

THE DEMON WHO WOULDN'T AND THE DISCIPLES WHO COULDN'T

“And it came to pass, that on the next day, when they were come down from the hill, much people met Him. And, behold, a man of the company cried out, saying, ‘Master, I beseech thee, look upon my son: for he is my only child. And, lo, a spirit takes him, and he suddenly cries out; and it tears him that he foams again, and bruising him hardly departs from him. And I besought thy disciples to cast him out; and **they could not**’ ” (Luke 9:37-40). The **disciples who couldn’t**...

How different from the scene atop the Mount of Transfiguration from whence they had come! There Peter, James, John and the Lord had witnessed the vision where “the fashion of His countenance was altered, and His raiment was white and glistening. And, behold, there talked with Him two men, which were Moses and Elias: Who appeared in glory, and spake of His decease which He should accomplish at Jerusalem” (Luke 9:29-31).

Following a scene of such glory it must have been a huge let-down to be so greeted by **the demon who wouldn’t**. Not long before this the Lord had sent out “His twelve disciples together, and gave them power and **authority over all devils**, and to cure diseases. And he sent them to preach the kingdom of God, and to heal the sick” (Luke 9:1-2). They had participated in a ministry of miracles such as the world had never seen. Now it was not going very well at all! They had met their match, more than their match!

Since Peter, James and John were with the Lord on the mount this problem was experienced by the nine apostles left behind. They had not been idle but attended diligently to their miracle-ministry but now had a problem of major proportions. Something was missing and they had no clue.

According to the lad’s father these disciples had tried earnestly to dispel the demon vexing his son, but to no avail. Surely they had tried more than once. Surely several, if not all, of the nine had “tried his hand.” Their failure was complete. Try as they will, this demon would not budge! How they must have waited anxiously for the Lord’s return from the mount. We have done this before with great success. What is different now and why won’t this demon budge?

Helpless disciples and a grieving father greeted the Lord and explained their desperate situation and the fruitless attempts. It was then the Lord answering said, “O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you, and suffer you? Bring thy son hither.” And as he was yet a coming, the devil threw him down, and tare him. And Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit, and healed the child, and delivered him again to his father.

“And they were all amazed at the mighty power of God. But while they wondered every one at all things which Jesus did, he said unto his disciples, Let these sayings sink down into your ears: for **the Son of man shall be delivered into the hands of men. But they understood not this saying, and it was hid from them, that they perceived it not: and they feared to ask him of that saying**” (Luke 9:41-45).

Matthew’s record sheds the light we seek, for “when they were come to the multitude, there came to Him a certain man, kneeling down to Him, and saying, ‘Lord, have mercy on my son: for he is lunatick, and sore vexed: for oftentimes he falls into the fire, and oft into the water. And I brought him to Thy disciples, and they could not cure him.’ Then Jesus answered and said, ‘O faithless and perverse

generation, how long shall I be with you? how long shall I suffer you? bring him hither to Me.’ And Jesus rebuked the devil; and he departed out of him: and the child was cured from that very hour.

“Then came the disciples to Jesus apart, and said, ‘Why could not we cast him out?’

“And Jesus said unto them, ‘Because of your unbelief: for verily I say unto you, If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you. Howbeit this kind goes not out but by prayer and fasting’ ” (Matt 17:14-21).

The Lord’s answer was still perplexing. What did He mean by “this kind... etc.” Was this a demon of a special kind, a demon with too much resistance for the power granted thus far to the disciples? And what is the significance of “prayer and fasting.” What did “prayer and fasting” have to do with the situation? And what was it they did not believe that seemed to be a problem? And what was it the disciples did not believe? Three aspects of a very difficult situation.

Such perplexities had bothered me for more years than I wish to admit. Furthermore, I could get no help from anyone I asked. Commentaries I consulted seemed to overlook the issues and shed little light, so I laid the problem aside but could not forget it.

One day while reading through my Bible I came upon the passage in Matthew 9:14-15 where “Then came to Him the disciples of John, saying, Why do we and the Pharisees fast oft, but Thy disciples fast not? And Jesus said unto them, Can the children of the bridechamber mourn, as long as the bridegroom is with them? but the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken from them, and then shall they fast.”

Here we notice the Lord defending His disciples for not fasting, when at that time the disciples of John and the Pharisees were fasting. Since fasting expresses sorrow, the Lord explained that His disciples could not be expected to fast while in His presence. In His illustration the Lord pictured Himself as the bridegroom and added that the “days will come when the bridegroom shall be taken from them...and **then, shall they fast.**”

That’s it! Here is the clue we missed. Before the Mount of Transfiguration and yet immediately after the Lord had given Peter the keys of the kingdom of heaven we read, “**From that time forth began Jesus** to show unto His disciples, how that He must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day.” The Bridegroom – the Lord Jesus – would be taken from them. But did they believe it?

Had they believed their Lord would be soon taken from them by crucifixion they would have been "praying and fasting" and having greater success dispelling demons of every kind! At that time they were more occupied with gaining positions of prominence in His coming kingdom. How sad indeed.

How did Peter take it? He was outraged and rebuked the Lord! “Then Peter took Him, and began to rebuke Him, saying, Be it far from Thee, Lord: this shall not be unto Thee.” Peter wanted no part with that message!

“But He turned, and said unto Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto Me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men” (Matt. 16:22-23).

How did the other disciples feel? They felt exactly like Peter!

“And while they abode in Galilee, Jesus said unto them, the Son of man shall be betrayed into the hands of men: And they shall kill Him, and the third day He shall be raised again. And they were exceeding sorry” (Matt 17:22-23). They seem to be catching on, but they are not yet taking this message seriously. They are sorrowful but have not embraced the Lord’s words.

This explains the Lord’s words “Because of your unbelief: for verily I say unto you, If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you” (Matt 17:20).

Would you say that “Faith smaller than a grain of mustard seed” is mighty small faith! While refusing to believe the Lord’s announcement of His being taken away from them by way of the cross, they were not at all in harmony with His “change of program,” and were helpless to continue their ministry of miracles, signs, and wonders.

Luke’s record makes clear to us what was still hidden to them,
“And they were all amazed at the mighty power of God. But while they wondered every one at all things which Jesus did, he said unto his disciples, Let these sayings sink down into your ears: for the Son of man shall be delivered into the hands of men.”

What had they learned from the Mount of Transfiguration? Did they not hear Moses and Elijah talking about the Lord’s death which He would accomplish at Jerusalem? Whatever they learned there, their lips were sealed for “as they came down from the mountain, Jesus charged them, saying, Tell the vision to no man, until the Son of man be risen again from the dead” (Matt. 17:9).

“But they understood not this saying ... and it was hid from them ...
they perceived it not: and ... they feared to ask him of that saying.

“Then there arose a reasoning among them, which of them should be greatest” (Luke 9:43-46).

While jockeying for positions of greater honor, they seem clueless and have no idea what the Lord has been trying to teach them? O ye of little faith... “O faithless and perverse generation...” (Matt 17:17). Don’t you wonder some times what He would say to us?

So, you see the real problem was not **the demon that wouldn’t**. It was the apostles in unbelief **that couldn’t**, and most sorrowful of all, they did not know why. Are not our thoughts recalled to poor dear Samson, shorn of the hair of his strength, who did not know “that the Lord was departed from him” (Judges 16:20).

Your brother of little faith,

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PS: If the glove fits... you know the routine.

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