jesus do this?

And Jesus said to him, “‘If You can?’ All things are possible to him who believes.” Mark 9:23 (NASB)

Jesus says, “Yes!” Yes, I can heal! All things are possible if you believe. This reminds me of a time when I was suffering from asthma as a child. The family was watching Oral Roberts conduct a healing service on television and the preacher encouraged folks to lay hands on one another and pray for healing for any who were sick. So my dad did just that. However, I was never healed. Did my dad not have enough faith? Did I lack the faith? I imagine many families have tried this but without success. Did Jesus’ disciples not have enough faith? It is obvious that the man in this account did not have enough faith in Jesus. Listen to the man’s next statement,

Immediately the boy’s father cried out and said, “I do believe; help my unbelief.” Mark 9:24 (NASB)

Did the folks or the religious leaders not have enough faith? This is a prayer each one of us needs to offer often, “Help my unbelief and increase my faith.”

Most of the crowd was still behind the man and coming quickly. I am sure they wanted to hear and experience every exciting detail. The next verse in Mark says that they were coming rapidly. The Greek grammar implies they were running to Him.

When Jesus saw that a crowd was rapidly gathering, He rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, “You deaf and mute spirit, I command you, come out of him and do not enter him again.” Mark 9:25 (NASB)

While they were coming, the miracle occurred. Jesus simply commanded, “. . . come out . . . and do not enter him again.” Matthew 17:18 says that the boy was healed “at once” or that hour. Mark adds this,

After crying out and throwing him into terrible convulsions, it came out; and the boy became so much like a corpse that most of them said, “He is dead!” But Jesus took him by the hand and

raised him; and he got up. Mark 9:26-27 (NASB)

Luke reveals the response of the crowd,

And they were all amazed at the greatness of God. But while everyone was marveling at all that He was doing, Luke 9:43 (NASB)

This healing did not take weeks or months as some would have us believe today. The healing was immediate. That is power, and it is power that no one else has today.

KEY TO THE MIRACLE. I doubt that the father had come looking for the disciples initially. Most likely he had come looking for Jesus. But when he did not find Jesus he momentarily settled for someone inferior - nine disciples. Then discouragement and disappointment followed because he settled for second best. If he had kept looking for Jesus, he would not have become discouraged; but he would have remained hopeful.

Do you wonder why the disciples couldn't cast out the demon? Didn't they have faith? The disciples did too! Look at the next verse in Mark,

When He came into the house, His disciples began questioning Him privately, "Why could we not drive it out?" Mark 9:28 (NASB)

The disciples were wondering too! They waited until they were alone with Jesus. Then they asked why couldn't they "drive out" the demon. The Greek word that is translated as "drive out" is *ekballo*. It literally means "throw out, to repel, or cast out." So, the disciples were wondering, "What happened?" Then Jesus gave this answer,

And He said to them, "Because of the littleness of your faith; for truly I say to you, if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible to you. Matthew 17:20

The message is their faith was very, very small. It was smaller than a mustard seed. Jesus used a metaphor that was

similar to one used in the Jewish culture of His time. It was common to refer to a preeminent person as a "A rooter up of mountains."¹ That is, the normal person could not uproot a mountain. Only significant individuals could do that. This helps us understand that Jesus was simply saying that someone who had more faith than they had would be a significant man of faith. He would be like the men and women of faith in Hebrews 11.

Some teach that miracles are not occurring today in the lives of believers because they lack faith. Recently, a preacher claimed that we should be able to move mountains just as Jesus said. However, should we really believe that God wants us re-designing His world, re-designing the universe, or changing the shape of someone's face or body at our pleasure? Are we to believe that we should have enough faith to put money in our bank or arbitrarily control the weather and events of the world? If we are realistic, Jesus' point was that their faith was incredibly very small. This was an encouragement to have faith in God. But we will never have enough faith to do such things. Should we believe that we can be like God and create another universe and life? That is why He added this comment,

And He said to them, "This kind cannot come out by anything but prayer." Mark 9:29 (NASB)

Do you see the reference to "kind"? The first thing Jesus says is that this type or kind of demon cannot come out by faith, but only by prayer. That is, there is no faith that the disciples could ever have possessed that would have expelled this type of demon. Did you notice that Jesus did not tell the disciples that they needed more faith or how to get more faith? Instead He told them simply that they should pray to God to cast out this demon. That means that God would cast out the demon. That is the source of ultimate faith and power. There is the truth. These disciples would never have

1. John Lightfoot. Commentary on the New Testament From The Talmud and Hebraica. Hendrickson Publishing. 1989. p. 283. (The Jews used to set out those teachers among them, that were more eminent for the profoundness of their learning, or the splendor of their virtues, by such expressions as this: *רקנר סינה נא* He is a rooter up of (or a remover) of mountains. "Rabbah Joseph is Sinai and Rabbah is a rooter up of mountains." The gloss [or the interpretation is]: "They called Rabbah Joseph Sinai, because he was very skillful in clearing difficulties; and Rabbah Bar Nachmani, A rooter up of mountains, because he had a piercing judgment.")

enough faith to expel this demon on their own. Divine faith was missing. That means the greatest spiritual weapon we have is prayer and nothing less. We should not be looking to human healers to cast out demons. We should have faith in our God and simply ask Him to do it.

CONCLUSION. This important truth was illustrated in the lives of two pastors I know. One of these pastors is a friend who once experienced a case of demon possession. He had met a woman in an apartment building who had supernatural strength and who spoke in an off-voice. Realizing the situation, he called a pastor friend and asked his friend to come to the apartment. When the pastor friend arrived, the demon shouted, “Stay way from me, I know who you are.” The men started praying and the demon finally left. Now that is the power of prayer and faith together. Faith in God is required in the midst of prayer. What a terrific lesson for us.