

Down from the mountaintop

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[0:00] Can we see that? Yes, we can. Good evening.! We will walk through the text and we're going to take a little detour away from the text and just look at the symptoms that this boy is showing because that's a very, very relevant thing that we need to look at and that we need to understand. And then we'll try and make some conclusions from the text. So the introduction.

We're last looking at this chapter two weeks ago and we found that the chapter opens with Jesus and his disciples, Peter, James and John, up a very high mountain. There Jesus was transfigured and his disciples were gifted with a view of Jesus in his glory. Another way to say this would be that he was transformed. And he was transformed from his human body to a form very similar but one in which there were visible elements of his supernatural being as the son of God. So the text says in verse two of chapter 17, his face shone like the sun and his clothes became as white as the light. I hope I've captured something of that in that illustration there.

Jesus in his glory at this moment, he was talking to Moses and Elijah, both of which had long since gone to heaven before Jesus was in the body on earth. In Mark 9 and Luke 9, it says the disciples were half asleep. So I think they've been up there for some time and they have drifted off.

They saw this and they were very, very scared. Peter was completely knocked bandy by the whole situation and he started talking about putting up shelters. It says in the other two accounts that he didn't really know what he was saying. Before he could finish speaking, they were covered by a cloud and God spoke to them saying, this is my son who I love. With him, I am well pleased. Listen to him. Jesus told his disciples to get up from the floor because they were so scared they fell to the floor. And they had a conversation about the prophecy concerning Elijah, which we won't go into tonight. And they made their way down the mountain.

And this is where our text tonight starts. So we have this event of Jesus healing a demon-possessed boy, which also occurs in the accounts of Mark and Luke. As we walk through our text in Matthew, we're going to be pulling lots of details out from those other two accounts because they're so rich with details that aren't expressed in Matthew's account. And I think it's very important that we get a very full picture of what exactly is going on.

[3:40] So, verse 14. We're told that they, being Jesus, Peter, James and John, came to the crowd.

The crowd is waiting for them at the bottom of this mountain. Who does the crowd consist of? Mark tells us that they came to the other disciples who had a large crowd around them.

And these would be the crowds that Jesus seemed to be attracting, the people that were drawn to him because of his miraculous works and his teachings, something that we keep hearing all the way through the book of Matthew.

And with him were the teachers of the law. And they were arguing with the disciples. The people were overwhelmed with wonder when they saw Jesus.

Some of the commentators on this have mentioned that maybe Jesus still had some kind of element of glowing occurring from his heavenly thing that was occurring on the mountain, the transfiguration.

[4:49] So the teachers of the law were arguing with the disciples and the crowd were all around and they run into Jesus. They were overwhelmed with wonder. Jesus asked the question.

And bear in mind, when Jesus asks questions, it's not like he doesn't know the answer. He knows the answer. He says, what are you arguing with them about? And out of this crowd appears a man

who comes to Jesus and he kneels before him.

In verses 15 and 16. So the question that Jesus was asking, what are you arguing with them about? The man responds to this question in explaining the situation. He says that he has a very sick son and the disciples couldn't heal him.

That's why they were arguing. Let's take a look at the boy for a moment. This is where we'll be taking a short detour.

We're going to look at all the symptoms of the boy. So these are from all three accounts. In Matthew it tells us he has seizures that he falls down.

[6:02] There's an element of danger. His life is at risk. says that he's also possessed by a spirit. It doesn't say that directly in the first part of Matthew but it does say in verse 18 when Jesus drove the spirit out.

It says that there's a spirit present. In Mark's text very, very similar symptoms. They vary a little bit. There's a lot of things going around with this area. The area of the face and the mouth.

He's robbed of speech. He's foaming at the mouth and he gnashes his teeth. He also falls down. It says he's completely rigid and also he's possessed by a spirit.

In Luke's account there's screaming taking place. Not audible words but loud noise. There's wailing of pain and foaming of the mouth.

Again, we see that he falls down. He convulses. We see the element of the danger again. The spirit is destroying him. His life is at risk.

[7:08] It's a very, very serious illness. This is emphasized. And again, we have the third sign. It says that he's possessed by a spirit. When you read about this text, the general consensus for many, many people even says in some translations is that the boy is epileptic.

So the word is, I've got it on the bottom of the slide there, seleniazomai. I'm probably saying that wrong but it's something like that. Which actually means moonstruck.

This kind of condition was so believed to be a kind of insanity which was depending on the changes of the moon. That's why some translations of this text say lunatic which in Latin literally means moonsick.

And this raises a very, very common objection and a very important question that we need to answer before we move on. And I think it's a question that a lot, maybe atheists would probably say and they would say that are these simply primitive people blaming a health condition on a demon because they don't understand it?

Because they don't have the technology that we have today to determine these things. I'm going to categorically state no, that is absolutely not the case.

[8:36] Because in all three accounts of the incident the text states that the boy has physical symptoms of epilepsy, this is true, but two, there is a demon present. So the truth is both things are happening.

And if you're not a Christian and I would believe this at one point too, you might be thinking that believing in demons is all a bit too strange or a bit too superstitious to actually be real.

But this is what the Bible says is the reality of the world that we're living in. If we have more time I'd actually like to go into a lot more detail than this, but I don't have the time to do that.

Here's a couple of verses from the Bible that tell us about our world that we're living in. Ephesians 6.12 Put on the full armor of God so that you can make your stand against the devil's schemes.

For our struggle is not against flesh and blood but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

[9:39] In this world there are authorities and spiritual forces of evil. That's quite clear. The text also says that they have a negative control over people.

The verse names the leading figure of this dark spiritual kingdom as the devil which means the slanderer.

Verse also states that God offers us what we need to protect ourselves against this. Revelation 12.9 says in depicting the early history of the world that the great dragon was hurled down.

That ancient serpent called the devil or Satan who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth and his angels with him. So this same character the devil or the Satan meaning the

accuser came to take power on the earth and he had companions angels which means specifically messengers.

these messengers are what we would also call demons. And whether you like it whether you don't like it this is the reality of the world that we're living in.

[10:54] There are demons present. There are demons in this world. There are spiritual forces of evil at work in everyday life. It's all going on kind of behind the scenes if you don't know what you're looking for and you might be tempted to think that modern day science tells us that these things are too strange to exist.

They're too superstitious and I would say that if you are interested in science the world of quantum physics says things much much more strange than what we're reading here.

Much more unexplainable. Google quantum entanglement or the double slit experiment if someone's interested. So with this context of the spiritual dark forces at work and with the symptoms of the boy we'll go back to our text with verses 15 and 16 we have the boy he's very sick and he's under the influence of this demon and this demon has some authority over the flesh of this boy and is inflicting him with a sickness like epilepsy and the father of the boy kneeling before Jesus says the following he says Lord that is master or teacher in the other accounts acknowledges him as a figure of authority have mercy on my son probably through his reputation of teaching and healing he asks the master's compassion to be demonstrated upon this situation and then in response to Jesus asking why everybody was arguing states that his disciples could not heal him so Jesus responds to the man and as I believe a three part response to this from Jesus there's an addressing and a diagnosis there's a warning and there's a solution so we'll go through each of those three things the addressing and the diagnosis he says oh which is an exclamation unbelieving also faithless or non-believer and perverted meaning corrupted or opposing generation so straight away he's addressing the root cause of the problem and he assigns this cause to the people before him that's what we have there the second part of his response is a warning I found this part particularly interesting I had to read it a dozen times before I even got close to really seeing what I think was going on here so this links I believe to Jesus addressing the people of this time or as he says this generation by posing time related questions how long shall I be with you how long shall I put up suffer with you that's why the repetition it's tempting to think that these are statements isn't it I mean in the language the way we use English now we would use these as rhetorical questions I mean they are somewhat rhetorical but I think I don't think these are statements I think certainly not anything said in haste it's very very clever well placed questions designed to make people think Jesus poses these two questions and it's not in any way in anger in both are a statement that time is limited how long so within that bracket the first question speaks of our relationship with Jesus and then the second question flips that around and it speaks of Jesus relationship with us so we could paraphrase it this way how long will you have me for and the miracles that I bring as Jesus and then the second part how long shall I endure you and the unbelief you bring it's a very very unbalanced couple of questions isn't it do we see the relational difference here but the questions are they're emphasizing one thing that despite everything they'd experienced and everything that they'd seen of Jesus the minute he was absent so was their faith Jesus had brought miracles and amazing teaching and these people brought unbelief I think we can see this statement as somewhat of a warning time is limited to respond to the work of

[15:49] Jesus that brings us to the third part of Jesus response which is the solution Jesus commanded bring the boy here to me this was a desperate situation the men's faith had failed evil was winning arguments raged on the boy was still sick still demon possessed so what was the solution to the problem take it to Jesus according to Luke Jesus was specifically commanding the father to bring the boy being the person that came to his feet acknowledging him as Lord and requesting mercy verse 18 Jesus rebukes the demon Matthew's account of this whole event is actually very succinct when you read the other accounts in

Mark and Luke they're much more in depth what I was saying earlier and we're going to go and draw out some things from those two accounts in a second but the verse says quite plainly Jesus rebuked the demon it came out and the boy was healed Mark accounts many extra details within these events and I'll recap them fairly quickly so this is Mark 9 verses 20 to 27 if you're interested to

turn!

sentient active entity demon recognized Jesus he understood who Jesus was and was probably in fear for being cast out and threw the boy to the floor Jesus questions the father of the boy he says how long has he been like this let's remember that Jesus isn't asking because he doesn't know the answer he is the son of God he knows everything about this boy so what Jesus is doing is drawing out the faith of the father in this really really intense situation so the boy is rolling around on the floor and the father is probably panicking and Jesus says how long has he been like this fairly calmly the emphasis is that the sickness has been going on for a long time Jesus is inviting the father to remember the magnitude of the problem before he demonstrates his authority over the demon the man answers

Jesus and he shows unbelief the man tells Jesus it's been going on from childhood but he isn't yet 100% convinced of Jesus authority in the matter is he if you read the verse it says it has often thrown him into the fire or water to kill him but if you can do anything if you can do anything excuse me take pity on us and help us and again Jesus remains calm and he says if you can said Jesus everything is possible for one who believes in the meantime the child is still rolling around on the floor Jesus is in complete control of the situation there's nothing precarious or dangerous about this situation because Jesus has it all completely in the palm of his hand the man then submits this unbelief to Jesus so the man exclaims another way of saying this will be said with tears so that emphasizes the passion and the things that are going on on the inside of this man he says I do believe help me overcome my unbelief he has believed but he has also acknowledged that it's corrupted! It's a desperate plea Jesus casts out the demon he rebukes or commands the demon out of the boy he says you deaf and mute spirit he said I command you come out of him and never enter him again the spirit shrieked convulsed him violently and came out the boy looked so much like a corpse that many said he is dead but Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him to his feet and he stood up Luke's gospel said that everyone was amazed at the greatness of God I wonder how many incidents there are of epilepsy being cured especially in such a way yet more weight behind the fact that there was a spiritual thing going on here shows us that

[21:19] Jesus did in fact have authority not just over the demon but over the sickness too and that is exactly the reason why everyone was amazed at the greatness of God this boy has been suffering from his whole life since he was very small at least so at this point we're building up quite a picture of the problem that's going on amongst these people aren't we the problem was clearly this prevailing unbelief as we go back to Matthew in verses 19 to 20 we look at the faith of the disciples so it was a little time after this Jesus went indoors and his disciples asked Jesus why couldn't we drive the demon out we have this wonderfully patient response from Jesus and I say that because after everything we've heard about unbelief and everything he said about unbelief they're saying why why can't we drive this demon out

Jesus responds in verse 20 he says because you have so little faith Jesus goes on to paint a famous and quite a wonderful picture of what can be achieved even with just a little faith he says 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 so when we put this in context with everything that we've just learned I think what Jesus is saying here to his disciples is that on Jesus return from the mountain the level of their Pharisees though it wasn't completely gone because the disciples had attempted to drive out the demon in Jesus absence the faith didn't even measure up to the size of a mustard seed there's also a second part to this answer in some translations verse 21 is present and it repeats the words in

Mark 9 29 which say that this kind talking about the demon can only come out by prayer some say prayer and fasting so the text is suggesting that they weren't praying and if that's the case they were likely putting their faith in their own power it stands to reason if that's what was happening that's why they failed wasn't it their work was fruitless they were counting on themselves and not Jesus verse 22 and 23 Jesus and the disciples come together in Galilee so it's not known exactly where the events at this mountain took place smart people have determined that there's two possible locations and they're both around somewhere between 15 and 20 miles from the sea of Galilee somewhere up north and somewhere west yeah west but whichever mountain it was we're

looking at probably about a day's travel to where they're heading to because they're going to Capernaum as we see in the next verses so on this journey they come together Jesus goes on to tell his disciples a second time of his purpose on earth which is that he will be delivered to men that he will be killed and he will be raised to life on the third day as we heard from Ben last week on chapter 16 this was a purpose planned out from the creation of the world the disciples had now come to accept that this was the truth and they were feeling grieved!

over the fact that Jesus must die if we remember particularly Peter Peter rebuked Jesus before didn't he? in Mark and Luke's account the text tells us that they did not know what Jesus meant which I don't think is referring to so much the fact that Jesus would be killed or delivered into the hands of men I think they clearly understood that because they were grieved I don't think they understood that Jesus would be raised to life three days later they couldn't quite grasp this they hadn't yet understood the full purpose of Jesus mission so this little part of the text is a snapshot of a conversation they had as they travelled Jesus is reminding the disciples and teaching the disciples exactly who he is he continues to do this that he is the Messiah he is the son of God and he's walking with them and preparing them for the things to come so we get to the verses about the temple text this is verses 24 to 27 so they all arrive in

[26:44] Capernaum collectors or a collector comes to Peter and ask if Jesus pays the temple tax so this would have been a tax requested by the Pharisees from the Jewish people the things relating to the temple so upkeep resources things like this it wasn't unlawful to not pay the tax it wasn't a government tax this wasn't a Roman thing this was a Pharisees thing but I think it would be fair to say that if you didn't pay it if you were a Jew and you didn't pay it there'd be a substantial level of accusation present a lot of pointing fingers something akin to you don't pay the tax therefore you are displeasing to God not holy false believer these kind of things as when the collector of the tax challenged Peter I think we can read the tone of this as maybe slightly sly or accusational because they knew who

Jesus was Peter's response to the collector was very cautious response he says yes he does because it's probable that he wanted to avoid some confrontation remember that before this there had been that weighty conversation about Jesus being delivered into the hands of men and killed so his response was a very measured and very cautious response Peter returns to the house and Jesus knowing everything that happened again we have this format of Jesus asking a question Jesus speaks first and he asked Peter also called Simon from whom do the kings of the earth collect duty and taxes from their own children or from others what Jesus is drawing out from Peter here is on the earth children of the ruler would be exempt from paying the taxes so what he's doing he's making a parallel with himself as the son of the most high saying

I am the son of the most high God he would be exempt quite rightly he should be exempt and yet even in this position of Jesus being the most high we see that he's prepared in an act of grace to pay the tax and this is for some very specific purposes it's actually mentioned it says not causing offense or causing to trip causing to stumble this is about how it affects other people this is a call from Jesus to be setting an example of some kind he's teaching Peter that we don't have to be so combative over little things as long as it doesn't go against the word of God what we see here is an act of charity so the act of charity is a very very powerful thing isn't it that can have very powerful effects on people

I got this jumper by the way in a charity shop the other day I call it my old man jumper four pounds absolute bargain it's Marks Spencer's jumper it's very good quality I'm finding it a bit warm up here to be honest should have worn a shirt charity is a powerful thing even someone's charity affected me in a powerful way and this is just a jumper a nice jumper so was the pain of the tax an absolute necessity charity as Jesus and Peter have this conversation Peter could be saying I don't have to pay that why should I have to pay that Jesus is saying an act of charity can do powerful things so especially not necessity not a necessity for Jesus to be paying but in the submission of the paying of the tax there's this key element of keeping peace and showing kindness and that is something of a necessity isn't it in our everyday lives

Jesus makes a provision for this and quite wonderfully sends Peter out to retrieve a coin that in a way would have put his faith to the test after everything that we've just read about unbelief about

everything that the disciples have been challenged although Peter was one of the disciples that went up with Jesus on the mountain we have a stage set for Peter to go out and retrieve a coin in the most miraculous way that you could think of this also demonstrates the very things that Jesus has been teaching that he is the son of God he is omnipotent he knows everything he knows where that fish is what's in its mouth where the coins come from we're not told of the outcome of this but I think we can safely assume that this was achieved quite readily quite easily so let's make so let's make some conclusions so my first conclusion to this text would be to my

[32:43] Christian brothers and sisters we walk by faith not by sight that's 2 Corinthians 5:7 there came a time for these disciples where Jesus ascended he went up he climbed the mountain and he engaged with the heavenly kingdom in the meantime they were below and awaiting his return and when we look at the imagery of what we've seen tonight from the transfiguration from the heavenly things that are going on below that's quite a contrast isn't it and there came a time where Jesus wasn't present in the meantime they were below and they ran into trouble in the form of some very serious spiritual opposition and they failed and I want to point out look at where this failure led it made them fruitless in their work it led to a real outward problem with people when

Jesus came back down the mountain his first question is why are you all arguing and a desperate call for help when unanswered a young boy continued to suffer so the failure was that they were not trusting in the words of the Lord Jesus they put their faith to their own strength and stopped seeking God's power tried to use their own and that's a lesson for all of us absolutely all the things that occurred here were because of their unbelief and the most important point that I'd like to make is this happened in the space of a day and a half all of these things fruitless in their work the arguments the problem with people the boy that was sick and needed healing the call went unanswered this was a day and a half imagine the disaster of a week without that faith or a month or a year living like that for that amount of time without

Jesus is a disaster and will bring disaster absolutely on our lives if we're not cautious thankfully! Jesus tells us the remedy we can ask him if we have that unbelief we can ask him help our unbelief and it doesn't bear thinking about a life lived without without a real faith but what does bear thinking about are the things that God can achieve Jesus here is saying everything is possible with God God does answer prayer and God does do amazing things and Jesus proved that our Lord God behold you have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and by your outstretched arm nothing is too difficult for you Jeremiah 32:17 everything is possible with God faith and prayer it's worth mentioning here that that doesn't mean that we're going to get everything that we pray for God isn't going to answer every prayer the way we want it to be answered I'm not going to go home tonight and find a swimming pool full of cookies in my front garden Paul the apostle prayed for relief from his health condition his faith I would say was sufficient because God responded to him but he said my grace is sufficient for you God had a different purpose for Paul much wiser purpose than he could have imagined Jesus taught us to pray that God's will would be done God's will is perfect unlike ours so if you are struggling with your faith as many do the solution is very very clear take it to Jesus pray Lord help my unbelief that is a prayer I guarantee he will answer as we go into this new week brothers and sisters know that if you are placing your faith in the Lord Jesus there is no battle no spiritual battle that can't be won my second conclusion will be for those who don't know Jesus the world isn't what you think it is it's not a place where we live we work and we die without consequence it's wonderfully made no doubt but it's a place of spiritual warfare and dark forces and it's a place that is awaiting the return of Jesus hopefully something of this text if you don't know Jesus will speak to you and show you how wonderful it is to be part of his kingdom to be on his side and I say that because there will come a time

[38:26] Jesus will return and he'll return as judge and he won't be dealing with one but all of the earth including Satan and all his messengers and people because that's the power that Jesus has there's a verse from Matthew 25 it's 31 to 32 it tells us Jesus future return when the son of man comes in his glory and all the angels with him he will sit on his glorious throne all the nations will be gathered before him and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the

sheep from the goats so again if you don't know Jesus you have two options when this occurs you can be with him and you can go to a place that's more wonderful than you could ever possibly imagine or you can join those dark forces for eternity in a place that's much darker and much more miserable than you could ever imagine the Bible says that you are uniquely fearfully and wonderfully made

God does love people specifically you he knows you and everything about you as Jesus knows the boy and he gave his one and only son that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have that eternal life in Jesus and all you have to do is place your faith in him that's it Amen