

Matthew 17:14-27

"From The Divine To The Demonic"

From Divine revelation to demonic confrontation. That's the transition that takes place as we come down off the Mount of Transfiguration. It's quite the contrast from the Mt high into the valley low, from light to darkness, out of a scene of exaltation & into a scene of desperation.

& I'd just like to point out by way of observation & experience that it seems to me that you can pretty much count on Satan to be waiting at the bottom of every spiritual mountain top experience that you may have. There you are, & you've had the most beautiful experience w/God. He's drawn near & spent intimate time *with* you, imparted some fresh revelation of His Person/power or love *to* you & as you "return to planet earth" from that high spiritual experience the enemy is just waiting there to test you & take *from* you that blessing that God has given to you... That's certainly what happened here.

There was Peter, James & John, just abiding in the glory of the Lord, seeing Him in a "light" (literally & figuratively) that they'd never before seen. It was good, it was glorious, they didn't want to leave (& who would). But life needs to carry on, God has a plan & we need to be about it & so they come down off the Mt & there's the enemy just waiting to rip them off for the experience & the glory that they'd just experienced.

Therefore we do well to (as Paul said) not be "ignorant" of our enemy's devices. No matter how great the glory, no matter how wonderful my experience w/God may be, I do not have immunity from the attacks of the enemy. We need to be aware of the fact that many times, it's after God's greatest blessings that he will be there to try & distract & destroy what God has done. The bible says, "*Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.*" 1 Pet 5:8 Don't be so foolish to believe that he doesn't have *you* in his sights. He wants to discourage, to defeat, & to destroy every good thing that God has done in you, through you & for you. How then can we wage wise warfare? Let's look beginning at Vs 14.

Vs 14-16

Perhaps you're thinking, "Gee Jeff, you mentioned that this was a demonic attack but the text simply says the young man was epileptic. Why do you think this was demonic?" Because in Vs 18 Jesus tells us it is. Now that's not to say that every epileptic seizure is a sign of demonic possession, (I feel silly even needing to say that). I would say the vast majority of cases don't need demonic exorcism, but a doctor & appropriate medication.

However in this case, things were different.

& When we combine the accounts of the other gospel writers we begin to see just how *severe* this particular case of demonic possession was. Of course, I'm not sure that there's ever a case of "mild" demonic possession, however some manifest in much more radical & destructive ways than others.

Matthew tells us that this demon was very dramatic in its manifestations. This was the kind of situation that's stereotyped & movies are made of. The demon caused this man's son to fall into seizures, he made him suicidal causing him to fall into burning fire or pools of water. In Mark's gospel, we discover that when he fell to the ground in these fits he would foam at the mouth & grind his teeth & when he was done seizing & contorting his body would become stiff. Luke informs us that the demon would cause bruises to appear on his body.

Ken Gire does a good job describing this demon. He says, "A cruel spirit that lies in wait, like a bully waiting to pounce on a kid coming home from school. It sneaks up on the boy, jumps him, from behind, & mashes his face into the dirt - all the while, delighting in the tyranny!"

Now we don't know how old this man's son was, but in Mark's gospel Jesus asked him how long these things had been happening to him & he said, "From childhood." So I want you to realize that Satan doesn't care how old, or how young you may be. He has but one agenda. Jesus said, *"The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy."*

Jn 10:10 Occasionally someone will ask me if it's possible for children to be demon possessed. Scripturally I have to say "yes". Satan is no respecter of persons. He's not going to show mercy simply because "he's only a child". 8, 18, 80, he wants to destroy your life.

However I would also say this. That as believing parents your children come under your covering. The bible indicates a certain hedge of protection afforded to the children on the basis of the parental covering of believing parents. In 1st Cor Ch 7 Paul is there speaking about the marriage relationship between a believer & an unbeliever. (Married as unbelievers, one comes to Christ what are we to do?) He says that if the unbelieving spouse is willing to stay, than the believing spouse is to remain w/them. Then he says, *"For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband; (then he makes this statement) otherwise your children would be unclean, but now they are holy."* 1 Cor 7:14 God sanctifies the children on behalf of the believing parents.

Ok, couple things we want to take note of here.

Again, we come out of a scene of glory into a scene of baffled & beaten faith, defeated & discouraged disciples.

We see that while Jesus was upon the Mt that the man had brought his son to the Lord's disciples but they were unable to help him. & That's semi-shocking to us because we know that previously (Ch 10:8) that Jesus had given them authority to cast out demons. He sent them out into the surrounding region & He told them, *"Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out demons. Freely you have received, freely give."* **Matt 10:8** So they did, & they came back to Him & they were all stoked saying, "Man, even the *demons* were subject to us in Your name!" & Jesus said, "Hey, I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven... But don't rejoice because spirits are subject to you, rejoice because your names are written in the book of life."

So previously they'd been successful at casting out demons, presently they couldn't... We wonder why, & Jesus will tell us.

Having said that I want to say this. Sometimes Jesus' followers will fail, & they will fail you. Try as they may, sometimes they will let you down. However Jesus never will. We commend this guy for not giving up when Jesus' *followers* couldn't help, instead he pressed straight in to Jesus.

Mom, Dad, you see where this is going don't you? Bring your kids to Jesus. You've tried this counselor, that pastor, this therapist or whatever & no one seems able to help. Bring them to Jesus, pray *for* them, get on your knees on behalf *of* them & never quit pleading before the Lord on their behalf. *This man was desperate, he was tired & his prayers reflect both. He fell to his knees & said, "Lord, have mercy on my son." Listen to me, don't give up, don't give in, your child's only chance (regardless of their age) might just be their parent's willingness to plead for them at the feet of Jesus.* Be like Job who offered a sacrifice for each of his children everyday just in case they'd perhaps sinned & cursed God in their hearts. (Jb 1:4-5) He had it in his heart to stand in the gap on their behalf regularly, consistently/persistently. This man's persistence was about to pay off.

I also want to say this & then we'll move forward. There was a sense in which the disciple's failure was good for them. Because it provided an occasion from which they might learn. I think it's safe to say here that they learned to guard against the rut of *mechanical ministry*. You know, the "been there done that" mentality. "We've seen this before, we know the formula..." We've constantly got to be on guard against that mentality because ministry can become mechanical if we're not careful

Ministry should be relational (serving out of the overflow of our relationship w/God), not mechanical (going through the motions w/an absence of the heart).

It also reminded them that the good that happened through them wasn't because of something *in* them, but it was of Christ. & It taught them to come to Jesus when they had a problem rather than trying to deal w/it on their own. Jesus said, "*I am the vine*, (the source of supply) *you are the branches* (the conduit of said supply). *He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.*" Jn 15:5 This would be a ready reminder of that truth. Look at Vs 17

Vs 17

Now in Mark's gospel something interesting is added here. As they were bringing him to Jesus the demon threw the man's son to the ground & he began to convulse & foam at the mouth & wallow around. & The man says to Jesus, "If You can do anything, have compassion on us & help us." To which Jesus responded, "If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes."

Do you see what happened there? The man placed the "If" on Jesus, implying doubt, "Nothing else has helped, I doubt You can either, but *if* You can... please." Jesus turned it back on the father, "It's not *if I can do it*, it's *if you can believe*." & Of course that's when the father uttered those words that resonate so deeply in all of us. He cried out, "Lord, I believe, help my unbelief!"

But I've discovered that so often we're just like this man when it comes to problems in our lives. We place the "if" on Jesus, "If Jesus can help me overcome this habit, this addiction..." But the problem isn't *if He can do it*, it's *if we'll believe Him* for it... So let's not place the "if" on Jesus, let's wear it ourselves. "Lord I believe, help my unbelief."

Now I should say that there were other times that Jesus moved & ministered independent of the person's faith. But in this case (for reasons that lie w/in His sovereignty) He wanted to bring healing to this man's faith *then* He would bring healing to his son.

Vs 18-21

Something I always like to point out when we come across scenes like this in scripture is the *lack of drama* brought forth from the Lord. There was no fanfare, no hyping of the situation. Jesus simply rebuked the demon, commanded him to never return (Mark tells us that) & he was delivered instantly. What the disciples failed to do, Jesus did immediately & w/out any difficulty.

Understandably it invoked a question in the disciples. They ask, “Why could we not cast it out?” & Jesus says that it really boiled down to one thing, “unbelief”. They lacked the faith. All of them. *The father lacked faith, “help my unbelief”, he knew he needed to trust the Lord but didn’t. The scribes had no faith (they didn’t help him)...* But Jesus’ primary focus was on the lack of faith of His followers, the disciples.

Jesus was in essence saying, “You have got to trust Me completely & know that I have *all authority* over the enemy. If you forget that you will fail.”

I think sometimes we can have a tendency to take the human element out of the scriptures. *But you’ve got to remember that these men were just like you are & I am. I have no doubt that when they saw this manifestation, the convulsions, the foaming at the mouth, this demon contorting his body & all, it was probably rather frightening. But here’s the thing, fear will rob you of your faith. We forget that God is greater, we’re set back by our fear & we fail.*

Something else I think we need to realize is that when it comes to the demonic realm, the bible teaches us that some demons are stronger than others. They’re more stubborn, more tenacious. *In Eph 6 Paul speaks of the various rankings, powers, principalities, rulers of the darkness of this age & spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. It would seem as this demon was more difficult than most & because of that the disciples were caught unprepared to wage effective warfare.*

& Being that they were able to cast out demons earlier, we see now why they couldn’t here. Jesus says, “Because of your unbelief”. What caused them to fall flat in their faith? We don’t know. As I said it could’ve been a sense of fear, it could’ve been over the fact that they were perhaps jealous that Jesus didn’t call *them* to the Mt top w/Him but took Peter, James & John again... *So they weren’t really praying, they were a little more focused on themselves & their faith waxed & waned. Then when the crisis came they were caught unprepared... Kind of like Samson they tried to wage war not realizing their power was gone.*

This is why it’s so important to stay spiritually healthy & not neglect to seek the Lord regularly... Jesus tells them that had they been remaining in prayer, disciplining themselves, crucifying the flesh & feeding the spirit (staying in the word), they’d have cast the demon out & helped the boy. But because they’d neglected any real form of spiritual discipline they lost the battle.

You see, when Jesus says, “If you had the faith of a mustard seed...”

“You’d say to this Mt, ‘be moved from here to there’ & it would move; & nothing will be impossible for you.” He’s not speaking of the quantity of faith so much as the *quality* of faith. The focus isn’t on the *amount* of your faith, the focus is the *object* of your faith. The point is for *God nothing* will be impossible & us really believing that. & If God is the object of your faith, it just takes a little faith for Him to do great things. You see the focus isn’t how awesome your *faith* is, it’s how awesome your *God* is. Remember? Apart from Christ we can do nothing...

So faith isn’t about your ability to produce an effect, it’s about trusting in God’s ability to work, for w/*Him* nothing will be impossible. God is the source of power, not faith, faith is the conduit through which God’s power flows. **That’s why faith is so critical, because w/out it, it’s like turning off the shut off valve that connects to the source. Apart from faith we’re no longer effective because we’re not appropriating the power of God.**

But w/faith, you can move mountains. The idea here being that faith will change the landscape of your problems. Jesus isn’t issuing a prayerful blank check. But rather, if it’s something that He’s given you authority to do (as His disciple) (such as casting out demons) than nothing can prevent it no matter how huge or impossible it may seem.

Then Jesus tells them, “However, this kind does not go out except by prayer & fasting.” The idea here being that for some things a stronger faith is required than for other things & it’s too late when the situation is upon you, you need to be prepared in advance. & **The vital link between your faith & God’s power... is prayer.** (Fasting, isn’t in the majority of manuscripts, though fasting is a biblical discipline of denying the flesh).

We might say that if prayer attaches us to God, than fasting detaches us from the flesh. Our lifestyle should be one that seeks attachment to God & detachment from the flesh. If you want a powerful faith than you need a prayerful life. Prayerlessness leads to powerlessness.

Satan will attack your loved ones when you least expect it. We’re to be a people who stay prayed up; attached to God, detached from the flesh so that we’re prepared when the enemy strikes... Again parents, keep bringing your kids to Jesus, fight the good fight on their behalf. Don’t come up empty when the enemy strikes...

Vs 22-23

Isn’t it interesting how Jesus is beginning to prepare them more & more for what’s to come yet for some reason they still weren’t prepared? They hear of His death & seem to miss the news of the resurrection, they weren’t there the 3rd day waiting at the tomb.

They were shocked when He was betrayed & put to death. Listen, God is faithful to prepare us for what's ahead, even when we don't pay attention too well.

Vs 24-26

To me this is a semi humorous scene. (Btw this is how we know that Jesus is about a month away from the cross at this point. They would collect the temple tax in the outlying areas like this about a month before Passover.)

But they come to Peter, "What's up? Doesn't your Teacher pay the Temple tax?" Peter's all, "Yeah..." (Almost like, I don't know but "yes" seems to be the appropriate answer here).

Then when he goes into the house, Jesus has a word of knowledge. He already knows what's taken place & He's all, "Peter, I have a question for you. Do the kings of the earth take taxes from their sons or from strangers?" Peter's all, "Well, from strangers." They don't go around the castle, knock on their kids doors, "Tax time... pay up!" Sons are free... It's like a lightbulb moment for Peter. The Son of God is exempt from temple tax... "Hello?"☺ Israel was subjected to temple tax by the Law, but the Father doesn't require tax of His own Son.

Vs 27

Wait, what!? This is radical isn't it? Write this down, read it later. Ps 8:6-8, Jesus had dominion over the works of God's hands, all of it. Over nature, over the animal kingdom, over the birds of the air & the fish. God had given it to Adam in the beginning but he lost it due to sin. What man lost through disobedience Jesus regained through obedience.

But here's what we want to see then we'll wrap up. "Nevertheless, lest we offend them..." Jesus was under no obligation to pay this tax, He was a Son, not a servant. But He also recognized the importance of not enforcing His liberty at the expense of "offending" or "stumbling" others. (Btw, bonus info. You might note that Jesus didn't have any money on Him, the bible says that He became poor for our sakes that we might become rich [that is enter into His eternal inheritance]).

But this is the N.T. principle in view. Unless the bible speaks to a matter specifically there is a tremendous liberty that we have to enjoy in Christ. However the law of liberty is always subject to a greater law & that is the law of love. Liberty may allow it, but love might forbid it. In other words if my liberty offends someone else, love says, "Don't do it."

They weren't going to understand the liberty extended to the Lord. So in love He surrendered His liberty & simply paid the Temple tax.

If you want to study this principle a little more in depth you might refer to 1 Cor 8. The point is simply that we need to be thinking of others 1st & if it serves the greater good, than in love we will yield our liberty.

But we love the fact that Jesus paid the price, not only for Himself (which He did not owe) but for Peter (because he could not pay).

& Isn't that the message of the gospel? Man owed a debt he could not pay, so Jesus paid the debt He did not owe. Peter heard the word of the Lord, responded in obedience & God took care of them. We can trust the Lord to meet our needs as we move forward in faith, honoring His word...

Prayer Points:

Lord help us to be those who are moving forward in faith, growing in faith being a people of prayer who honor/obey Your word. May we be a people who exalt the law of love over liberty that we might minister effectively to those around us. & Lord quicken our hearts to always be a people in season, attached to You, detached from the flesh, that we might be effective in the warfare You've called us to wage.

Jesus fought the ultimate fight, waged the war on sin & death & arose victorious through the power of the resurrection. Jesus paid the debt He did not owe because we owed a debt we could not pay. He paid for me, & for you upon the cross. Humble yourself in the sight of the Lord, believe on the Lord J.C. & He'll wash away all your sin & give you new life. A reason to rejoice, not that the spirits are subject to you in His name, but that *your name* is written in heaven...