

Bi132 The Gospels I

Lesson Bi132-30 Jesus and Unbelief

One of the most embarrassing times in life is when you think you have control of a situation and then discover that you don't. It is hard to explain the situation to the people who trusted you. How do you avoid 'losing face'? After a great experience on the mountaintop, Jesus and the three disciples returned to the reality of life in the valley. Satan was holding a man's only child in bondage and the disciples were powerless to provide deliverance.

At the foot of the mountain Jesus saw a large crowd around the other nine disciples. Some teachers of the law were arguing with them. But as soon as all the people saw Jesus, they were overwhelmed with wonder and ran to greet him. The disciples were being questioned by the scribes. We don't know exactly why, perhaps they were taunting the disciples about their inability to deliver this demon-possessed boy. More likely, they were questioning the authority of Jesus himself. He came to rescue and to teach the disciples. At the same time the people were overjoyed to see him. "What are you arguing with them about?" he asked.

A man in the crowd answered, "Teacher, I brought you my son, who is possessed by a spirit that has robbed him of speech. Whenever it seizes him, it throws him to the ground. He foams at the mouth, gnashes his teeth and becomes rigid. I asked your disciples to drive out the spirit, but they could not" (Mark 9:14-18).

"You unbelieving generation," Jesus replied, "How long shall I stay with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring the boy to me." There seemed to be a definite frustration in the words of Jesus. Though Jesus addressed the father, his words were intended for the crowds, and only later directed to the disciples. The crowds were always excited to experience another miracle, but still refused to place their faith in him as Messiah.

They brought the boy to Jesus. When the spirit saw Jesus, it immediately threw the boy into a convulsion. He fell to the ground and rolled around, foaming at the mouth. Jesus asked the boy's father, "How long has he been like this?"

"From childhood," he answered. "It has often thrown him into fire or water to kill him. But if you can do anything, take pity on us and help us." The boy's father explained the situation to Jesus. He described the symptoms of the possession. The demon was trying to kill his son. As for the disciples, they had cast out demons before, but in this situation they tried and could not.

Think about this. If deliverance in the kingdom is based on faith, as Jesus had demonstrated many times, had something changed about the disciple's faith that made them powerless to deliver this particular boy?

Perhaps their lack of power had to do with their rejection of Jesus' recent teaching—that he would go to the cross. They failed to realize their authority came from God alone; it was not

resident in them. Perhaps pride had overtaken them as well or they were beginning to take for granted the power given to them.

The father said, "If you can do anything, help us."

"If you can?" said Jesus. "Everything is possible for one who believes." Jesus is again trying to stretch people's faith, and in the process strengthen it. The question was not whether Jesus had the power and authority to heal the boy, but whether the father had the faith to believe for it. A person who truly believes will set no limit on what God can do.

Immediately the boy's father exclaimed, "I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!"

As much as possible Christ wanted to avoid further publicity. So when Jesus saw that a crowd was running to the scene, he rebuked the impure spirit saying, "You deaf and mute spirit," he said, "I command you, come out of him and never enter him again."

The Lord is kind and compassionate to this father and son. Still he wanted to strengthen this man's faith, so he would believe that God had the power to do what was impossible for man. The father's statement about his own faith reminds us that human faith is not always perfect, but a mixture of belief and unbelief.

The spirit shrieked, convulsed the boy violently and came out. He looked so much like a corpse that many said, "He's dead." But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him to his feet, and he stood up.

After Jesus had gone indoors, his disciples asked him privately, "Why couldn't we drive it out?"

He replied, "This kind can come out only by prayer." This suggests that there are different kinds of demonic forces requiring different approaches to bring deliverance. Fasting and prayer are still necessary to assure that we will be ready at any time to take authority over Satan, in Jesus' name. The same situation exists today as people wait for the power of the Holy Spirit to deliver them.

Matthew gives some additional words of Jesus. He told the disciples they could not drive out this demon because they had so little faith: "Truly I tell you, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you." It was not the smallness of their faith that was important here, but the potential for growth that was important. The mustard seed produced, when cared for correctly, a very large plant.

The disciples and Jesus then left that northern place and began to pass through Galilee. Jesus was starting the final journey to Jerusalem to suffer and to die. Focusing his teaching ministry on the 12, he said to them, "The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men. They will kill him, and on the third day he will be raised to life." The disciples were filled with grief (Matt 17:22-23). They did not understand what he meant and were afraid to ask him.

Though the boy's crisis ended with deliverance and victory, the disciple's joy remained short-lived. Jesus had now predicted his death a second time and it profoundly moved the disciples emotionally. This did not match their understanding of his mission. They did not yet realize he must first die, before he could reign as their king.

This story is **important** because it shows Jesus' loving response to a desperate situation. When the disciples lacked faith, Jesus came on the scene to bring deliverance.

The **main truth** of this story is that Jesus has the power and authority to destroy all the works of Satan, and our faith should be in him alone for deliverance.

Let's **review** this lesson—

1. What kind of help did the father need when he brought his son to Jesus?
A. [Pause for 5 seconds.] If you said the father brought his son, who was possessed by an evil spirit, for healing, you are correct.
2. What did the father say when Jesus told him to have faith?
A. [Pause for 5 seconds.] If you answered that the man said, "I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!" you are correct.
3. What did Jesus say to the demon to set the boy free?
A. [Pause for 5 seconds.] If you answered that Jesus told the demon, "I command you, come out of him and never enter him again," you are correct.

Your **assignment** for this lesson is to learn the story so you can tell it to someone from memory. After you tell the story ask this question, "If you were one of the disciples, would you feel grateful or foolish after Jesus had delivered the boy from the demon?" Your response would probably be determined by the focus of your life; if that focus was mostly on yourself or mostly on the need of the boy. How can a person who is called by God maintain a humble spirit focused on Jesus? Each of us has to realize that we are totally dependent on the Holy Spirit to work in and through us. This is true for the person just beginning ministry as well as the person with years of ministry experience.