

Jesus Casts a Demon Out of a Boy
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Text: Mark 9:14-29 (see also Matt. 17:14-21; Luke 9:37-42)

Gospel of Mark: [Bibliography](#) or [Manuscripts and Greek Exegesis](#)

UBS 4th Edition Paragraph Topic: The Healing of a Boy with an Unclean Spirit

Central Idea of Message: Life's challenges require more strength than any of us can muster on our own, therefore, complete reliance upon God, expressed most humbly through prayer in the life of one having sustained personal intimacy with God, is absolutely necessary for both cultivation of faith and actualized spiritual empowerment.

Introduction: Episode 44. As Jesus and three of his disciples, Peter, James, and John, descended from the transfiguration experience on the mountain, the nine disciples who had been left behind were embroiled in a heated debate with a group of scribes who were experts in the Law of Moses as well as most all of the Old Testament.

The argument revolved around a boy who was demon-possessed showing signs of something similar to epilepsy, deafness, and the inability to speak. This is the scene to which Jesus and the three disciples return. This is also the last exorcism recorded in Mark's gospel. The following is an exposition of Jesus casting a demon out of a boy.

- I. **Jesus and the Father of a Demon-Possessed Boy (vv. 14-19)**
 - A. Scribes arguing with the disciples (v. 14)
 1. Jesus, Peter, James, and John had just come down from the mountain where the transfiguration had happened
 2. A large crowd was gathered around the other nine disciples listening to them debate with some scribes about something, presumably demon-possession or casting out demons and the failure of these nine disciples in their attempted exorcism and cure for the boy (cf. Robertson 1:340)
 3. **Failure to cast out the demon and cure the boy undoubtedly delighted the scribes and proved to be**

extremely humiliating for these nine disciples, who had experienced successes of this type before (see Mark 6:7-13)!

- B. Jesus approaches (v. 15)
1. When the crowd saw Jesus walking up their focus shifted from the argument between the disciples and scribes to him
 2. The people were amazed and began running up to greet Jesus, but why?
 - a) Because of an afterglow from the transfiguration (cf. Brown 2:79; Henry 5:509)?
 - (1) Unlikely!
 - (2) Such an afterglow would violate his own orders that the three tell nobody about what they had seen until he should rise from the dead (Mark 9:9)
 - b) Because they were witnessing an argument between the scribes and nine disciples about Jesus and his power and now here Jesus came at the most opportune time?
 - c) "The evangelist wishes to stress that the person of Jesus himself provokes astonishment" (Lane 330)?
- C. Jesus asked what the discussion had been about (v. 16)
- D. A father speaks up (v. 17)
1. This answer apparently reveals the general nature of the previous argument between the disciples and scribes
 2. The father addresses Jesus as "Teacher"
 3. He had brought his mute son, who was possessed with a spirit, in an effort to locate Jesus and have his son delivered from the grip of the spirit
 - a) How old was the boy?
 - b) At this point we don't know
 - c) He was demon-possessed
 - d) But how had this happened?
 - (1) Something dad was doing?
 - (2) Father or son toying with practices associated with the occult [sorcery, witchcraft, etc.]?
 - (3) Father or son involved in temple prostitution associated with a false god?
 - (4) Where was the mother?

- e) **We can safely conclude, however, that demon-possession is always voluntary and never involuntary except in the case of pigs - the boy and/or the father had allowed a demon to have access to the boy's mind, eyes, ears, hands, and the rest of his body**
 - f) No explanations are given other than what the father says next
- E. The father explains his son's symptoms to Jesus (v. 18)
- 1. Whenever the spirit seizes the boy it dashes him to the ground
 - a) He foams at the mouth
 - b) He grinds his teeth
 - c) He stiffens: is temporarily immobilized
 - 2. Resembles an epileptic seizure, but with demon-possession added (cf. Robertson 1:342)
 - 3. The father had told Jesus' disciples to cast out the spirit, but they could not
 - a) This implies that the disciples had tried to cast out the demon, but had failed
 - b) This likely exposes their lack of faith at this point in their development and places them squarely in the midst of the unbelieving generation Jesus was about to scold
- F. Jesus replies to the father (v. 19)
- 1. "Oh unbelieving generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring him [the boy] to me!"
 - a) The reproach uttered here by Jesus is full of disappointment, mostly in his disciples
 - b) In case you hadn't noticed, Jesus has some high expectations from those who know him and his works!
 - 2. The father and the scribes, along with the nine disciples engaged in the debate with the scribes, could also be included in this rebuke by Jesus, along with almost everybody else living in that "generation"
 - 3. **One of the reasons the disciples had failed in their attempted exorcism was lack of faith**
 - 4. Jesus will also identify another key component missing from their attempt - prayer

II. **Jesus and the Demon-Possessed Boy (vv. 20-27)**

- A. The boy is brought to Jesus (v. 20)

1. When the boy [and therefore the demon] saw Jesus the spirit threw the boy into a convulsion
 2. The boy fell to the ground [just as his father had reported had happened many times before]
 - a) Began rolling around on the ground
 - b) Began foaming at the mouth
 3. Clearly, the father had told the truth with no hint of any exaggeration about the symptoms of his son's demon-possession
- B. Jesus questions the father (v. 21)
1. Notice that Jesus is not immediately swinging into action and is showing neither alarm nor intimidation
 2. "How long has this been happening to him?": Jesus wanted to explore the history of the case much as a doctor or psychologist would today
 3. "From childhood"
 - a) This suggests that the boy was now an adolescent [teenager]
 - b) If you think that an eleven year-old boy can't decide to dance with the devil, think again!
- C. The father tells Jesus of more symptoms of demon-possession (v. 22)
1. The spirit has often thrown the boy into the fire and into the water in an effort to kill him
 - a) How many times had this father, or someone else, had to rescue this boy from death by burning or drowning?
 - b) This father could not sleep soundly or fail to be on alert most of the time for fear of what the demon might do to his son or what the demon might do to someone else through his son
 - c) This father had to have been at his wits end!
 2. **The ultimate objective of every demon is the malevolent intention of destroying [killing] the body of its host [just as with the swine in Mark 5:1-20]**
 3. "But if you can do anything, take pity on us and help us!"
 - a) Obviously, the father was desperate
 - b) The father regarded Jesus as a "Teacher," not as the Messiah having full authority over land, sea, illness, and even demons
 - c) The father was throwing a "Hail Mary"

- d) And Jesus immediately perceived this
- D. The response of Jesus (v. 23)
 - 1. "If?" How dare you!
 - 2. Jesus challenges the father's faith
 - 3. "All things are possible to him who believes"
 - a) The one with the faith and the power standing there at that moment was only Jesus
 - b) The father, although desperate and pitiful, questioned openly whether or not Jesus could cast out the spirit from his son
 - c) After all, his disciples had failed to do so
 - d) The father was losing hope
 - e) But Jesus prompted him to rekindle his faith!
- E. The cry of the father (v. 24)
 - 1. **"I do believe!": even a small amount of faith in Jesus will prove not to have been misplaced!**
 - 2. "Help my unbelief!"
 - a) **Jesus knows that wherever there is faith in him there is also likely, at some point, to be unbelief**
 - b) **Asking Christ to help us in times of lesser faith or even unbelief is a wise request!**
- F. Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit (v. 25)
 - 1. Jesus saw that the crowd was gathering around them
 - 2. He rebuked the unclean spirit
 - a) Directly addressed the unclean spirit as "deaf and dumb"
 - b) Ordered the spirit to "come out of him" and not to enter him again, suggesting that re-entry was probable without the authority of Jesus having been exercised
- G. The actual results of the exorcism (v. 26)
 - 1. The demon threw the boy into "terrible" convulsions
 - 2. The demon cried out [using the boy's vocal chords]
 - 3. The demon came out
 - 4. The boy became like a corpse: so lifeless and still that most in the crowd said that the boy was dead

III. Jesus Teaches the Disciples (vv. 28-29)

- A. Jesus and the Twelve had gone inside the house (v. 28)
 - 1. The disciples quickly began to question him privately
 - 2. They were asking why they could not cast out this demon like they had successfully done with others

3. They were seeking "an explanation for their colossal failure" (Robertson 1:343)
- B. "This kind cannot come out by anything but prayer" (v. 29)
 1. This "kind" of demon
 - a) One that causes deafness and dumbness?
 - b) Reference to rank and, therefore, to power and resistance to exorcism?
 - c) "... a specially vicious kind of spirit, that it took a good deal to exorcise" (Gould in Decker 23)
 - d) This is definitely a reference to certain kinds of demons, so there are different types
 2. Apparently, the disciples had failed to use prayer in their attempt to cast out the demon
 3. Prayer, not just invoking the authority of Jesus in that moment, must also be utilized
 - a) Magic won't work
 - b) Force of will won't work
 4. **Evil spirits seemingly sense a lack of moral and spiritual power and easily dismiss attempts to thwart them, their work, and their occupancy of a body**
 5. **To a demon, prayerless Christians trying to throw their spiritual weight around are no threat at all, and are, instead, utterly laughable**

Conclusion: Principles.

(1) **Every parent, teacher, coach, and supervisor knows the frustration of having their clear instructions left unfollowed - so it is with Jesus (v. 19).**

(2) **Suicidal ideations and attempts can be induced by demonic possession, since the purpose of it [demonic possession] is "to distort and destroy the image of God in man" (v. 22; Lane 331; cf. Wuest 1:183).**

(3) **We can expect God to challenge our faith when it is weak or altogether absent (v. 23).**

(4) **One element of authentic Christian faith is not setting limits on God's power - with Christ, there is no "if you can" (vv. 23-24)!**

(5) **When we experience moments of despair and doubt, the most excellent thing to do is ask God to fill us with deeper faith which helps heal our unbelief in him, his power, and provision (v. 24).**

(6) Healing depends on the power and will of Christ, not upon the extent of the faith of a disciple, father, or mother (v. 26).

(7) Bathing in advance any battle with demonic powers and principalities is a wise decision for every spiritual warrior (v. 29).

(8) When we find ourselves powerless, it might be because we are prayerless (v. 29).

(9) Life's challenges require more strength than any of us can muster on our own, therefore, complete reliance upon God, expressed most humbly through prayer in the life of one having sustained personal intimacy with God, is absolutely necessary for both cultivation of faith and actualized spiritual empowerment (v. 29).