

## The Powerful King

### Matthew 17:14-21

#### Introduction

The Lord Jesus returns from the Mount of Transfiguration with Peter James and John. In chapter 16 Jesus revealed His identity, mission and destiny. In that revelation we also learned about our identity and mission and destiny. On the top of the mountain Jesus revealed His glory and provided a peek into the future Kingdom of God. As they head down the mountain they will face a dark problem. A desperate father and demon possessed boy—powerless. Nine disciples at the bottom of the mountain—powerless. Jesus returns surrounded by powerless people. Jesus brings them face to face with their problem. **They are powerless because their hearts were filled with unbelief. They lacked power because they lacked faith. And so it is with us.**

Horatius Bonar said, “In all unbelief there are these two things: a good opinion of one’s self and a bad opinion of God.” We might say all unbelief includes two things; an exaggerated opinion of one’s self and a foolish opinion of God.

A.W. Tower wrote; “Every man will have to decide for himself whether or not he can afford the terrible luxury of unbelief.”

How do we find power for faith? It would seem that we have to revise our opinion of our self and God. William Booth wrote; “The greatness of a man’s power is the measure of his surrender.” Surrender to what or who? We must be connected to Christ. Again Horatius Bonar says, “Nearness to Christ, intimacy with him, assimilation to his character—these are the elements of a ministry of power.” Jesus is the object of our faith (Acts 20:21). The Holy Spirit is the power for our faith (1 Cor.12:9; Gal.5:22). The Word of God is the channel for our faith (Rom. 10:17).

#### A Powerless Family (vv.14-15)

*Matthew 17:14 (NKJV) 14 And when they had come to the multitude, a man came to Him, kneeling down to Him and saying,*

*15 “Lord, have mercy on my son, for he is an epileptic and suffers severely; for he often falls into the fire and often into the water.*

The Lord and the disciples Peter James and John were met by a large crowd and a desperate father. The man is on his knees. Mark’s gospel helps fill in the blanks. Chapter 9:17; “. . . he has a mute spirit. (18) “And wherever it seizes him, it throws him down; he foams at the mouth, gnashes his teeth, and becomes rigid.” Luke’s gospel adds (9:28); “Suddenly a man from the multitude cried out, saying, “Teacher, I implore You, look at my son, for he is my only child.”

The word *epileptic* translates a Greek word that literally means “moon-struck” hence the word *lunatic* in the KJV. Epilepsy is a “disorder of the nervous system characterized by either mild or severe seizures which sometimes result in a loss of consciousness” (see Random House Web-

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ster's Dictionary). Does this boy have a mental or emotional or physical or spiritual problem? We are told in Mark's gospel that a demon was terrorizing the boy. We know from Bible passages that demons can cause severe physical symptoms that include self-destructive behavior. The father assumes the boy is 'moon-struck'. In some ancient cultures (and even some modern cultures) it was believed that the moon had special powers. If you slept under a full moon and the light of the moon shone directly on your face you were said to be moonstruck. When Emergency Rooms receive a rash of patients who act out in bizarre fashions they often say, "It must be a full moon".

We are told the boy constantly put himself in harms way. Throwing yourself in either fire or water would be attempts to end one's life. We might think of this as suicidal behavior motivated by the presence of this demon.

The suicide statistics in Colorado and the nation are frightening and frustrating.

Years ago the Denver Post carried the story of Samuel Graham (4-18-97). Samuel was 12 years old. He was the heavy kid who didn't have many friends. His father Vincent Graham is heart-broken. His mother Jacqueline Graham still can't show her son's room to a stranger. "One night late last August while his family slept, Samuel climbed out of bed, dragged a stool into the backyard and hanged himself from a fruit tree. On his last day on earth, Sammy Graham went to church. He had a pillow fight with his brothers, and ice cream for desert. He was 5'4" and weighed 174 pounds. He wasn't the heaviest kid at school but he was shy and sensitive. Some people teased him about his weight and would chase him down the street and smack him on the back of the head. When the teacher wasn't looking sometimes he would cry. In the social hierarchy of Westwood Heights Elementary school he was on the bottom rung. Would things have been different at Parkway Middle School? Sammy was to have started the sixth grade there that Monday, the morning his father cut him down from the tree."

Demons are real. But demons aren't necessary to create chaos and confusion and mental and emotional distress. There are families living in constant horror and pain. There may be social factors, physical factors, spiritual factors and yes even demonic factors. Demons are committed to the destruction of your loved ones. Demons cooperate with people's fears, insecurities, and sense of hopelessness. Demons bring together in a perfect storm pain and problems and offer **self-destructive behavior as the way out.**

We live in a world that glorifies Satan. Young people are given a steady diet of post-apocalyptic visions; invitations to supernatural experiences, drugs, alcohol, acting out sexually and dozens of other harmful activities. Parents say; "My child doesn't want to go to church or participate in youth group. My child doesn't believe the Bible, pray or have faith in Christ."

Is your child in trouble? Suicide is more than a social problem, it is a spiritual problem and a personal disaster for those affected.

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### **The Powerless Disciples (v.16)**

*16So I brought him to Your disciples, but they could not cure him.”*

You have to admire this father. He would not give up. In the multitude there must have been a few Scribes, Pharisees and perhaps even some Sadducees and other legal experts. **No one could help the boy.** Perhaps the religious leaders began to chide the disciples, taunt them, jeer at them, scream “you are all religious frauds and fakes”. You are fraud. Just like your phony master Jesus! So much for Christian counseling!

The man is at the end of his rope. The nine disciples left at the foot of the mountain apparently had no power in this situation. Were they embarrassed by their failure? Did they provide an excuse for their lack of power?

In Matthew 10:8 Jesus told them “Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out demons. Freely you have received, freely give.” But now the power was gone! What is the source of power? Was this lack of power brought on by a lack of faith and unbelief?

Clearly the man brought his son to the disciples in the hopes they might find a cure or a solution to the boy’s horrible condition. Did the disciples try to exorcise the demon?

Why couldn’t the disciples help? Later in the passage Jesus will explain the cause was in part linked to their unbelief and lack of spiritual discipline. The implication being the disciples were not in prayer or fasting in the absence of Jesus! Why weren’t they exercising spiritual discipline in the absence of Jesus? We are not told.

We might speculate. They might have been envious of the other disciples enjoying the mountaintop experience of peeking into the future. They may have foolishly thought they could accomplish the deliverance in their own power or based on successful exorcisms in the past. They may have been jealous, they may have let their guard down—but in the end we are not told.

Did you know it is OK to ask for help? Are you struggling right now with depression? Get help. Are you struggling right now with thoughts of suicide? Get help.

I’ve tried. Many people exhaust their resources and give up. We talk to ministers, counsellors, therapists, social workers, doctors. Some are sincere and supportive. Some are expensive. Some complicate the situation. Some aggravate the situation. It’s not working. **But the man’s persistence will pay off. He brought the boy to Jesus.**

### **A Powerless Generation (v.17)**

*17Then Jesus answered and said, “O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I bear with you? Bring him here to Me.”*

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Jesus uses the terms ‘faithless’ and ‘perverse’ to describe His generation.

The Lord speaks to all present. The 12 were given “power over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all kinds of disease” (see also Mark 3:14-15). Faithless. Perverse (crooked). After only a week’s absence from Jesus the disciples are powerless. They failed. But not because they hadn’t given it some effort. “Their problem was unbelief” (Hughes p.23). “They believed in the process (of exorcism) they believed in themselves because they had done it previously, but they were not resting their faith on Him.”. Jesus says, ‘how long till I be with you or won’t you ever learn?’

What an indictment against the powerless disciple, or the powerless church or the powerless generation. We’ve never had more access to God’s Word and God’s promises and we remain without power. We have radio and TV and the Internet and still struggle to present the gospel with clarity and power. We have more teaching tools than ever before. We are so rich, so blessed; but why do we remain powerless? “We cannot and dare not duck the master’s diagnosis. For if we accept it, we must carefully listen, with his disciples, to what Jesus now said and did—for in a few moments he would raise the boy’s father’s faith to a level requisite with the miracles to take place” (Hughes p.24). **We are powerless when we fail to appropriate the power of God has given us through Jesus Christ and through His Holy Spirit.**

Look at the words of Jesus; “*Bring Him here to Me.*”

We have a responsibility to bring our loved ones to Jesus. To bring the broken and the sick and the demon possessed to Jesus. Have you brought your children to Jesus? Have you brought your family to Jesus? Have you brought your loved one to Jesus? Do you understand the dark and wicked forces at work in their lives? Bring them to Jesus. Are we going to solve the problems of persistent depression, suicide, with more government, more drugs, more education? If we destroyed every drug; imprisoned every drug lord, banned all music that glorified sex, drugs, rock and roll—if we crushed every pornographic web site and cleansed the earth from all sex traffickers—we would be left with every human heart and the hosts of hell still at work. Jesus remains the solution. How do I bring my precious loved one to Jesus? What does that mean how do I do it?

**What will Jesus do? Rebuke the demon. Cure the boy.**

### **A Powerless Demon (v.18)**

*18And Jesus rebuked the demon, and it came out of him; and the child was cured from that very hour.*

The demon had no choice but to respond. This is no contest. Demons are no match for Jesus. Demons are created beings. Jesus is the powerful, living, Lord of the Universe! Mark’s gospel tells us that the demon did not leave without making one last desperate attempt to destroy its

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host! Mark 9:26; “Then *the spirit* cried out, convulsed him greatly, and came out of him. And he became as one dead, so that many said, “He is dead.” **Can you imagine?** The boy's father screams out in fear and terror and confusion! What has just happened? Did you kill my boy? Has Jesus failed? The demon's gone—but at what price? Mark 9:27—“But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up, and he arose.” The boy was cleansed, alive, free. What kind of life do you desire for your children?

Demons are powerless against the Lord Jesus Christ. C.S. Lewis made the comment that we make two mistakes concerning demons. We give them far more attention than they deserve. Or we dismiss them altogether as mythological creatures—or ancient superstitions fabricated by primitive peoples afraid of the dark or ignorant of brain chemistry. **Some people point to demons to explain all bizarre behavior.** Chuck Smith gave me good advice years ago. He said, “emphasize what the Bible emphasizes. Teach what the Bible teaches. Be silent where the Bible is silent. The Bible is not silent on the subject of demons. Ephesians 6:12; “For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual forces of wickedness in high places.”

The enemy is unseen but still real. The struggle is personal. We face a powerful army bent on the destruction first of individuals and then the church. When we believe and trust Jesus His enemies become our enemies. **These enemies suggest, seduce and sometimes people surrender to demonic involvement.**

The Bible rightly condemns the occult, divination and spirit communication or seeking access to information through the dead. Oswald Chambers wrote; “The devil is a bully, but when we stand in the armor of God he cannot harm us; if we tackle him in our own strength, we are soon done for; but if we stand with the strength and courage of God, he cannot gain one inch of way at all”.

The Lord Jesus deals with demons without compromise and in absolute power.

### **A Powerless Faith (vv.19-20a)**

*19*Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, “Why could we not cast it out?”  
*20*So Jesus said to them, “Because of your unbelief;

The disciples ask Jesus privately “Why couldn't we deal with the demon?” The simple answer Jesus offers “Because of your unbelief.” What does unbelief include? **Remember? At least two things: a good opinion of one's self and a bad opinion about God. All unbelief is the belief of a lie (see Horatius Bonar). Exaggerated personal ability. Underestimating God's ability.**

Their question reveals their error.

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“Why could *we* not cast it out?” Is it possible the disciples believed they possessed this power apart from the Lord Jesus Christ? Were they looking to exercise powers independent of the Lord? Were their minds or motives somehow disconnected from the mind and heart of the Lord? Were they centering on “we” instead of “him”?

Unbelief is not the cause of sin; sin is the cause of unbelief.

A.W. Pink wrote; “None but the Lord himself can afford us any help from the awful workings of unbelief, doubting, carnal fears, murmurings, Thank God one day we will be done forever with “unbelief”.”

In order to defeat Satan and demons it will require faith and supernatural power. Not just any kind of faith. Biblical faith. The kind of faith that is persuaded that Jesus Christ is Lord; the kind of faith that trusts Jesus and places supreme confidence in Jesus.

### **A Powerful Savior (vv.20b-21)**

*for assuredly, I say to you, if you have faith as a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you.*

Jesus places the cause of their lack of power as a lack of faith. The mustard seed is the size of a period at the end of a sentence. The disciples did not need to increase the quantity of their faith but rather the quality of their faith. Mustard Seed Faith is persistent faith.

The basis of faith is the Word of God; Romans 10:17 “So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God.”. There is an intimate relationship between faith and the faith. Faith is the act of believing; John 1:12 “But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who *believe in His name*”.

**J      Justification (Rom.4:24-24)**

**E      Eternal Life (John 4:13-14)**

**S      Salvation (Matthew 1:21)**

**U      Union (John 12:24)**

**S      Satisfaction (John 7:37)**

**The faith is truth believed. Faith is food that makes us strong (Acts 14:22).** Faith is a weapon we wield in the battle against spiritual forces of darkness (1 Timothy 6:12). “Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, to which you were called and have confessed the good confession in the present of many witnesses.” The faith is the anchor which faith fastens to its cable—so that can you hold on tight. Acts 16:5; “So the churches were strengthened in the faith, and increased in number daily”.

The disciples needed to learn the lesson we must all embrace. Our power comes from the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus would be leaving the disciples very soon and making His way back to heav-

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en. They would not be able to see His face or have fish tacos on the shore of the Galilee. They would not be able to have hot mint tea in Jerusalem with Jesus. Jesus was teaching the disciples to trust him in persistent faith. Even though the Apostles were gifted and unique in many ways—their power, authority, ability and provision would have to be the Lord Jesus Christ.

*21 However, this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting.”*

Prayer attaches us to God. Prayer is faith breathing (Bruner p.621). Prayerlessness is powerlessness. Not very good English but very good theology. On top of the Mountain God the Father said, “This is my beloved Son hear Him” now the beloved Son says—this is my beloved Father—talk to Him!

Fasting detaches us from the flesh. Many manuscripts omit fasting from the text—but the principle of denying the flesh applies in the strategy of cultivating and exercising faith. Faith requires a life-style of prayer and fasting. Our prayers and fasts prepare us like soldiers in boot camp or physical conditioning like an athlete.

### **Conclusion**

Demons are dangerous.

But we are not powerless.

Faith goes up the stairs which love has built and looks out the window which hope has opened.

Faith says; “I will stand in God’s will”            like Stephen (Acts 6:5).

Faith says; “I rest in God’s bosom”            like Timothy (2 Timothy 1:5).

Faith says; “I am glad in His joy”            like Paul (Romans 5:1).

Faith says; “I am inspired by His love”            like the Ephesians (Eph.1:15)

Faith says; “I am strengthened by His grace”            like the Apostle (1 Corinthians 2:5)

Faith says: “I glory in Christ and am completely satisfied in Him” (Phil.3:9 and Ephesians 3:17).