

FAITH

Matthew 17:14-20; Mark 9:14-29; Luke 9:37-43
Yeshua §90

Mark Sellers, my supervisor at Community Bible Chapel, played a significant role in training me for ministry. He taught me the importance of distinguishing between my goals and my desires. Goals are things within my control for which I'm responsible. Desires are things outside my control for which I hope. A ministry goal would be to teach a Bible passage. It is in my control to

study, compose and preach the passage to the best of my ability. I'm responsible to do that. The accompanying desire is that the hearers would understand and apply the passage to their lives and by so doing grow spiritually and impact others. I cannot control any of that; all of that is in God's hands. People burn out in ministry because they take responsibility for their desires; when people do not change or grow to the degree the minister desires, the minister gets frustrated and embittered. To stay healthy in ministry we need to take full responsibility for our goals seeking always to improve. We need to pray for our desires, asking and trusting God to work in people's lives. Only God has the power to save and transform lives. It is our joy to be used of God when we serve Him in faith.

It is the power of God that "moves mountains"; it is the power of God that accomplishes the impossible. We partake in the work of God as we trust Him, rely upon Him to accomplish His will.

It is this truth Jesus drove home with His disciples as He returned from the Transfiguration on Mount Hermon.

The Transfiguration event now comes full circle. It began with Jesus and the disciples traveling north to Caesarea Philippi at the base of Mount Hermon. Peter declared his conviction that Jesus is the Messiah. Jesus revealed the establishment of the Church and, for the first time, He revealed His death and resurrection. It was here Jesus made clear that to continue to follow Him required a willingness on their parts to suffer and even die with Him. He then revealed that some of the disciples would see the Kingdom of God come with power. Six days later, Peter, James and John witnessed Jesus' unveiled glory and His confab with Moses and Elijah.

- Part 1. The Coming of the King
- Part 2. The Authentication of the King
- Part 3. The Controversy over the King
- Part 4. **The Training of the Twelve by the King**
 - **Faith**
- Part 5. The Opposition to the King:
- Part 6. The Preparation of the Disciples by the King
- Part 7. The Official Presentation of the King
- Part 8. The Preparation for the Death of the King
- Part 9. The Trial of the King:
- Part 10. The Death of the King
- Part 11. The Resurrection and the Ascension of the King
- Part 12. The Sequels

We pick up the story as Jesus and the three returned to the foot of the mountain where they found their companions in a very difficult situation. The Gospel of Mark gives the most detailed account of this episode.

MARK 9:14-19 (ESV)

And when they came to the disciples, they saw a great crowd around them, and scribes arguing with them. And immediately all the crowd, when they saw him, were greatly amazed and ran up to him and greeted him. And he asked them, “What are you arguing about with them?” And someone from the crowd answered him, “Teacher, I brought my son to you, for he has a spirit that makes him mute. And whenever it seizes him, it throws him down, and he foams and grinds his teeth and becomes rigid. So I asked your disciples to cast it out, and they were not able.” And he answered them, “O faithless generation, how long am I to be with you? How long am I to bear with you? Bring him to me.”

We need to be a bit understanding with these disciples. They were faithless, as Jesus said, but they had a difficult problem facing them here. From our previous studies we discovered what made this case of demon possession different from other cases they had faced. This was a demon that caused muteness. This was the kind of demon, according to rabbinic teaching, that only the Messiah is able to cast out. Jewish exorcists and perhaps Jesus’ disciples depended upon learning a demon’s name in order to cast it out. We see their difficulty with a mute demon. This demon was particularly cruel; in addition to afflicting the boy with muteness (and I assume deafness) it also afflicted him with epilepsy. This was demonic possession manifesting itself in epilepsy. The description here is of a grand mal seizure. According to the father, the demon would throw the boy into seizures when he was near fire or water attempting to destroy him. Undoubtedly the boy’s body was covered with scars. How much more his mind and soul? Here was the kingdom of Satan manifest in all its vile cruelty.

So the disciples were in a tough situation. To make it worse, scribes were present exploiting the disciples’ failure to cast aspersions upon their master, Jesus.

Jesus was frustrated by what He saw; He was frustrated by the lack of faith. I think the “faithless generation” included everybody there. Certainly it included the faithless scribes seeking to discredit Him. I think it included the boy’s father whose faith faltered in light of the disciples’ failure. I think it included the disciples whose failure was linked to a lack of faith.

Jesus called for the boy to be brought to him

Mark 9:20-27 (ESV)

And they brought the boy to him. And when the spirit saw him, immediately it convulsed the boy, and he fell on the ground and rolled about, foaming at the mouth. And Jesus asked his father, "How long has this been happening to him?" And he said, "From childhood. And it has often cast him into fire and into water, to destroy him. But if you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us." And Jesus said to him, " 'If you can'! All things are possible for one who believes." Immediately the father of the child cried out and said, "I believe; help my unbelief!" And when Jesus saw that a crowd came running together, he rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, "You mute and deaf spirit, I command you, come out of him and never enter him again." And after crying out and convulsing him terribly, it came out, and the boy was like a corpse, so that most of them said, "He is dead." But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up, and he arose.

This particular demon is a real piece of work. In one final display of defiance it threw the defenseless boy into a violent seizure in front of Jesus.

Remember, at this point Jesus was no longer performing miracles to validate His messianic claim; He only did miracles where there was a need and where there was faith.

In his exchange with Jesus, the father expressed less than robust faith. He said, "If there is anything you can do -- if there is -- please help us." There was an honesty in his statement that we have to appreciate, but it was, nonetheless, an admission of doubt. Perhaps his confidence had diminished because of the disciples' failure. But here, he was dealing with Jesus. Jesus was looking for genuine faith. He challenged the father; the problem was not Jesus' ability (if you can), but the father's unbelief (for one who believes).

Immediately the man did a beautiful thing; he humbled himself and accepted Jesus' reproof. His words have expressed the hearts of many since that day: "I do believe; help my unbelief!" Out of the honesty of his weakness, he cast himself on the Lord. "Yes, Lord, I do believe; but I feel my unbelief and I don't know how to handle it. Lord, help me." That kind of faith is small, like a grain of mustard seed – but it is able to move mountains because God can do the impossible. The moment he said those words, the moment he cast himself in his weakness back

on the Lord, that was all God wanted. Our Lord spoke the words, and his son was delivered. Again we see the defiant cruelty of this demon. It cried out, convulsed him, then left him for dead. But Jesus picked him up by the hand and restored him.

The impossible became possible through faith in the power of God.

No doubt the disciples rejoiced with the boy's deliverance, but they wanted to know why they failed. Once they were all alone, Jesus answered them.

MARK 9:28-29 (ESV)

And when he had entered the house, his disciples asked him privately, "Why could we not cast it out?" And he said to them, "This kind cannot be driven out by anything but prayer."

It's interesting that, contrary to the Jewish rabbis, Jesus indicated clearly that it was possible His disciples could have cast out this mute demon. I take it that prayer here, does not refer to a "formula prayer" that when prayed had power to drive the demon out. Rather, I think prayer here describes a complete, utter dependence upon God. Perhaps in this way the disciples lacked faith; they relied more on the methods that had been successful in previous exorcisms rather than relying upon God and His power.

Even though the father's faith was shaky, Jesus delivered his son from the clutches of Satan and gave him a new life.

God wants to work in and through those who will trust Him.

If this incident took place in Caesarea Philippi, it really does bring it full circle. It was here, in the shadow of the red cliffs and caves that Jesus declared He would build His Church. His Church would be built on "this rock", the rock on which they stood; the rock which was called "the gates of Hades". Jesus declared He would build His Church smack dab in the middle of Satan's territory and Satan would be powerless to stop it. But this Church will only be built, the kingdom of God will overcome the kingdom of Satan, only through faith in the power of God to accomplish His will.

The disciples needed to learn this crucial truth. The Church was not going to be built by their skills, by clever methods or charismatic leadership. The Church was going to be built by the power of God working in and through them as they served Jesus in faith. It is only by the power of God that people are delivered from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light. It is only by the power of God working through the Word that sinners are transformed into the likeness of

Christ. Just like the disciples, our faith must be in God, not in our methods or our programs or our persuasive abilities.

It is God Who “moves mountains”, Who does the impossible and we have the joy of seeing lives saved and changed for eternity as we pray and serve Him in faith.