

"14 When they came back to the disciples, they saw a large crowd around them, and some scribes arguing with them. 15 Immediately, when the entire crowd saw Him, they were amazed and began running up to greet Him. 16 And He asked them, "What are you discussing with them?" 17 And one of the crowd answered Him, "Teacher, I brought You my son, possessed with a spirit which makes him mute; 18 and whenever it seizes him, it slams him to the ground and he foams at the mouth, and grinds his teeth and stiffens out. I told Your disciples to cast it out, and they could not do it." 19 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!" 20 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. 21 And He asked his father, "How long has this been happening to him?" And he said, "From childhood. 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!" 23 And Jesus said to him, "'If You can?' All things are possible to him who believes.'" Mark 9:14-23, NAS95."

When Moses came down to the foot of the glory-peaked Mount Sinai he met rebellion, idolatry AND apostasy. The Lord's own people were dancing before a golden calf and acknowledging it as their god. When Elijah came down from his triumph over the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel he met the threats and swagger of Jezebel and Ahab, and when Jehovah Jesus came down from the mount of transfiguration he met the hatred of the teachers of the law and the unbelief of his disciples. From the mount of transfiguration to the valley of the devil; from the vision of glory to the sight of demon possession; from the company of Moses and Elijah to unbelieving teachers of the law mocking the disciples; from the foretaste of heaven's glory to a scene of sin, sickness and pain; from the voice of God testifying aloud of his love for his Son to the voices of men loudly expressing their disdain for the Son of God and his followers. We come from a mountain where three apostles were awestruck at what they were seeing, to the sight of a tormented child, mute, and under an evil influence, a broken-hearted father and a little band of feeble disciples helpless at Satan's power. What a contrast, and all within one day in the life of Jesus of Nazareth.

Let's look at this scene as it is so fully and fascinatingly described to us here. The narrative of this incident is also found in the gospels of Matthew and Luke, but it is twice as long in the text that is before us. We meet here five sorts of people.

First, there are the teachers of the law who are heckling and taunting Jesus' disciples. A father has brought to them his own son who was possessed by a spirit. It was tormenting him and had robbed the boy of his speech. He has pleaded with Jesus' disciples to drive out the spirit, and they had tried but failed.

For the first time in the gospels we find the Pharisees and scribes arguing with the disciples and not with the Lord Jesus. You notice, when Christ appears, he goes to their aid, "What are you arguing with them about?"

(v.16). They were criticizing Jesus' own disciples for their weakness.

Second, there is the poor father, utterly dejected. "I brought him to you - everyone said that you could cast out demons. I had built up my hopes that you would deliver my dear son and he'd be healed. You couldn't do it.

Third, there are the disciples, "We don't know how to account for it. We treated him just like we acted with all the others who were brought to us

Fourth, there is the general crowd. Many of them could know of someone whose life has been changed by Jesus and they are not going to side too quickly with these teachers of the law. But some maybe 'halting between two opinions'.

There was a fifth party here, and that is the devil triumphant for the moment..

So that is the scene we have at the bottom of the mount of transfiguration. There are the scoffing scribes, and the anxious father, and the broken-hearted disciples, and the undecided crowd looking on, and the rejoicing devil. What more could you want to bring this scene to your mind and your emotions?

Haven't we seen this on a human level from time to time? There is a scene of chaos and confusion, and into the midst of it comes a man of authority.

There was a man called Nicky telling of a Saturday morning on which he had taken his son to play a game of soccer. When he arrived there he discovered that there was no referee and he was cajoled by the boys into refereeing the match - though he had little knowledge of the rules of football. He blew his whistle and the game started, and soon

his judgments were being challenged: "That was a foul!" "No it wasn't." "Yes it was." "He was offside." No he wasn't." "It's not fair. That's cheating." The boys were shouting at one another and soon it was a scene of utter confusion and bitterness as the game was spoiled, until, on his bicycle, unaware of all this chaos, rode up the actual referee. He thought the game was to start an hour later. He blew his whistle, and called the two teams to line up and the game started and it was fun, because a figure of authority who knew the rules had come along. The rules of a game don't destroy the game, they make it.

You see this in many walks of life. The troops are in disarray; the center has almost failed; the enemy is gaining heart; their artillery are opening fire and the ranks are in range. What is going to happen? Along comes the general. He sums up the situation in a moment. "Forward there! Hold that position! Backward there!" The orders are given. New resolve is introduced and the scene changes. The mere presence of this man affects the whole face of the field and now the enemy has a real fight on their hands. So it was at the bottom of the mount of transfiguration when someone turned around and shouted, "Here's Jesus," and he, with his three disciples, arrived at the scene. Immediately Christ begins to ask questions and they are silent before him. Before long he is in complete control: "You deaf and mute spirit . . . I command you, come out of him and never enter him again" (v.25). The thing is done; the victory is achieved; those enemies from the pit now know they have a fearful fight on their hands. You see it during times of spiritual awakening. There is chaos in a meeting with excited people getting up and speaking from all over the building; men and women are swooning and laughing and weeping; others are trying to sing. Then a man stands in the pulpit, addresses them, and grips them with a divine authority. The discord ends and all things are done decently and in order - the sure mark of the Spirit's presence.

Dr Lloyd-Jones was once preaching in Park Baptist Church in and he had not spoken two sentences before a man sitting in the gallery said 'Amen.' Then another sentence and another 'Amen!' Another sentence and another 'Amen!' Dr Lloyd-Jones stopped; he fixed his eye on the man, "My friend, the gospel is to be applied not applauded." The

Divine authority.

What do we have here? A group of Jesus' disciples who were continuing Jesus' ministry but without Jesus' presence. They were bodies trying to act without their Head! How many ministers of the gospel are behaving in that way today? Men and women in the body of Christ - how dependent we are on our great Head and the fullness of authority and power and wisdom that he brings to our work. The Lord Jesus works everything after the counsel of his own will, and so he has deliberately left these men to depend on their own wits, in order to write on their hearts the truth of his great words, "without me you can do nothing" (Jn. 15:5). What a humbling way to learn that lesson. Down they have fallen, utterly humiliated and mocked. J.C.Ryle says, "The things that we learn by smarting experience abide in our memories, while truths heard with the ear are often forgotten. But we may be sure that it was a bitter lesson at the time. We don't love to learn that we can do nothing without Christ."

There came a time in the life of Peter when he felt that he didn't need any warnings from the Lord about watching and praying, or cautions that he was about to deny Jesus three times. Not Peter. The others might, but not him. That pride and the subsequent fall cost Peter bitter tears. The holiest Christian has only what he has received from the fullness of Christ. The Christian's strength is not his own. His power in preaching is not his own. He has nothing but what he has received from Christ. Let him start to live a sensual life, or let him start depending on his gifts, and he will soon discover that he is like Samson, that without his hair he is as weak as any man. Every day we need the presence of Christ. When he gives us the Great Commission to take the gospel into the whole world he says, "Lo! I am with you always! You have to count on me to do this work." He has to be with us in order for the work of the kingdom to be advanced. Only by him we may resist Satan and he will flee from us. With Christ we can overcome the greatest temptations, but without him they'll surely overcome us. At the start of every day we have to pray in our hearts, "Don't leave me for an hour today or I am lost. I don't know what is going to happen today, but I do know that you must

So there is chaos and suspicion and accusation and heartache, and then the Lord Jesus comes and takes a grip on the situation. "'What are you arguing about?' he asked. A man in the crowd answered, 'Teacher, I brought you my son, who is possessed by a spirit which has robbed him of speech. Whenever it seizes him, it throws him to the ground. He foams at the mouth, gnashes his teeth and becomes rigid. I asked your disciples to drive out the spirit, but they could not.' 'O unbelieving generation,' Jesus replied, 'how long shall I stay with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring the boy to me'" (vv. 16-19). Christ sees the unbelief of his own body of disciples. He has left them for a little while, they were not trusting in Christ for the work He empowered them to do. They were not looking to him. They were unbelieving. Their faith was in themselves, and Jesus, fresh from the Transfiguration cries out, "O unbelieving generation!" - in other words, the disciples were just like the rest of this generation - "how long shall I stay with you?" He has tasted the glory of heaven and yet has to stay in this warped world. Would they ever learn? I am asking you to consider whether this might be the Lord's diagnosis of the professing church in the 21st century? Much of it is equipped, and rich, and instructed and yet it is spiritually ineffective. It has divorced itself from Christ through its lack of trust.

But I want you to notice that Jesus said these words aloud. He didn't allow them to think of their failure as some justifiable inadequacy. They couldn't plead that they were only human beings. He charged their consciences with their sin. They were not looking to him and trusting in him and it made him groan. Isn't Christ made sad today by what he sees in the professing church - the Lord in the midst of the throne grieved by the behavior of the body on earth? If we are warned against grieving the Spirit then certainly we may grieve the Spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ. He can say, "I and the Spirit are one." We nailed him to the cross with our sin, and now we make the risen exalted Christ say, "O unbelieving generation," when we fail to trust him as we ought.

Bring the boy to me," (v.19) says Jesus. There were friends of a certain paralysed man

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who carried him all the way to Christ, even removing a section of the roof from the house where Jesus was teaching in order to bring their friend right before our Lord. Others brought their servants or their children to him by name, or sought to bring Christ to their loved ones. The two must come together, Jesus and the one in need. That is what we do in prayer, we bring before the Lord our friends in their need.

Then what happens here when the boy stands before the Savior? All hell is let loose on the boy. We are told that the spirit dominating the boy focused upon Jesus as the boy was brought right up to the Lord. It knew the identity of Christ and so began to wreak its destruction on the lad utterly contemptuously: "it immediately threw the boy into a convulsion. He fell to the ground and rolled around, foaming at the mouth" (v.20).

Jesus comes near to a sinner in the grip of the god of this world. He comes to save the boy, and then there is a torment of evil activity. It is the last desperate flurry of hatred and frustration and fear of the devil. You would imagine that when Jesus drew near to an unbeliever that the signs of his nearness would be a peace and a new openness to the gospel, but here the child is brought to Christ and there is conflict; there is not new life but suffering. The presence of God can produce storm and stress before anything of the life of heaven enters our friends. Don't give up on your friends if they start using bad language - which they never did when you first knew them, and they start to demean the church and talk of "the folly of the gospel." That may be almost inevitable if the Holy Son of God is dealing with them.

Some come to services and gatherings and it seems they are very near the kingdom of heaven, but then start thinking, "How boring it all is! He preaches on and on and on. I don't believe this; I can't believe this; I can't become a Christian; I don't want to become a Christian. I don't feel well when I come here! I am getting nothing out of all this. It's a lot of nonsense. I'm not coming to church again. How much longer is this going on?" This is on one hand the deceit of Satan and on the other the sinful nature kicking against the goad. Sometimes this tag team will drive you into presumption so that you think you are a Christian before you've been born again, or take the opposite tack and will drive you into despair so that you think you never could be.

Sometimes this spirit threw this boy into the water, and sometimes he threw him into the fire. He won't give up easily, and so the father here could look down now at his boy and see him being thrown down on the ground - bang - and then rolling round and round in a torment foaming at the mouth. What a scene when he is brought to Jesus!

Then Jesus continues his pastoring; "How long has he been like this?" he asks the father. "From childhood . . . It has often thrown him into fire or water to kill him." (vv. 21&22).

Wasn't it hard for this man to trust in God? Some of us have known continuous green pastures and still waters. We have known good health and our children have grown up without any serious illnesses. When they were young they came to know the Lord and they married in the Lord. How great is our debt to God. For many Christians it has not been like that. This man had a son who from childhood had to be watched continually. If there was a fire in the house in the winter days the boy had to be watched constantly. If they went to the well for water the mother had to keep his hand tightly in hers. Let them take their eyes off this boy for a moment and he might be in terrible danger. They slept lightly at night and were often binding his burns in the day. Year after year this went on. They loved him and he loved them but how tough it was to believe in Jehovah the God of love when they had to watch all this. How they prayed, and the boy was no better.

Then he brought his son to Jesus. He had heard much of him and the people whose lives he had changed. He had found his disciples at the foot of a mountain and asked them if they would deliver his son from this spirit. They had tried. How they had tried. They had all tried, praying and commanding the demon to leave, doing it in the name of the Lord Jesus. The boy was no better at all. There was no deliverance. The Father's last hope had been Jesus, and now this had failed. Wasn't it hard for a parent to trust in God when his messengers failed to help him?

Then Jesus himself had appeared. What a relief; maybe he could do something, but when he brought his son to him the boy was thrown into a convulsion. The spirit in him seemed to pick him up and slam him down against the ground. He twisted round and

round helplessly in the dirt. There didn't seem to be much sign of healing there.

Wasn't it hard for such a man to trust in the Lord, and love him, and ask him with faith to heal his son? Have you known this? Your prayers unanswered for yourself and your loved ones, and this for many years, but they're not getting better but worse? Satan's activity in them seems to be having free rein doesn't it? So it was with this man.

But still he spoke to Jesus, and this is what he said, "if you can do anything, take pity on us and help us" (v.22). Let us notice carefully Jesus' response because it is one of the most important and misunderstood sentences in the Bible. "'If you can'? said Jesus. 'Everything is possible for him who believes.'" (v.23). There was an 'if' in the man's request, but the father had put it in the wrong place. The Lord Jesus is telling him here to retract the 'if' and put it in its proper position. "There is no 'if' about my power," Jesus is saying, "and no 'if' about my willingness to help your son. The 'if' lies somewhere else. If you can believe; that is the issue, whether you trust my power and compassion, not whether I have power or pity."

These words of Jesus are one of the most abused verses in the Bible. People rip this verse out of its context here and they say it means that all your wishes will come true if you can only believe enough. It means, they claim that if only this father could have believed that his son was going to get better then he would get better. That is what many people think a phrase like this means, but it cannot possibly mean this.

Lets look at three instances in the Bible where people had complete faith in God but where they did not get what they wanted. The first was David's prayer for the healing of his child. He prayed to God for the life of his son. How he prayed, with such earnestness and faith. David had been inspired by the Holy Spirit to confess, "The Lord is my Shepherd, and so I shall not be in want." God would ever supply all his needs. David had that assurance, and so he brings his sick baby to God with the deepest trust in God's power to deliver, the Lord who had saved him from the lion, and the bear, and the Philistine giant, he could certainly save his baby from death. There is no question about David's faith in God's power to heal his child, but the boy did not live.

The second case is Paul crying to God that the thorn in the flesh that God had brought to him might be removed. Paul could pray in faith knowing of all those times when God had delivered him from sickness, danger, the devil and death. He could outline the holiest arguments of the benefits the removal of this thorn would be to himself and to the spread of the kingdom of God. Paul didn't give up easily in bringing this request to God. He had three sessions of intercession focused on this particular request. The prayer was given by God, sustained by the Holy Spirit, and made in faith, and yet the answer was no.

The third case was our Lord praying in the Garden that the cup might pass from him. There was no lack of faith in Christ. He believed God could give him another cup. He believed in God's power and compassion. He loved God with all his heart and he knew God loved him and so there was no weakness in Jesus' prayer. He prayed a number of times, and he also asked his friends to pray with him, and yet the answer was No. So whatever this verse means it doesn't mean that if we only had enough faith when we went to God with something then we would get it, and if we don't get what we ask for then the failure is our lack of faith. Every so called faith-healer says this. They take your money and when you or your loved one fail to get better they tell you that you didn't believe, and to make matters worse they quote these words of Jesus in your face, "Everything is possible for him who believes."

What does this verse mean? Jesus is commenting upon the failure of his disciples to have healed this boy. They had ceased trusting in the Lord. Perhaps they were trusting in formulae, in the vain repetitions of a phrase like, "I command you in Jesus' name come out of him." They were trusting in the fact that months earlier Jesus had commissioned them to preach and heal and cast our demons. They were looking back, or they were looking to words. They were trusting in the engineering of man; they were not going to God, conscious of their great weakness, and saying to him, "Lord, it is in your power to save this boy from this evil spirit. Please will you do so. It will make him a full human being again, and it will give such joy to his parents, and it will give glory to the name of Jesus Christ," and then waiting on God to act. That is not what they were

doing. They were not praying, then acting with the authority given to them but who reserves his right to say No even to believing prayer, to God-honoring and glorifying prayer. We say, "I still trust him. Though he slay me, yet will I trust him."

Everything is possible for the man who is joined to the Lord by saving faith.

"Everything?" What does that mean? It certainly does not mean that I can shrink this earth to size of an apple and put it in my pocket if only I believe I can do it. It doesn't mean that I can run a four minute mile if only I believe, or that it would be possible for me to fly into the air if only I could believe. It cannot mean things like that. What it means is this, that everything that God wants me to do in my life that will honor and glorify him is possible for that person who trusts in God - everything. It means that it is possible for me to care for a boy possessed by an evil spirit, and take the loss of my friends, my business and my life for the sake of the gospel. It means it is possible for me to love my enemies. It is possible for me to speak like Job at a time of incredible grief and say, "The Lord gave and the Lord took away blessed be the name of the Lord." It means, it is possible for me to turn the other cheek, and go the second mile. It means it is possible for me to overcome evil with good. It is possible for me to be poor in spirit, and mourn for my sin, and be meek, and pure in heart. It is possible for me to do everything with all my might to God's glory. It is possible for me, in whatever state I'm in, to be contented. Everything that God can ask of me, whatever duty, whatever command, it is possible for me. It's possible for me bear any burden, to cross any river, to endure any pain, to suffer any loss, to pass through any shame - everything is possible for him who believes.

What do you have to do for all this to be possible? Believe! Trust in the Lord! Not lay everything on the altar. Not attain spiritual perfection. Not have Holy Spirit baptism, but do what these disciples failed to do, keep looking unto Jesus, keep trusting in him and believing in him day by day. Everything is possible to him who believes in Jesus Christ and does not lean on his own understanding.