

**Text:** Luke 9:37-45

**Title:** Demon Possessed Boy Healed

**Truth:** Jesus's miraculous work highlights the majesty of God.

**Date/Location:** Sunday April 14, 2024 at FBC

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## Introduction

The most detailed parallel account of the demon-possessed boy is in Mark 9:14-29. Another is found in Matthew 17:14-20.

### I. The Circumstances, v. 37-40

A. After the glory of the Transfiguration on the mount, the disciples returned from the mountain-top experience to a world filled with suffering and injustice. Nothing was new. The Transfiguration was a transient experience, one for which they wait to occur again on a much grander scale when Jesus returns in glory with His angels and His saints.

Matthew 17:10-13 tells us that the disciples asked about Elijah and Jesus explained about the connection between Elijah and John the Baptist. Elijah is coming in the future, but John was very much like Elijah in that he was a forerunner. He suffered at their hands, and the Messiah would likewise. But this portion is not critical to Luke's purpose in informing his largely Gentile audience about the power and glory of the Jewish Messiah.

B. The nine disciples who were not privileged to see the Transfiguration encountered a man who asked them to help his son. The son had convulsions, foamed at the mouth, and was often injured. We learned from other passages that the boy was often harmed in "accidents" with fire or bodies of water. It was a long-term and ongoing problem. No solution was in sight except for a miracle.

It appears like the clonic phase of a tonic-clonic (grand mal) seizure where the patient experiences uncontrolled jerking or convulsions. (The tonic part of a seizure entails the patient becoming rigid. There are often two phases: stiffening and then twitching.) Such a seizure can also include foaming at the mouth. When it happens, it is very scary for onlookers and especially family members.

C. The nine disciples had no success in this situation. Earlier in chapter 9 we read that they had been sent out to preach the gospel and to heal diseases and to have power and authority over all demons. That power seems to have dissipated once the mission was over. But the immediate reason that they could not help the man's son: weak faith (Matt. 17:20) and lack of prayer/fasting (Mark 9:29). They could not do this challenging work because their spiritual lives were weak.

Imagine with the Renaissance master artist Raphael in his last great work the juxtaposition of the glory of the Transfiguration alongside the inability of the disciples to heal a boy of his demon possession. You see the glory *and* the curse in one painting. And then, imagine the exalted Jesus, descending once again, as it were, to the humiliation of the incarnation by coming down from the mount of glory to the earth of woe.

D. The man came to the right people at first, but they could not do the job. Then the right Person came to him. The father implored Jesus to look at his son.

E. The afflicted boy was an only child, like the son of the widow at Nain (Luke 7:12), and like Jairus whose only daughter was dying (Luke 8:42).

## **II. How do we know this was demon-possession?**

A. A typical reader in the west would read this account and diagnose that the son had epilepsy or a similar seizure disorder. The solution: medical treatment. Such dismissal of the supernatural is an essential feature of modern western thought.

B. We know this is a case of demon possession:

1. The father of the boy, who knew the situation the best of any person, said that "a spirit seizes him." Given the context historically and biblically, he can only be thinking about a personal, evil spirit, not a feeling or force.
2. The authors of the gospels, Luke in this case and Matthew and Mark in the parallel passages, give no indication that the

demon-possession diagnosis is wrong. In fact, they plainly say that the affliction was due to a demon (Luke 9:42).

3. The disciples of Jesus understood this to be the case. They were frustrated that they could not cast it out (Matt. 17:19) but that was because they lacked the requisite measure of faith.
  4. The Biblical narrative tells us plainly that Jesus cast out the unclean spirit and thus healed the child.
  5. The final indication that this was a supernatural problem is that the boy often falls into the fire and water (Matt. 17:15). Mark 9:22 adds that the father perceives this often happens and is a deliberate attempt to destroy the boy. He has insight that the boy does not desire self-harm. These repeated dangerous incidents are not random; they happen too often to be accidental. Demon-possession is a reasonable diagnosis.
- C. The remainder of the New Testament does not give us diagnostic tools or instructions about how to handle demon possession. This does not say that there is *no* demon-possession today, and I believe it does exist. God has restrained demonic activity to a great degree (Jude 6, though Satan is *not* bound today, 1 Peter 5:8). Not absolutely, but particularly in places that have a Christian background and influence of the church. That restraining influence has been waning in recent decades and cases of demonic influence, possession, and depraved behavior will increase. Under-the-table kind of activity will become more open and brazen. As for the situation in other countries where Christianity has not had such influence I cannot speak with firsthand knowledge.

Second, God has given us the ultimate tool against all wickedness, and that is the gospel of Christ. It is the power of God to save every person and make them zealous for good works, whether they are demon possessed or just self possessed. If someone is under the influence of demonic power, we are not instructed to make a pronouncement to cast out the demon or have a religious service to do so. We are instructed to proclaim the gospel to everyone. God's Spirit can, if He so desires, break into the person's life.

### III. Jesus Handles the Situation, v. 41-42

A. His response is one of holy grief and frustration at the faithlessness and perversity of the disciples. But the text broadens the criticism to the “generation.” His criticism concerns more than his nine who lacked the faith to cast out the demon. The entire nation was filled with people like this. He had not found significant faith in God in Israel (Matt. 8:10). It was shot through with false religion, shallowness, focus on the political and material. But who was looking for the Messiah?

The statement, “How long shall I be with you and put up with you?” further indicates frustration. God and His Son must exercise their most longsuffering patience to put up with the people of earth, even the believers sometimes.

There is a place for a bit of holy impatience when it comes to lack of faith in people who ought to know better. For those who do not know, patience is obviously the rule of the day.

B. The demon inside the boy made one last effort to stave off exorcism and to exercise his power over the boy and his father. He made a scene with convulsion and foaming and all the rest. Perhaps he hoped to kill his host. The timing of this is another reason we can add to our list that shows this is demonic.

Right around the time this happened, the Lord asked the man if he believes, for this would be possible by God’s grace if he did believe. The man freely admitted that he believed, but that he had a difficulty with weakness intermixed in his faith. He asked the Lord to give him the strength of trust that was required for this to occur. Jesus was more than willing to do that! This is a good example for you and me: ask God to help you believe. If you do now, keep asking. If you do not trust him now, ask him to help you.

C. All Jesus needed to do is rebuke the unclean Spirit. He did so in time to save the boy and so restrain the evil of the demon. Remember what Michael, the archangel, said to the Devil? “The Lord rebuke you!” (Jude 9). This is why we do not rebuke unclean spirits—we let the Lord take care of that Himself. Once this was

done, the child was healed, and Jesus gave the boy back to his father.

- D. Do not forget about the little boy! He was healed immediately. He had to be profoundly impacted for the rest of his life by the Lord Jesus Christ. The boy's father was also changed. If only we could watch a follow-up documentary on how they were a year later or 10 years down the road! I hope they continued to be followers of Jesus.

#### **IV. The Impending Death of the Messiah, 43-45**

- A. The crowd of people was floored by what they saw. We have mentioned over the course of our series in Luke several purposes of miracles, including one in Luke 5 where Jesus intended the people to know that He did indeed have power on earth to forgive sins (5:24). They correctly apprehended that this miracle of demon removal and healing was intended to point them to the "majesty of God." This refers to God's grandeur and impressiveness.
- B. This astonishment continued as the crowd certainly talked among itself. But Jesus once again told the disciples to pay attention carefully and grasp that the Son of Man (= Jesus) was soon to be betrayed and given over to men.
- C. They heard the words, like they did in 9:21, but they did not understand Him. With His power and relative popularity among a segment of Israel's population, it seemed impossible that events could take such a turn for the worse. God graciously allowed them to remain in the dark and gave them a disposition of fear to ask about it. This was merciful, because they would be able to go on with somewhat of a sense of normalcy. If they understood, they would perhaps attempt to redirect the Lord away from this fate (Peter in Matt. 16:22) or be so deeply troubled that they could not function well. They would grasp it all too well later.

#### **Conclusion**

Think on this again: just like the Transfiguration gave way to the suffering of the world, here again the glory of the Messiah in healing a young boy is resonating with the crowd while at the exact

same moment the Messiah is explaining that He will lower Himself even more than He has already. He came in fashion as a man; but that was not enough. For He then humbled Himself to the point of betrayal by His own people and death at the hands of the Romans, even death on a cross. He would lower Himself one step further, to be placed in a tomb that did not belong to Him.

He is the owner of the cattle on a thousand hills, and every beast in every forest, the creator of earth and all its fullness, the stars, and galaxies from one end of the heavens to the other end 93 billion light years distant. And he owned no spot of ground to rest his head, or even to be buried. Yet He was raised the third day because He is the author of life, and it was not possible that death could hold Him!

This juxtaposition highlights the height of the exaltation of Jesus Christ alongside the depth of the humiliation. The contrast shows that Jesus is worthy of all majesty. He is worthy of worship in His humblest moment, and in His most glorious.

I beseech you to give Him His due recognition. He deserves all of it. And no matter how difficult your case seems to be, our Lord can take care of it like He cared for the child.

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