

- man. By what sort of logic can Jesus, or anyone else, say that John the Baptist is the Elijah intended?
26. What is the central message of the Transfiguration? What do we learn about Jesus from it? What happened to Jesus that made the transfiguration take place? Why was the transfiguration only temporary in the person of Jesus? Where did He get that glorious light that shone out of, or through, His physical human nature? What other Bible passages would help to explain what we should see in this event?
27. When or where is Jesus permanently glorified?

Section 43

JESUS HEALS AND FREES A DEMONIZED BOY

(Parallels: Mark 9:14-29; Luke 9:37-43a)

TEXT: 17:14-21

14 And when they were come to the multitude, there came to him a man, kneeling to him, and saying, 15 Lord, have mercy on my son: for he is epileptic, and suffereth grievously; for oft-times he falleth into the fire, and oft-times into the water. 16 And I brought him to thy disciples, and they could not cure him. 17 And 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 hither to me. 18 And Jesus rebuked him; and the demon went out of him; and the boy was cured from that hour.

19 Then came the disciples to Jesus apart, and said, Why could not we cast it out? 20 And he saith unto them, Because of your little faith: for verily I say unto you, If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you. (Many authorities, some ancient, insert ver. 21: "But this kind goeth not out save by prayer and fasting." See Mark 9:29)

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. Where did the crowd of people come from? Why were they present here?

- b. How did the nine Apostles get embroiled in this embarrassing situation?
- c. Why were the scribes arguing with the Apostles? What do you suppose the argument was about? (Cf. Mk. 9:14, 16)
- d. What was there about Jesus' appearance that caused the crowd to be greatly "amazed" when they saw Him? (Cf. Mk. 9:15)
- e. Why did they all press forward hurriedly to greet Him? (Mk. 9:15)
- f. To whom do you think Jesus addressed His question: "What are you discussing with them?" The scribes? The disciples? The multitudes? (Mk. 9:16)
- g. What is Jesus' intent behind this question? (Mk. 9:16)
- h. In what way is the appeal of the father on behalf of his son the answer to Jesus' question? (cf. Mk. 9:17)
- i. Why do you think the father went into such great detail in his description of his son's case? Would it not have been sufficient to be brief, since anyone who knows Jesus understands that His compassion is aroused by a simple presentation of the problem. What did the father hope to gain by such a thorough recitation of all the symptoms found in the three Gospels?
- j. Does the boy have epilepsy, or is he demon-possessed? How can you distinguish between the two? Is it not evident here that the distraught father is confused by the severer attacks of the disease, to the extent that he sincerely, however mistakenly, ascribes the symptoms to an evil spirit in his boy's body? How do you decide this?
- k. With regard to whom does Jesus sigh: "O faithless and perverse generation, how long am I to be with you and bear with you?" How do you know? Do you think this question indicates Jesus was exasperated? Why?
- l. Why does Jesus take so long to cast out the demon and end the poor sufferer's torments? (See Mk. 9:19-25.) Why waste additional precious seconds merely to ask further details of an already clear case? What possible good could be accomplished by this?
- m. Explain what the father meant by, "I believe; help my unbelief!" (Mk. 9:24)
- n. Do you think Jesus is impatient in throwing the father's statement back at him ("... if you can do anything")? Or is He patiently pointing out the weakness of faith in the father? Why do you decide as you do? (Cf. Mk. 9:23, 24)
- o. Why should Jesus be so concerned about a "crowd running together" (Mk. 9:25), that He would hurry up the casting out of the

demon? Or was He deliberately waiting on their arrival in order to achieve maximum publicity?

- p. In what sense were the witnesses to this miracle "astonished at the majesty of God"? (Lk. 9:43)
- q. If the disciples had at least some faith, however little (Mt. 17:20), why was this insufficient to expel the demon? What kind of faith is "little faith" and why did it fail?
- r. Are there varying kinds of demons? When the disciples asked the Lord why they could not cast it out, His answer was that "this kind cannot be driven out by anything but prayer." (Mk. 9:29) Are there other kinds that can be driven out without prayer? What did Jesus mean?
- s. Why should the Apostles' unbelief prevent their working a miracle? After all, was not the power to do it actually God's? Could He not do anything He desired, notwithstanding their weakness and lack of faith? What did their faith have to do with it anyway?
- t. Should we expect the same miraculous demonstration today of mountain moving? In what sense? Does this mean that we can "pick our mountain" and, "in faith," order it to move, expecting God to do it? If faith is taking the Lord at His word, and He has given us no specific instructions regarding a particular "mountain" in our life, do we have any basis for believing that He will move it, merely because we have determined within ourselves that it has to be moved and simply because we want to believe that He will?
- u. Would you say that modern man is *liberated* from the fear of demons and the devil, or *superstitious and bound* by his bold assumption that "of course, they don't exist!"?

PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

The next day after the Transfiguration, Jesus, Peter, James and John descended from the mountain. They were approaching the other nine Apostles when they noticed a large crowd surrounding them and some theologians debating with them. Suddenly, when all the crowd saw Him, they were awestruck. Running forward to Him, they greeted Him. But He broke in, "What is this argument about? Why are you arguing with them?"

At this point a man pushed out of the crowd and fell to his knees before Jesus, imploring, "Teacher, I brought my son to you. I beg you to be merciful to him and take a look at him, because he is my only boy. He has a demon that makes him speechless. He is an

epileptic and is very ill. When this evil spirit attacks him, he screams unexpectedly. It convulses him, dashing him to the ground. He is always falling into the fire or into water. He foams at the mouth, grits his teeth and becomes rigid. The evil spirit is severely bruising him and is slow to leave him. I brought him to your disciples, begging them to drive out the demon, but they failed! They were not able to heal him."

"O you unbelieving, corrupted children of the times!" Jesus sighed impatiently, "How long must I be among you? How long must I put up with you? Bring your son here to me!"

Then they led the boy to Him. But before the lad could reach Jesus, the demon saw Him. He suddenly threw the child to the ground in a convulsion; and he lay there writhing and foaming at the mouth. Jesus interrogated his father, "How long has he been like this?"

"Ever since he was very small," the father responded. "It is always trying to end his life by casting him into fire or water! But if there is anything you can do, take pity on us and help us!"

But Jesus retorted, "What do you mean: 'IF YOU CAN . . .!'? Everything is possible to the man who believes!"

Instantly the child's father exclaimed, "I do believe! Help me overcome my unbelief!"

Now when Jesus noticed that a crowd was rapidly forming, He spoke sternly to the foul spirit: "You deaf and dumb spirit, it is I who command you to come out of him and never go back again!"

The demon screamed and convulsed him terribly, but came out, leaving the lad like a corpse. This caused most of the people to gasp, "He is dead!"

But Jesus grasped the boy by the hand and lifted him up. He stood up, instantly cured. Then He handed him back to his father. Everybody stood awestruck at this demonstration of the majesty of God.

When He got home, Jesus' disciples came to Him privately, puzzled, "Why is it that we were unable to drive out that demon?"

"Because you believed so little," He replied. "I can assure you that even the tiniest amount of authentic faith is invincible against the most impossible obstacles! Nothing will prove impossible to you. Nothing is effective against this kind of evil spirit, unless you go to God asking Him to drive it out. Cases like this require prayer, not argument."

SUMMARY

Following the Transfiguration, Jesus and His inner circle of Apostles returned to the waiting nine whom they found engaged in argument with some rabbis, at the center of attention of a large crowd. Surprised to see Him back, everyone hurried to welcome Jesus. He, however, went straight to the point, asking what was going on. The father of a demonized epileptic presented his son's case to Jesus, describing the Apostles' failure to expel the demon. The Lord summoned the lad, but the demon made one last effort to break the boy, causing a violent convulsion. When He saw the despairing doubt of the father, He demanded of him unhesitating confidence. To end the further suffering of the boy, Jesus ordered the immediate and permanent expulsion of the demon, and it obeyed, but not without a final struggle which left the child apparently dead. Jesus instantly raised him up perfectly healed, and gave him back to the father, to the reverent amazement of the entire crowd.

Later, the humiliated Apostles asked for a private explanation. The Lord underlined their lack of faith and prayer.

NOTES

II. REPROOF OF FAITHLESSNESS AND FAILURE

A. POWER PARALYZED BY PREOCCUPATION,
PESSIMISM AND PRAYERLESSNESS

As will be seen by a summary comparison with the accounts of Mark and Luke, it is clear that Matthew boils this incident down to a few essential lines. He omits:

1. The greatness of the crowd gathered around the disciples. (Mk. 9:14)
2. The debate raging between the embarrassed disciples and the scribes. (Mk. 9:14, 16)
3. The amazement of the crowd when Jesus suddenly appeared. (Mk. 9:15)
4. Jesus' scolding challenge: "What were you discussing with them?" (Mk. 9:16)
5. The fact that the epileptic demoniac was only a child (Mk. 9:24)

- and that he was an only child (Lk. 9:38).
6. The epileptic symptoms: its seizures, foaming at the mouth and rigidity (Mk. 9:18) and its convulsions (Lk. 9:38).
 7. Whereas Mark and Luke immediately attribute the cause of the disease to a "dumb spirit" (Mk. 9:17) or a "spirit, a demon" (Lk. 9:39, 42), Matthew almost neglects to mention the demon until the actual cure takes place. (Mt. 17:18)
 8. The long conversation between Jesus and the father. (Mk. 9:20-24)
 9. The fact that Jesus was moved to rebuke the unclean spirit when he saw that a crowd was gathering. (Mk. 9:25)
 10. The final convulsions as the demon came out, and Jesus' raising him up (Mk. 9:26f)
 11. Jesus' returning the boy to his father, healed (Lk. 9:42b)
 12. The astonishment of the witnesses at the majesty of God (Lk. 9:43)

Matthew brushes aside these instructive details in order to get down more quickly to the chief features of this incident: the faithlessness and failure of the followers.

17:14 **And when they were come** to the foot of the mountain the next day (Lk. 9:37), they immediately encounter *the multitude* (*tôn óchlon*). The definiteness of this expression makes the reader ask, "What multitude?" Since there was none mentioned as they went up the mountain, McGarvey (*Matthew-Mark*, 152) disposes of the problem by deduction: "From the expression . . . we infer that Jesus and the three had left a multitude when they went into the mountain, and that they now return to the same." The point is, of course, that the presence of the article made such a deduction necessary. The last time a definite "crowd" was mentioned previously, was the multitude present with the disciples during Jesus' sermon on "The Cost of Our Salvation" (Mt. 16:24-28), but it was Mark who mentioned the crowd in that instance, not Matthew. (Mk. 8:34) Perhaps this crowd had remained with Jesus' party until now, lingering around the Lord for further teaching.

The solution may be that suggested by Thayer (*Lexicon*, 433, see his examples): "The article is used with names of things not yet spoken of, in order to show that definite things are referred to, to be distinguished from others of the same kind and easily to be

known from the context . . ." Arndt-Gingrich (552) agrees that "the individualizing article also stands before a common noun which, in a given situation, is given special attention as the only or obvious one of its kind . . ."

The linguistic result would be much like the common American idiom with which people often begin a story: "There was this man . . . ," although we learn who the man was from what follows, not from what precedes, since this is the beginning of the story with a definite demonstrative pronoun!

So, Matthew may mean nothing more than "the (usual) crowd."

As with all crowds, these folks were eager to find Jesus for almost as many different reasons as there were people. They had become, however, unwilling eye-witnesses both of the disciples' humiliation and of the scholars' insinuating questions. The fact that Jesus' sudden return immediately brought them running to greet Him is evidence of where their sympathies lay during the heated discussion between the rabbis and His disciples. But the great amazement of the crowd caused by His sudden appearance so near them must not be attributed to any traces of the radiance of His transfiguration lingering about His face or body. Such a hypothesis is at variance with Jesus' forbidding all publicity connected with His Transfiguration. The better explanation of their amazement is that Jesus' sudden return at just the right moment took everyone by surprise. Those who sided with the rabbis would feel suddenly exposed as if they had been caught in the act. These loyal to Jesus would be happily surprised and relieved that He had arrived at just the right moment.

Upon His descent from the mount of Transfiguration He found disorder among His disciples, however not as crude as Moses found in the camp of Israel when he descended from Sinai. (Ex. 32) But the perversity and faithlessness were no less damning. Hurrying into the midst, Jesus challenged the scribes and His disciples alike with one blistering question: "What were you discussing with them?" (Mk. 9:16)

1. To the gloating scribes, this would mean: "Do you dare say to me what you just said to my disciples?"
2. To the disciples, this would mean: "What was so important that you had to discuss it with THEM, instead of getting on with the business of God?"

The scribes stand voiceless and impotent before His onslaught. Their

silence evidences a felt rebuke for the unjustified revelling over the failure of His disciples. The silence of the nine Apostles betrays their guilty conscience and they have not the courage publicly to admit their failure to their Lord and Master. Despite His fiery challenge, **there came to him a man, kneeling to him.** The desperation of a distraught father pushes him to leave the anonymity of the crowd and rush to his knees to state the pitiful plea in Jesus' presence. Although this is not the answer to Jesus' question, his case is the object around which the entire discussion had hinged.

B. THE POIGNANT PLEA OF A PATHETIC PREDICAMENT

17:15 **Lord.** The other two Evangelists quote him as saying, "Teacher." (Mk. 9:17; Lk. 9:38) Without denying these other testimonies, Matthew seems to underline the proper lordship of Jesus by showing the man's respect for Him. However, since *lord* (*kyrie*) may also mean nothing more than "Sir," an address used in place of the proper name of the person addressed, we cannot assess the depth of the man's faith on the basis of the form of address alone. **Have mercy on my son.** Although the father will later show the inadequacy of his confidence in Jesus' power (Mk. 9:22b), his initial request appeals to Jesus' compassion, as if the Lord's ability to heal the boy were for him a foregone conclusion.

The child is an *epileptic*, but not just an epileptic, because this physical malady is merely the background upon which his demon possession is superimposed. Rather, the cause of the epilepsy and its accompanying symptoms was a demon. (v. 18) On demon possession, see notes on 8:28ff and Seth Wilson's "Notes on Demon Possession" (*Learning From Jesus*, 302ff). Although the NT does not teach that all, or even most, cases of epilepsy were produced by demonic power, this one was. Note that doctor Luke (Col. 4:14), who would have most scientific reason to doubt the demonic cause, is as descriptive as Mark in attributing the seizures to "an unclean spirit, a demon." (Mk. 9:17f, 20, 25; Lk. 9:39, 42f) Matthew himself knew how to distinguish cases that were strictly demonic from those which were normal, non-demonic epileptics, paralytics and other various diseases and pains. (Mt. 4:24) Beware of that indiscriminating pseudo-scholarly talk that affirms that "during this time it seems to have been common to attribute various types of physical difficulties to demon possession. It should be obvious because of this that the term

'demon' in the various Gospel narratives may mean a number of different things, mainly bound up with what were otherwise inexplicable human problems." (McMillan, *Mark*, 113)

For he often falls into the fire and often into the water. Are these phenomena to be attributed to the epileptic seizures or to the attacks of the demon who maliciously tried "to destroy him"? (Mk. 9:22) Certainly the father means that the unexpected effects of the (demonically induced) convulsions required that the boy be constantly watched lest such terrible accidents endanger his life. **Into the fire.** Even non-epileptic children, if not controlled, can be horribly burned by their accidentally falling into the open brazier of live coals used for heating their homes. **Into the water.** The danger of drowning is just as real for a non-swimmer whose body is out of control.

17:16 And I brought him to thy disciples, and they could not cure him. What damning evidence of their failure! The man had originally come, bringing his son to Jesus. (Mk. 9:17) Finding Him temporarily absent, he cheerfully turned to the very men who were reputedly disciples of His, men who had shared His miraculous power, men who should have shared His mind and heart and turned instantly to God in prayer for power. Instead they stood POWERLESS, sputtering over their embarrassing incompetence.

Had this distraught father neglected to try every remedy known in his time? would such a father have left any stone unturned, any solution untried to save his boy? If not, do we not learn that there was nothing in that time equal to the task of liberating him? Was there nothing in all Hebrew culture or religion that could touch that boy? Was there nothing in the refinement and learning of Hellenism to free him? In the presence of the most refined philosophies of his age, that father personally experienced their absolute bankruptcy and helplessness to set his little lad free from the foul demon that enslaved him! Only spiritual power can deal with spiritual problems, and even Jesus' disciples did not possess this.

Thy disciples means the nine Apostles left at the base of the mountain while Jesus ascended with Peter, James and John for prayer. Barnes (*Matthew-Mark*, 179) suggests that the disciples here are not the Apostles, but other followers who attempted to work miracles, for others of His disciples also worked them who were not personal attendants on His ministry. (Mk. 9:38) However, this explanation presupposes that the father had never asked the Apostles to heal his son. But this is highly improbable, since the Nine were physically present in this scene. The father probably would not have asked others

of Jesus' disciples present in the crowd, instead of the Apostles who would presumably have had more faith and more experience and power than those unsuccessful "disciples." On the contrary, the word *disciples* calls us back to remember that the mighty Apostles of the Church of Christ were one day but learners, struggling with doubts and mistakes.

They could not cure him. This is the first time any failure on their part is mentioned in the sacred narrative. Their embarrassed question at the conclusion is further proof that this is the only failure in their ability to work miracles. (17:19; see also Lk. 10:17-20) And, since Jesus showed them the cause of this unsuccessfulness, it is evidence that they learned the lesson of faith. (17:20)

17:17 The pained outcry of our Lord is provoked primarily by the powerlessness of His nine Apostles to heal the boy. Mark 9:18b, 19 underlies this by saying: "I asked your disciples to cast it out, and they were not able." And he answered THEM . . ." Matthew in v. 16 furnished the fullest statement of the disciples' discomfiture. So, his v. 17 most naturally expresses Jesus' chagrin at THEIR ineptness.

Some consider this exclamation as addressed to the unbelief of the relentless scribes who were present, the doubting father, the vacillating multitudes, the human miseries caused by sin and unbelief, as well as the weak faith of the baffled Apostles. Others would inexplicably exempt the Apostles from censure, and blame rather the perversity on the malicious influence of the rabbis at work in the crowd, and only indirectly on the Apostles, if at all. It is not wrong to ascribe perversity and faithlessness on the crowds and the scribes, who undoubtedly were all of this.

In fact, can the Lord be complacent in the face of the pernicious influence that threatens to undermine the faith of His disciples and destroy the precious nucleus He had labored so patiently to create? And should He not denounce it, even in general terms, so that ANYONE who shared these doubts would feel compelled to reaffirm his personal decision about Jesus to follow Him in single-minded faith?

Because they had begun to entertain some of the uncertainty about Jesus and His Messianic methodology and the same doubts that were characteristic of their cultural ambient, the Apostles had been brought back temporarily to the same level of unfaithfulness with their own unbelieving countrymen. This is why they must share in the common condemnation.

O faithless and perverse generation. Often when Jesus used the word *generation*, He considered the whole contemporary generation of Jews as a uniform mass confronting Him. (Cf. Mt. 11:16; 12:41f; 23:36; 24:34; Mk. 13:30; Lk. 7:31; 11:29-32, 50f; 17:25; 21:32) He described that *generation* as "evil" (Mt. 12:45; Lk. 11:29), "evil and adulterous" (Mt. 12:39; 16:4), "adulterous and sinful" (Mk. 8:38). Contemporaries of the Apostles appeared to them as a "crooked generation" (Ac. 2:40) and "crooked and perverse" (Phil. 2:15), like the kind that provoked God in the wilderness (Heb. 3:10). See Arndt-Gingrich on *geneá*, p. 153.

Here, however, He leveled the charge of perverseness and unbelief primarily at His own disciples. How can such an attitude of bitter disappointment be justified? This is an unmitigated outburst of divine judgment upon people to whom had been granted the most extraordinary opportunities to know and obey the truth. Therefore His words are to be taken in their harshest sense. (Cf. Dt. 32:5, 20, esp. in LXX!)

1. There is no necessity to soften the apparent severity of His words, because the disciples had done more than merely empty their reputation as miracle workers. In their self-seeking, they had nearly wrecked the father's faith. They would not have gone away grieved about the poor boy whom they had failed to heal; they would have slunk away, red-faced over their soiled reputation. Consequently, they had embittered the father, armed the scribes with handy arguments, and tarnished the name of the Lord whose discipleship they owned.
2. The Apostles had worked miracles in the name of Jesus before, especially the casting out of demons. (Mt. 10:1, 8; Mk. 6:13) Had they only now succumbed to the temptation to use this power for their own glory "just to show those scribes that they really could"? As a matter of fact, they were arguing with the theologians instead of striving in prayer to God. Apparently they merely began to try to cast out the demon. But the Lord had not told them to TRY to do anything: He told them to CAST THEM OUT through confidence in His authority. (Mt. 10:1, 8) He had provided the power, but they were to furnish the faith. They are now perversely faithless, and He furnished them no power.
3. The perversity of their faithlessness was further evident in, and actually caused by, their running mental debate with Jesus' views of the Messianic Kingdom. They refused to envision any hope of

success for a suffering, dying Messiah who worked so patiently with the most unpromising people and whose notorious lack of economic schemes, power structures and military policy was becoming intolerable. In other words, what they could not rationally accept, they tended to believe impossible. Believing that God in Jesus Christ could work out all the seemingly contradictory details was fundamentally foreign to large segments of their entire way of thinking. THIS IS UNBELIEF, PERVERSE AND WICKED UNFAITHFULNESS! They, too, needed to have Jesus repeat to them: "All things are possible to him who believes!" To the extent that the Apostles shared the feeling that Jesus' views and practice were uneconomical, impractical, unsound, unscholarly and bound to fail, they must suffer His condemnation upon their skeptical age.

Perverse (*diestramméne*, from *diastréfo*) means "twisted, contorted, distorted, disordered, inverted, changed, seduced, depraved." (Rocci, 466) If this sounds too strong for Jesus' Apostles, or even His disciples, Morgan (*Matthew*, 224) shows the connection:

Moreover, the age was not only "faithless"; it was "perverse"; which does not mean merely that it was rebellious; but that it was a generation twisted, and contorted; a generation in which things were out of the regular; a generation distorted in its thinking, in its feeling, in its action; a generation unable to think straightly, to feel thoroughly, to act with rectitude; a generation in which everything was wrong.

The use of the two words "faithless and perverse," indicates a sequence. A generation that loses its faith, becomes distorted, out of shape. A people who live exclusively upon the basis of the things seen, form untrue estimates; their thinking is distorted, their feeling is out of the straight, their activity is iniquity, which simply means crookedness.

There is no more tragic *unbelief* in all the world of any generation than the unbelief of BELIEVERS. There is no *perversity* more wicked than that which claims discipleship to Jesus and claims to be asking honest questions, while attempting to force its own opinions upon Him. It is *perverse* for disciples to refuse, however unconsciously, to let Him be the Teacher and Lord, debating His every word as if He were no more than a common rabbi from the country!

How long shall I be with you to rescue from the abortive attempts of your faithfulness and to teach you until you understand? How

long must I visit you until you take my medicine instead of yours? R. C. Foster (*Standard Lesson Commentary* 1959, 10) thinks that

This sweeping statement of Jesus seems to contrast earth and heaven. It was as if He looked up momentarily to all the glory and implicit obedience which had surrounded Him in heaven. It seems that a bit of nostalgic longing for all He had surrendered to come into this world suddenly swept over His soul. But it was not a word of self-pity, not to mention despair. It was a biting, challenging criticism and protest.

He had put up with this nonsense for almost three years now, and He longs for it all to be over. Not intolerable conditions, but intolerable UNBELIEF, wore Jesus out! In contrast to their wavering and wrongness, He trusted God and lived a life in harmony with His will, and the contrast caused Him pain. He had provided them enough reasons to trust Him implicitly, so He had a right to expect more intelligent faith. This anguished impatience is not evidence of His humanity, but of His deity! In fact, had He been but a mere man, He would have already given up! His impatience, disgust and weariness is just like God's! (Study Ex. 16:28; Nu. 14:11, 27; Isa. 1:14; 7:13; 43:24b; Jer. 4:14, 21; 15:6; Mal. 2:17) This longing for the finish of His earthly mission, even if that meant the cross and suffering in virtual preference to these continual disappointments, shows just how wearying to Jesus must have been the disciples' obtuseness and lack of confidence in Him. Yet, He loved them and continued patiently to minister to their needs until He could truly say, "It is finished!"

Bring him here to me. What imperative majesty there is in this summons! What confidence in the power of God at work in Himself! This prompt, decisive action is an indirect challenge to the scribes, because it focuses everyone's attention on Himself with whom "all things are possible," because HE believes that God will work through Him. It shames the Apostles for their time-wasting, faith-dissipating discussions.

The immediacy of Matthew's narrative omits the delay that occurred between Jesus' order (v. 17) and the expulsion of the demon (v. 18). In fact, Mark and Luke inform us that, while the boy was being brought, the demon, when he came in sight of Jesus, threw him to the ground in a convulsion. (See on 17:21.) At this point the following conversation took place:

C. THE PAINED BUT PERCEPTIVE PLEA OF THE PRESSURED PARENT (Mk. 9:21-24)

Mark 9:21 **And Jesus asked his father, "How long has he had this?"** The Lord's apparently clinical manner is not intended to furnish Himself information for a proper diagnosis, and certainly not to prolong the suffering of the victim and, consequently, of his father. He achieved two purposes by this question: (1) He showed the father His personal concern and steady nerve even though the demon was raging his wildest, and (2) at the same time, He impressed everyone present with the obstinacy and apparent hopelessness of the case, so that they might form some estimate of the supernatural power required to resolve it completely. When combined with the disciples' bafflement and the father's desperation and the scribes' overconfidence and the multitudes' indecision, these two factors are well calculated to throw Jesus' calm mastery of the situation into greater relief. **From childhood** (*paidíōthen*) may not mean too long a time, since the victim was still a "child" (*paidíou*, Mk. 9:24)

Mark 9:22-24 Confident of the Lord's power, the leper had said, "If you will, you can . . ." (Mt. 8:2) The believing Martha showed some uncertainty about whether it would be Jesus' will to raise Lazarus, but she too had no doubt about His power. (Jn. 11:21-27) But this poor doubter, basing his plea only on Jesus' compassion, now cried: **If you can do anything, have pity on us and help us.** Imagine the audacity of saying to Jesus Christ, "If you CAN . . .!" No wonder Jesus exploded, "What do you mean by saying to me, 'If you can . . .'? All the might of the living God is at the disposal of the person who trusts Him!" **Him who believes.** Where personal faith was impossible on the part of the victim, Jesus welcomed the faith expressed by those who brought them. (Cf. 9:2; 15:22, 28) The epileptic boy, victim of a malicious demon, could not be expected to believe, so Jesus requires faith of him who made the request and could believe. When HE breaks down under doubt, the Lord mercifully pricks his conscience to show him where his weakness lay. Note that the Lord expected him to believe in the face of the disciples' humiliating failure and the seemingly unanswerable attacks of the scribes and the deadening confusion of the crowds.

All things are possible to him who believes. Is this a general truth equally applicable to every believer, or to be understood only in this local frame of reference? The most natural explanation is to view Jesus as speaking directly to the need of a man who was clearly

doubting Jesus' ability. There is no suggestion here of Jesus' inability to heal an unbeliever. (See notes on 13:58.) Rather, He hints at the man's possible refusal, or failure, to believe that He could do anything needed. His word intends to stir the father to rid himself of the skepticism implied in his petition. It was the father's own wavering that was rendering the difficult healing even more so. Further, in the presence of the scornful scribes who had exulted over the failure of the nine disciples, Jesus would prove that *all things are possible to Him!* He Himself believed God and He would prove the truth of this doctrine by His miracle.

This passage is no justification for the assumption on the part of some who would take this as an unqualified promise for indiscriminate application, implying that God will automatically bend the universe to suit the fancies of the sincere. In His infinite wisdom, God may actually choose to bless the believer who prays that His will be done, in precisely the form in which the believer requests it. Yet, faith, to be faith, must be based upon objective evidence of God's will. (Ro. 10:17) But "faith" that is based on one's subjective wishes or dreams is not faith, but presumption. The backing of God is not promised for some screwy idea we cook up and attempt "on faith," because Jesus has not obligated God to deliver anything according to our whims.

The father instantly corrected his error, wringing out of his soul the most beautiful, most profound confession of trusting dependence upon God's mercy: **"I believe; help my unbelief!"** What a model for our every prayer in our struggle for righteousness! What profound understanding of the temptations to doubt despite our profession of faith! What humility to bare before the Lord our own unworthiness and lurking mistrust! What genuine confidence in Jesus to help us to greater faith and more real dependence upon His grace and power! What insight to call his little faith "unbelief!" This faith stood out in sharp contrast to the rabbis who had resisted the impact of the evidence and stubbornly insisted on not believing. Recognizing the inadequacy both of the content and of the sufficiency of one's faith, taken together with that intense, overwhelming longing to be all that it is possible for us to be, is the kind of faith that Jesus was longing to find.

What did the father believe? Jesus had been making tremendous, transparent claims to deity, leading men to accept Him as the only one who knew God (Mt. 11:25-30) and as the Forgiver of sins (Mt. 9:6) Despite its admitted weakness, this confession of faith made in

the presence of hostile witnesses admits that Jesus is possessor of divine power and divine truth. No small test this, it involved more than believing that the Nazarene could cure, since the very basis of this miracle was what Jesus claimed to be. Did the father believe this? His reaching out to grasp all the truth may have been caused by the ghastly realization that he only imperfectly saw Jesus as God's Revealer.

Meanwhile, the foaming, convulsing boy was half-carried, half-walked past the embittered critics and incompetent teachers of the age, past the fumbling, faltering followers, past the irresolute and inactive throng, into the presence of the Son of God.

D. THE PITEOUS PRISONER PROMPTLY PURGED OF HIS PERVERSE POSSESSOR

17:18 **And Jesus rebuked him and the demon went out of him,** thus ending years of suffering. (Mk. 9:21) That the Lord desired the clearest, most decisive conclusion to this event, is evidenced by the following considerations:

1. Before rebuking the unclean spirit Jesus waited until He "saw a crowd come running together." (Mk. 9:25)
 - a. A great crowd of people had been present from the outset. (Mk. 9:14) There is no evidence that these ever left. It is psychologically improbable that anyone would move a step until this great question was settled.
 - b. He had reason to await the arrival of newcomers. His purpose in waiting may have been to secure the largest possible number of eyewitnesses to His successful healing of the demoniac boy, since His own disciples had already muddied His reputation by their bungling.
2. When Jesus rebuked the demon, His wording is deliberate, precise and explicit (Mk. 9:25):
 - a. The specific demon causing the malady is singled out by description: "You dumb and deaf spirit . . ." i.e. the demon that caused the boy to be deaf and dumb. Note, Jesus did not address the disease, but the demon. Luke says it precisely: "Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit and healed the boy." (Lk. 9:42)
 - b. Jesus expressed His own personal authority: "I command you" (*egò epitásson soi*). He needed not, as the Apostles, to appeal to

any higher authority. (Cf. Ac. 16:18)

c. A specific order was given: "Come out of him!"

d. A warning admonished: "And never enter him again!" Men may have thought that the return of the convulsions had been associated with the return of the demon. Nevertheless, demons can return to former victims. (Cf. Mt. 12:43-45) However, we have no evidence that any Jesus expelled ever returned. McGarvey (*Fourfold Gospel*, 425) contrasts the particular "malicious effrontery and obstinacy" of this demon with the "cowed supplicating spirit shown by the Gadarene legion," (Mt. 8:28ff), suggesting that this demon might just try it, a possibility that would necessitate this precautionary warning.

3. Had He desired to avoid a valid use of theatrics, He could have shortened His conversation with the boy's father (Mk. 9:20-24) and gotten down to the business of casting out the demon much sooner, and done it instantly without any resistance by the demon. But the way Jesus led the father to deeper faith all the more clearly shows His deliberate intention to glorify God in the most spectacular way possible under the circumstances.
4. Finally, when He actually began the healing itself, He did not forestall the demon's violent, final convulsion which left the boy like a corpse and most of the witnesses convinced of his death. This tense moment furnished Jesus the privilege of lifting the boy up, perfectly and instantly cured. The first step (rebuking the demon) left the audience disappointed, so they were psychologically unready for His last move. The last step left the observers completely breathless and staring in wonder. So, His technique was made far more spectacular by a two-stage process than if He had simply hurried to banish the demon and heal the boy, all in one rapid gesture.

So, it is incorrect to affirm that Jesus' noting the gathering of a crowd caused Him to accelerate the healing, because this is not an example of His Messianic reserve, since there is no hint of an attempt to avoid the spectacular. If we have correctly located in semi-pagan country the mountain at the base of which this event occurred (see on 17:1), there would have been little or no need for silence to forestall unwanted publicity. It was only when He "went on from there and passed through Galilee" that "He would not have any one know it." (Mk. 9:30) Now, however, since His unbelieving, bungling disciples have forced Him to clear His name publicly, He has ample

reason to avoid secrecy on this occasion.

And the demon came out of him, not, however, without violent convulsions that left the lad so much like a corpse that bystanders pronounced the victim dead. Jesus ignored their judgment, took the boy by the hand, lifted him up and he arose, *cured instantly*. (Cf. Mk. 9:26f) The sensitive Luke notices that He "gave him back to his father." (Lk. 9:42) The instantaneous cure shows the decisiveness and completeness of Jesus' power, in contrast to others' time-wasting discussions and neglect of the suffering victim. It also leaves His hecklers suddenly facing the pressure of facts which they must accept (in which case they must repent) or reject (in which case they must invent plausible explanations in the presence of rejoicing crowds, astonished at the majesty of God and marvelling at everything Jesus did! Lk. 9:43). Whereas the disciples had drawn attention to themselves by their faithlessness and failure, the scribes had leveled unjustified criticism at the Lord's power, the demon had succeeded (apparently) in procuring the death of the afflicted lad, the crowds stood around with hands tied by human helplessness, the Lord, on the other hand, acted with compassion and total mastery. This vivid contrast left the crowd standing in awe of God! Lest our short-sighted love for Jesus cause us to be a bit jealous that "all were astonished at the majesty" not of Jesus, but "of God," let us rejoice at this compliment to Jesus whose every move draws men's eyes toward God. It is for this that we love and worship Him!

E. THE APOSTLES' PUZZLEMENT OVER THEIR PITIFUL PRODUCTION

17:19 **Then came the disciples to Jesus apart, and said, Why could we not cast it out?** The Nine had enough personal pride—or was it the timidity of bad conscience?—to reserve for private discussion the postmortem appraisal of their fiasco. In fact, Mark (9:28) notes that "when he had gone home" (*kai eiselthontos autoû eis oîkon*), they approached the Lord.

NOTE: Who went home? Does this genitive absolute refer to the demoniac boy's departure for home, or the return home of Jesus? The last mentioned possible antecedent for pronoun *autoû*, subject to the participle, is the subject of the preceding verb, "he arose, (*aneste*), referring to the boy. If so, then Mark's

expression would mean simply that when the boy left, the crowds apparently dispersed, leaving Jesus alone with His followers who can now ask Him the cause of their vain attempt.

On the other hand, if the pronoun refers to Jesus, Mark may mean that the disciples reserved their question until Jesus had sought lodging in the area. Then, when He had gone indoors, they approached Him. But since *eis oikon* is idiomatic for "home," especially with *eisérchesthai* (See Arndt-Gingrich, 563), Mark may mean that they did not dare bring up the question until they were clear back to Jesus' "home" in Capernaum! (Cf. Mk. 2:1; 9:33) If so, this section is recorded here because of its direct connection with the story of the demonized boy, of which it is the proper theological and psychological conclusion. But, from this standpoint, it serves as more fuel for the fiery debate on "who is greater in the Kingdom of heaven?" (See on Mt. 18:1ff)

It is to their credit, however, that, sooner or later, they **came to Jesus** for the solution to their turmoil.

This question is not proof that the pained lament of Jesus (17:17) could not have been leveled at them, since the formula used by Jesus had been broad enough to include ANY disciples contaminated with the spirit of the age. In fact, the Apostles ask a question which applies only to themselves, for had the answer they expected involved the failure of other "disciples," the question would not have been asked in the first person plural, but "Why could THEY not cast it out?," and, in the absence of the other disciples who presumably would have needed it, the answer becomes only academic information and a general warning to the Twelve. This question is, rather, proof only that they missed the connection Jesus intended to make between their perverse faithlessness and their failure.

Ironically, their failure was absolutely essential to their usefulness to Jesus. It was failure after exhilarating successes had left them elated with an invincible self-confidence. This was a humiliating defeat, but one they needed to see the fallacy of self-confidence and to make these disciples more really trusting, these strong men stronger.

The question may also have been part of the motivation behind the struggle for status in the Kingdom. (See on 18:1.) The Nine admit they could not cast out the demon, while the Three remembered that they themselves had been with Jesus, basking in the light of transfiguration glory. Naturally, these Nine cannot know about the

glory, but if the Three nourished any hopes of promotion (cf. Mt. 20:20-28), this contrast in fortune could not have escaped their notice.

We could not cast it out. This sentence guarantees the authenticity of this account, because the Gospel writers do not hide the weaknesses and failure of characters even this important in their narration. This shame, both in the presence of the multitude that day, as well as in the eyes of the present readers, is evidence of that stern truthfulness that must tell the facts as they occurred without embellishment even to save the influential. Lastly, this question and Jesus' answer is proof positive that they had not failed to work miracles before this time. It was a totally new experience, since, presumably, He could have answered, "You could not cast it out for the same reason you failed before."

1. THE POLLUTING POTENCY OF PRACTICAL PAGANISM

17:20 **Because of your little faith.** The Apostles, not the crowd or the scribes, had possessed but *little faith*. Their failure was not a question of lack of courtesy or skill, courage or readiness, or enthusiasm, or any other excellent quality, but of spiritual power! It was not the obstinacy of this loathsome disease with its foaming convulsions and shrieks, that left them despairing of being able to cure him, because they had faced bad ones before. It was not even this kind of malicious demon that stumped them, because "this kind comes out by prayer." It was not because Jesus was away, because He had commissioned them to cast out demons before in His absence, and they reported no failures then. It was not the heckling opposition of the scribes. Their insinuating questions perhaps contributed to the failure, but could have been silenced by confidence in God, prayer and miraculous success. Rather, it was their lack of confidence in the supernatural power of their Lord, which left them paralyzed in the presence of agonizing human need.

Their confidence in Him had been deeply shaken by His insistence upon the path of shame and suffering and the cross as the only road to glory. Perhaps they had hoped their Rabbi would change the world by an educational process, but now He had demanded their personal participation in the blood and ignominy of His own inevitable martyrdom. Consequently, to the extent that they did not fully trust Him to know, they began to be afraid of Him, even unconsciously, afraid lest He be mistaken, afraid to hold tenaciously to

Him and let Him lead, come what may. However unconsciously and insidiously this distrust grew, it nevertheless left them morally quite some distance from Christ, the Source of their power. At that moment, when face to face with real, demonic power and armed with only a paralyzed dependence upon a Christ only half-trusted, they failed!

Some have supposed that the demonized boy's father's lack of faith might have been a factor in the Apostles' failure. But the man's demonstration of doubt came after Jesus' arrival on the scene and after the Apostles' failure. The man himself had brought his son to Jesus originally. (Mk. 9:17) This is faith. Finding Him away, he asked His disciples to cast it out. (Mk. 9:18) This is cheerful perseverance that welcomes a suitable alternative. The man's desperation and struggles with doubts were caused, not by some original, deeply rooted distrust of Jesus, but by the blundering of the disciples who were supposed to know what they were doing, but clumsily handled the case and consequently collapsed, taking the father down with them! Even if the man himself possessed some faith, his weakness could have been healed by the Apostles' positive dependence upon God, had they but cast themselves on their knees instead of launching a debate with the scribes.

Note that faith is demanded of both: the Apostles and the one who requests the miracle. The mere possession of miracle-working power in the past was no guarantee of their present possession of faith or righteousness or worthiness to be God's representatives. (Cf. Mt. 7:21-23)

1. Even Judas Iscariot had worked these miracles previously. At least, he is not singled out as a non-participant. (Mk. 6:13) But miracles per se did not guarantee his personal honesty. (Jn. 12:6)
2. Remember Samson who would "go out as at other times . . ." but "did not know that the Lord had left him." (Jdg. 16:20)
3. "The Spirit of the Lord departed from King Saul, and an evil spirit from the Lord tormented him." (1 Sa. 16:14) Nevertheless, stubborn in his unbelief, he went out to battle the Philistines, hoping against hope to be able to "beat his luck," the certain death predicted for him by God through Samuel. (1 Sa. 28:3-28; 31:1-13)
4. The sin of Achan compromised the sanctity of Israel, so that, their miraculous victory over Jericho notwithstanding, Israel's first attack on the city of Ai crumpled. God was not with them as

- before! (Josh. 6, 7)
5. Even the mighty Moses buckled under the pressure of constantly having to prove himself the God-sent leader of Israel, and just once took credit for a miracle. Although God could have humiliated Moses and Aaron by letting them fail to bring forth water from the rock, He chose to punish them differently. But He did punish them, "Because you did not believe in me, to sanctify me in the eyes of the people of Israel . . ." (Nu. 20:12)
 6. Remember Peter's imperfect walk on the water. (Mt. 14:28ff and notes.)

So, Jesus' disciples' previously effective ministry became ineffective, because they had grown self-reliant, supposing that busyness and activity could substitute for humility, prayer and worship of God. They had begun to identify their results as their own accomplishments, and this self-trust undermined their confidence in God as the only true Source of their power.

Because of your little faith to depend on and receive God's power. Their faith was not expected to CREATE miracle-working power independent of God's might; it was only expected to COLLABORATE with God in whom their confidence should have rested. It was expected to trust God to do His part perfectly. (See notes on 14:31; also 6:30; 8:26; 16:8 for notes on *little faith*) Faith, as such, does not confer God's power: God does that. Rather, faith makes it appropriate that He exert His power in favor of the believer.

If you have faith as a grain of mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, "Move hence to yonder place," and it will move. This *mountain*, even massive Hermon, then in plain sight, is a symbol of impossible tasks, just as *a grain of mustard seed* symbolizes beautifully the smallest quantity of real spiritual power to fulfill them. That this is figurative, not literal, language, is proven by the Apostles' understanding and practice of what Jesus meant here. They did not go around rearranging earth's geography, but, by the exercise of genuine faith, they certainly "turned the world upside down!" (Cf. Ac. 17:6; Phil. 4:13) They did the impossible.

Some, while admitting that the point of the comparison is the smallness of the mustard seed in contrast to the huge mountain, insist that more is meant. Hendriksen (*Matthew*, 675) says: "A mustard seed (see 13:31) though at first very small, yet, because of its uninterrupted and vital contact with its nourishing environment, grows and grows until it becomes a tree so tall that the

birds of the air come and lodge in its branches. Accordingly, 'faith as a grain of mustard seed' is the kind of trust in God which does not immediately give up in despair when its efforts do not meet with immediate success. It maintains its uninterrupted and vital contact with God and therefore continues to pray fervently, knowing that God in His own time and in His own way will bestow the blessing." That is, does Jesus mean to indicate a faith that, however small initially, will rise to meet the task it faces, in the same way a mustard grain flourishes against its obstacles and becomes a tree at the right time? While this is true of living faith, it seems to be pushing the figure farther than Jesus actually intended it. Others, in a similar vein, suggest: "If you have any of this real faith at all, you possess what is certain to grow into more, and thus you have what will ultimately be competent to remove the most impossible obstacles."

But the Lord's point is not based upon the seeds' growing to be what it should become, but upon *mustard seed* AS IT IS as opposed to the *mountain* AS IT IS. On another occasion when Jesus taught something the disciples thought impossible to accomplish, they exclaimed: "Increase our faith!" His reaction is significantly similar to our present context. (Lk. 17:1-6) What was needed, was not larger faith to meet this "impossible task," but confidence that even the smallest amount of authentic trust in God can accomplish wonders.

But having *little faith* is not equal to having "a little faith" even so small as a *grain of mustard seed*, because, while the latter is indeed small by contrast to the mountain it must move, it is real. *Little faith* is not really faith, but doubt asserting itself as self-trust. Genuine faith is solid confidence in God, does not dictate to God any time schedules, does not waver, does not give up. (Jas. 1:6-8; Lk. 18:1-8) Faith means believing what Jesus says. Ironically, some later reader of Mark's text of this incident (Mk. 9:29) just could not believe that prayer was sufficient, so to the words of the Son of God he added: "and fasting!" Cannot He even be trusted to tell us what is necessary without our doubts reasserting themselves? Faith in Jesus means that He must fill all our vision, His will must be our only standard of judgment. When we permit Him to be measured by human considerations and place Him among other human beings and gauge Him as but one among many other great teachers. His power is not available to us. It is only when we let His Word be the standard by which all

else is judged, when He is Lord of all for us and our only hope, that we can be competent to accomplish the impossible in His service.

Jesus Himself BELIEVED that the Kingdom COULD be established "not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord," and all the mountains of traditional theology, all the mountains of ignorant zeal and deliberate opposition, were no match for Him! (Cf. Zech. 4:6, 7) As later events proved Him right point by point, His words, which now must have seemed so visionary, would have been the pragmatically successful power behind the unflinching courage of these same disciples. Belief did not come easy for them. They were even then totally incapable of grasping the most fundamental concept of God's Kingdom. (See on 17:22f.)

Nothing shall be impossible to you. Although addressed to His ancient disciples, is this promise applicable to modern ones?

1. Hurte (*Restoration NT Commentary*, 37) answers,

No, it can only apply to those who had the gift of power. Christians can appropriate any promise made to them as God's children, but the working of miracles was a special gift bestowed only upon a few. It was true to the apostles in relation to their work, but not to others.

2. However, it is GOD who decides what specific powers He will confer on any one disciple in any given age. Faith lets God decide this. Faith does not desire nor attempt anything but what He desires, a fact that automatically eliminates capricious rearrangements of terrestrial topography and any other supernatural fireworks not within His will. But the question of the hour is not: "Does anyone today have the miraculous power to do the impossible?" but: "Does anyone have faith enough to do all that IS POSSIBLE for him?" The fault of our failure to attain to all that is good, true and noble lies in our shallow, inconstant faith. (Jas. 1:5-8; 4:2, 3; 5:8-11, 13-18)

2. THE PURIFYING POWER OF PERSONAL PENITENCE AND PERSISTENT PRAYER

(17:21 is omitted in the better manuscripts: **But this kind cometh not out except by prayer and fasting.** See Mk. 9:29) Comment is made on this verse, not because Matthew wrote it, since he probably did not, but because Mark says that Jesus said it, and because of its

appropriateness as a comment on Matthew. (This is probably why someone originally copied it from Mark into their copy of Matthew, and a later scribe mistook the marginal note for a textual correction.)

This kind cannot be driven out by anything but prayer. (Mk. 9:29) *This kind* of demon suggests the natural antithesis: "other kinds." Trench (*Notes on Miracles*, 232) believes that

... *this kind* marks that there are orders of evil spirits, that as there is a hierarchy of heaven, so is there an inverted hierarchy of hell. The same is intimated in the mention of the unclean spirit going and taking "seven other spirits more wicked than himself." (Mt. 12:45)

On these hierarchies, remember also Eph. 2:2; 6:12; 1:21.

Are we to infer that "other kinds" of demons were more cowardly, hence more easily cast out? Jewish exorcists apparently attained considerably professional notoriety and success through the use of incantations and magic by which they were able to bring temporary remission for demoniacs. (See on Mt. 12:27; cf. Ac. 19:11-17; see also Josephus, *Antiquities*, VIII, 2, 5) In this case, it would be thought that some demons might be cast out without prayer and dependence upon God. And, if they obtained control over demons by obtaining, through magic, power of Satan or by compromises with him, they could temporarily appear to succeed. But their results were tainted with evil, unlike those of Jesus who caused all to be "astonished at the majesty of God." (*ISBE*, 1068)

This kind, then, speaks of the audacious wickedness and peculiarly determined viciousness of the demon Jesus had just cast out. The demon's maliciousness not only drove him to keep a strangle-hold on the lad despite the disciples' attempts, but appeared obstinately determined to defy the power of Jesus too! (Cf. Mk. 9:20; Lk. 9:42) Further, he took hellish delight in inflicting pain. (Mt. 17:15; Mk. 9:22) Confidence in God gives moral power that commands respect for the man of God determined to expel a demon. But without this fundamental confidence in God's backing, or faith, even the most experienced miracle-worker must back down and admit defeat in the presence of tenacious, malignant spirits of *this kind*.

Besides the disciples' prayerlessness, their floundering is attributable also to their alternative: they were arguing with the rabbis. (Mk. 9:14, 16) It is quite likely that they had been busy defending themselves against the heckling of these skeptics, when they should have

been praying and getting on with the business of glorifying God by healing the demonized epileptic. (Mk. 9:29) Prayer is the only suitable preparation of one's faith to address oneself to the task of doing the impossible. Prayer itself would not have given them the power needed, but it would have intensified their sense of dependence upon God, and so enabled them to be His instruments in utilizing the power He had granted them.

APPLICATION

What a striking parable of the modern Church! How important the lesson for the modern disciple during the Lord's absence, when he too is facing the daily cry of needy humanity in the valley of humiliation, the positive opposition of the agnostics, the frustration of confrontations and the need to succeed! The desperate world, finding Jesus temporarily away from the earth, turns to those who should know Him best and share the secrets of His power, crying for assistance to cure the ills of human existence. Far too often the faithlessness of the prayerless Church, busy with her ecclesiastical machinery and worldly concerns, is not only the main ingredient of her own failure, but, more tragically, the principle cause of the world's unbelief and doubting even the mighty power of Christ Himself. Embarrassed by lack of real spiritual power, the Church is too ready to try to save man by social programs of self-improvement, by theological debate, by religious programs, by psychological gimmicks or by the power of positive thinking. She depends upon these as a source of power, rather than fulfill a mission blessed by the power of God. Then, the now nearly hopeless world, bypassing the fumbling Church, with one last rattling gasp, whispers to our Lord, "If you can do anything, have pity on us and help us!"

Under such circumstances, brethren, we deserve the sternest denunciation our Lord can pronounce! To the extent that we personally share the doubts and consequent helplessness of our age, our perversity and unbelief cannot escape His holy judgment!

Brethren, when we are pressured by circumstances to doubt our direction, our abilities and our Lord's care and concern for us, let us pray. Let us admit our lack of great faith, confess our dependence upon God, consecrate ourselves more completely to Him, and rise to do the work of God as the men of God in our time until our Lord returns! Since men are not going to be saved and made fit for God

except by our faith and prayer, let us by prayer nourish a faith so mighty that it will not be put to shame as we deal with the impossible difficulties of our time! (1 Jn. 5:4)

DEMON POSSESSION — DO WE BELIEVE IT?

With his usual keen insight, Foster (*Standard Lesson Commentary*, 1959, 13) asks this incisive question and applies its significance to our section, in a note that well deserves repetition:

It is remarkable that in a lesson which concentrates upon our lack of faith, our need of faith, and the fact that Jesus calls forth faith, we find ourselves considering the type of record which today causes many people to doubt the truth and accuracy of the Gospel accounts.

Many people are caused to stumble at the fact that demon possession existed in the time of Jesus, that Jesus talked with the demons, that they responded intelligently and with evidence of superhuman knowledge, that He cast them out. As Jesus called for faith in the heart of this father, so He demands faith of us as we study these records.

Who are we to attempt to dispute the record of demon possession? What do we know about the spirit world? We cannot comprehend, except in a superficial manner, even the physical world approached by the five senses. If a person is moved to doubt that there are actually in existence the devil and his angels who serve him and seek to bring man to destruction, then will he also doubt the existence of angels in heaven? Thus the Sadducees went forward in their logical deductions that denied the existence of angels and of any life after death. That this compelled them to deny the truth of the Old Testament and robbed them of all hope did not bring them to a halt in their folly. But if there be no angels and no life after death, how can there be any God?

Jesus calls forth faith in the heart of every humble Christian today to accept without question the New Testament record as a true and faithful account of what actually happened.

The fact that vast mysteries lie imbedded in the records should not overwhelm us with doubt. What else can we expect? Are we not mere finite beings with puny outreach of both intellect and physical power? We cannot encompass God. We must believe.

We must depend upon God when our understanding and our strength fail.

FACT QUESTIONS

1. Where had Jesus and some of His disciples been when they encounter the remaining Apostles and a crowd of people? When and where did this take place? At what chronological point in Jesus' ministry did it occur?
2. In what activity were people engaged just before Jesus appeared on the scene? Where would they have likely come from? What was their interest in this situation?
3. What special goal would the scribes have hoped to reach in their debate with the disciples of Jesus? Who are the scribes: what section of national life in Judaism of Jesus' day did they represent?
4. What was the central point of focus of the entire situation that caused the excitement before Jesus' arrival?
5. What reasons did the disciples have for believing that they could have cast out the demon? Had they ever done so before?
6. List the physical symptoms described by the epileptic's father.
7. Did the father distinguish between epilepsy and demon possession? Are all epileptics demon-possessed?
8. What information in the text indicates that Jesus clearly distinguished between the disease and demon possession?
9. There are only four possible views with reference to the Gospel accounts of demon-possession and the casting them out, but only one of them is tenable. List them, showing why each of the three is illogical or historically improbable while the other is practically unassailable.
10. From the Biblical information available to us, is it possible to say whether demons always caused maladies or defects? Are there other symptoms of demon possession not seen in the case reported in this section (17:14-21)? If so, what are they?
11. To whom did Jesus address the words: "O faithless and perverse generation"? Prove your answer. What is the meaning of Jesus' question: "How long shall I be with you"? What does He mean when He says: "How long shall I bear with you"?
12. What caused the father to say to Jesus, "If you can do anything . . ." (Mk. 9:22)
13. What is the point of Jesus' reply? (Mk. 9:23)

14. Explain the seemingly contradictory answer of the father: "I believe; help my unbelief!" (Mk. 9:24)
15. How did Jesus cast the demon out?
16. What was the effect of the miracle on the eyewitnesses? (Lk. 9:43)
17. Why did the disciples fail to cast out the demon? State both of Jesus' answers. (Mt. 17:20; Mk. 9:29) Explain what He meant by each one.
18. List any Biblical passages which would tend to qualify our understanding of the phrase: "All things are possible to him that believes."
19. List other Biblical examples of demon expulsion that would aid our understanding of demons and demonic possession. Are demons merely bad habits? Must those who are demon-possessed be exceptionally wicked? What other young children have been mentioned as demon-possessed during Jesus' ministry?
20. What is learned about demons from the command Jesus gave to the demon: "Enter no more into him"? Can demons return?
21. What does the phrase "unclean spirit" indicate about the nature or the effect of demon-possession on the one possessed?
22. What is the significance of the reaction of the multitude to Jesus' signal victory over the demon? (Lk. 9:43)

Section 44

JESUS MAKES THIRD PASSION PREDICTION

(Parallels: Mark 9:30-32; Luke 9:43-45)

TEXT: 17:22, 23

22 And while they abode in Galilee, Jesus said unto them, The Son of man shall be delivered up into the hands of men; 23 and they shall kill him, and the third day he shall be raised up. And they were exceeding sorry.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. Why were people "gathering in Galilee"? (See comment on the textual variation from "abode in Galilee.") Is there a suggestion