

Exegetical Notes, Matthew 17:14-23
“Little Faith Without Prayer”

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Matthew 17:14-23

Verse 14-16

When they came to the crowd, a man approached Jesus and knelt before him. “Lord, have mercy on my son,” he said. “He has seizures and is suffering greatly. He often falls into the fire or into the water. I brought him to your disciples but they could not heal him.”

- A concerned father came to Jesus seeking help for his son. The father first approached Jesus’ disciples for help. Apparently, the disciples attempted to help the boy, but without success. So the man came directly to Jesus. His approach to Jesus is deeply respectful. Perhaps this respect is driven by the man’s desperate desire to help his boy.
- We know that the boy, whose age is not given, suffered from some form of seizure disorder. The seizures were frequent and required that the boy be constantly watched because the seizure caused him to fall into the fire and into water and were unpredictable in their occurrence. As a result of all this, the boy suffered greatly.
- Out of love for his son, the man came to Jesus hoping that Jesus would heal the boy.

Verse 17

“O unbelieving and perverse generation,” Jesus replied, “how long shall I stay with you? How long shall I put up with you? Bring the boy here to me.”

- These words are Jesus’ expression of disappointment in his disciples. Though they know who he is, they have not yet gotten hold of the true significance of that knowledge. Though they had tried to help this poor man, they had been unable to help him, thus prolonging his suffering and that of the child.
- What the disciples should have done when they failed to help the boy was bring the situation directly to Jesus. What they tried to do was

cover up their inability. They were willing to allow the boy to continue to suffer rather than bring their failure to Jesus' attention.

- Jesus' disappointment with the disciples lies not in their failure, but in their refusal to put the man and the boy above it.

Verse 18

Jesus rebuked the demon, and it came out of the boy, and he was healed from that moment.

- With very little effort, Jesus was able to do what the disciples could not. He rebuked the demon which was the cause of the boy's ailment and the demon departed. As a result, the boy was healed instantly.
- Not all seizure disorders are caused by demons, but this one was. Knowing the cause, Jesus went directly to it to bring healing to the boy.
- That Jesus acted so decisively indicates how concerned he was to do what the disciples were unable to accomplish to bring peace and healing to this boy and his father.

Verse 19

Then the disciples came to Jesus in private and asked, "Why couldn't we drive it out?"

- The disciples are still preoccupied with their own failure. They come to Jesus, who already knows about it, in private because they do not want it publicly known that they have failed. They are not rejoicing in the healing but want to know why they were unable to affect it. Their focus is on them and their inability.

Verse 20-21

He replied, "Because you have so little faith. I tell you the truth, 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. "But this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting."

- Notice that verse 21, printed above without bolding, does not appear in the NIV text. That is because this verse is not found in the oldest available Greek Manuscripts of Matthew's Gospel. However, this verse is found in all of the manuscripts of the Gospel of Mark where this story is told. See Mark 9:29.
- Jesus clearly explains the reason for the disciples' inability to help the boy. It is simply their lack of faith. In this regard, Matthew 9:29 is

interesting to consider. There, two blind men come to Jesus for healing. Jesus questioned them about their faith. Then he said to them, “According to your faith will it be done to you,” and they were healed. All that was required of them by Jesus was that they believe that Jesus was able to do what they asked of him. Surely the disciples have faith that is greater than that of those two blind men. They not only know who Jesus is but have openly confessed it. What is it, then, that their faith lacked?

- Perhaps it is what was said in the absent verse 21. They were not prepared to exercise the kind of faith that was required in this case. Faith is empowered by prayer and fasting. These disciplines focus attention on God as our provider. As stated above, the disciples were looking at themselves and their ability or lack thereof. Is their faith insufficient simply because they are wrongly focused and unprepared?
- With this kind of faith preparation and appropriate focus, Jesus promises that nothing will be beyond possibility.

Verse 22-23

When they came together in Galilee, he said to them, “The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men. They will kill him, and on the third day he will be raised to life. And the disciples were filled with grief.

- Still the disciples don’t get it. They are still focused on the wrong end of the deal. Jesus tells them about his coming death and resurrection. However, they only hear the part about his death (meaning their loss), and they are filled with grief. They did not hear the part about resurrection. They are, therefore, still unprepared to receive the greatest miracle of them all.

(These exegetical notes are the foundational study for the sermon entitled *Little Faith Without Prayer*. They have been prepared by the Reverend Doctor Charles H. Jensen, Senior Pastor at Cornerstone Fellowship, Coatesville Pennsylvania. All rights are reserved by *Cornerstone Fellowship & The Reverend Doctor Charles H. Jensen*. They are used here by permission.)