

The story in Luke 9:37-45 is an abridged version of Mark 9:14-29. It appears in all three of the synoptic gospels immediately after the transfiguration, and forms a stark comparison and contrast to the glory experienced on the mountain the day before. It moves from the work and power of God to the world of human and demonic mayhem, from a preview of Jesus' messianic glory to the disciples' defeat by the powers of darkness. It ends with the second prediction of Jesus' death.

"Jesus' passion predictions (9:22, 44) that surround the transfiguration reveal the divine necessity of His 'exodus' to Jerusalem. In obedience to God's will, He will set His face to go there (9:51). The lengthy travel narrative that follows (9:51–19:28) reveals that this journey is also necessary for the disciples' training. This section discloses that they have a steep learning curve before they will be fully prepared to take up their cross daily and follow Him, as He demands (9:23). They fail to exorcise a demon, fail to understand Jesus' second passion prediction, and show themselves to be competitive with one another and contentious with others. Jesus' continuing instruction on the way to Jerusalem will attempt to purge these faults" (Garland, 399).

The events that follow are the final public act of Jesus in Galilee.

**9:37 On the next day, when they came down from the mountain, a large crowd met Him.**

**9:38 And a man from the crowd shouted, saying, "Teacher, I beg You to look at my son, for he is my only boy,**

**9:39 and a spirit seizes him, and he suddenly screams, and it throws him into a convulsion with foaming at the mouth; and only with difficulty does it leave him, mauling him as it leaves.**

**9:40 "I begged Your disciples to cast it out, and they could not."**

The day before, three disciples – Peter, James, and John – had a glimpse of the blazing glory of God streaming forth from Christ; they had seen two Old Testament saints, and had been covered with the cloud of God's glory. They had also heard the voice of God affirming Jesus as His Son. In verse 37 they came down the mountain from that magnificent experience and were immediately confronted with the reality of life in a troubled, corrupt, and sinful world.

Verse 37 says a large crowd met Jesus when He came down from the mountain. Mark 9:14-15 says, "When they came back to the disciples, they saw a large crowd around them, and some scribes arguing with them. Immediately, when the entire crowd saw Him, they were amazed and began running up to greet Him."

The disciples who were in the dispute were likely the nine that were left behind when Jesus went up on the mountain to pray with Peter, James, and John in the previous context.

Scribes were the Jewish legal experts who had the responsibility of upholding the law. They appeared often with the Pharisees and were trying to discredit Jesus and the apostles. When Jesus returned from the mountain He walked up into an argument. They were most likely arguing about some point of the law that they felt Jesus and His followers were violating, or over the disciples' inability to cast out the demon. It may well have been that in the midst of this debate a father brought his demon-possessed son to Jesus' attention.

It was common knowledge that Jesus had healed people, cast out demons, and raised the dead. The father had come to the apostles for help while Jesus and the others were on the mountain, but they had not been able to cast that demon out.

The man's son was demon possessed, and the effects of the demonization were horrible. The gospel accounts describe it in different ways. The boy was not simply ill; he was assaulted. In Luke, the father said, "a spirit seizes him." It threw him into a convulsion, a violent epileptic seizure (Matt. 17:25 ESV) where the boy was dashed to the ground. In Mark 9:18 the father is recorded as saying, "he grinds his teeth and stiffens out." Verse 39 also uses "mauling" to describe the demon's activity upon the boy. The verb means "to break in pieces, to crush." Needless to say, it was a horror to the boy and all who watched him being tormented.

Luke 9:40 draws attention to the disciples, contrasting their inability to Jesus' ability. In Luke 9:1 it states that Jesus had "called the twelve together, and gave them power and authority over *all* the demons and to heal diseases." Then in 9:6 He sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to perform healing. So the disciples did not lack power, nor did they lack authority; what they lacked was faith. In Matthew 17, where the same incident is recorded, it says, "Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, 'Why could we not drive it out?' And He said to them, 'Because of the littleness of your faith. . .'" (Matt. 17:19-20). Evidently, the disciples were overwhelmed with such a severe case of demonization that they concluded it was beyond their ability. They let the circumstances control their thinking and had come to believe that the power given them was over *most*, not *all* demons. But the bottom line was that they did not believe Jesus. At the transfiguration the Father had instructed Peter, James, and John to listen to the Son (9:35). This is an example that illustrates that the disciples were *not* listening.

***9:41 And Jesus answered and said, "You unbelieving and perverted generation, how long shall I be with you and put up with you? Bring your son here."***

Verse 41 shows that something is clearly wrong but it is hard to know who Jesus is addressing. Some say Jesus was speaking to the father. But the father can't be called "a generation" and the "you" (i.e. "how long shall I be with *you* and put up with *you*?" ) is plural, so it isn't referring to just an individual. Others think that Jesus is rebuking the disciples since later the emphasis (in Matthew) falls on their lack of faith. Still others say He is addressing the crowd in general.

Jesus uses two Greek words. The first word is *apistos*, meaning "faithless, unbelieving." The second is *diastrepho*. In the NASB it is translated as "perverse" but literally means "crooked;" it is used of straying from the straight path. The expression "perverse generation" closely echoes the prophets' words to the unbelieving (Deut. 32:5, 20; Isa. 65:2; Jer. 5:21-23; Ezek. 12:2; also see Phil. 2:15). The crowd would have boasted in being children of Abraham, but their faith was nothing like his; they had wandered from the path long ago. They were unbelieving and perverted. Elsewhere, Jesus calls them a clutch of snakes, adulterous, and a sinful generation. Nevertheless, if Jesus was not addressing the father at all, the sentence wouldn't make much sense. Jesus' rebuke was prompted by the father's request, not from something the crowd had said. However, as we have just seen, the disciples were also unbelieving; their

inability to cast the demon out was due to the littleness of their faith. Thus, it is probably best to see this as a generic statement said loud enough so that all present could hear. It was a rebuke of humanity's persistent unbelief that was expressed to one degree or another, by the crowd, the father, and the disciples. Jesus' response to the whole situation is one of exasperation and lament.

***9:42 (a) While he was still approaching, the demon slammed him to the ground and threw him into a convulsion.***

Any question about the severity of the boy's condition is removed by verse 42 (Bock, 884). As the boy approached Jesus the demon threw him to the ground and into a convulsion. The demon's action betrayed its malicious intent to destroy the boy and its utter contempt toward Jesus. Jesus responded to the situation quickly and decisively; He rebuked the unclean spirit, healed the boy, and gave him back to his father. The fact that Luke used the word "heal" to describe what happened is probably indicative of the fact that the demon exploited a physical ailment.

Luke's emphasis is on Jesus' tremendous power, so he leaves out some details found in Mark 9 that could detract from his point.

Mark 9

*21 And He asked his father, "How long has this been happening to him?" And he said, "From childhood.*

*22 "It has often thrown him both into the fire and into the water to destroy him. But if You can do anything, take pity on us and help us!"*

Jesus' question demonstrates His sympathetic concern toward the boy and the father. It also shows the seriousness of the condition; the boy had suffered from demonic assaults since he was a child. The demon had repeatedly tried to kill him by throwing him in water and in fire. "Water" is plural in Greek, probably referring to pools and streams. Fires were constantly burning to keep people warm and to cook from; they then became a venue for the demon to express its hatred.

When the father had first come to seek help, he found out that the disciples could do nothing. He had come in faith, but his faith was shaken by the disciples' inability. He therefore approached Jesus with some reservation: "*if You can do anything, take pity on us and help us!*" His plea shows that although his faith had been shaken, he had not given up all hope.

Mark 9

*23 And Jesus said to him, "'If You can?' All things are possible to him who believes."*

*24 Immediately the boy's father cried out and said, "I do believe; help my unbelief."*

Jesus immediately focused on the father's comment, "*if You can?*" The problem was not with Jesus' ability, but with the faith of the father. Up to this point, the lack of faith had been focused on Jesus' disciples – the would-be healers - but here it shifts to the father. All need faith, both the healer and the

healed (Brooks, *Mark*, 147). The disciples' inability to cast the demon out showed that lack of faith hinders the work of God (Stein, *Mark*, 434).

Jesus was not suggesting that the father's faith was a personal power that could heal; He wasn't telling the man if he had faith in his faith his son would be healed; the challenge was for the father to have full confidence in Jesus and His ability to heal. "In effect, Jesus is saying to the man, 'do you really believe that I can cast out the demon?' 'Yes or No?' Despite the failure of the disciples, does this poor man really believe that Jesus can deliver his son? And so, it is not a question of whether or not Jesus has the power to do this, it is a question of whether or not the man truly believes that Jesus can do this" (author unknown). Hebrews 11:1 says, "faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." Faith transports God's promises from the future into the present tense. It is a conviction that acts, trusting in what has been said. It becomes the dominating reality in our life.

Jesus didn't always require faith from the people He healed, but His intent is to teach about the importance of faith. The Bible says, "Without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him" (Heb. 11:6). Jesus wanted more than to give the man a healed son, He wanted to stimulate faith so that the man could please God.

The father immediately responded that he does have faith, but honestly recognizes that it is not full confidence; his faith was insecure. He therefore asked Jesus to strengthen the faith that he had.

"This man has heard Jesus' words. He believes that Jesus can drive out the demon. But he knows that he is just like everyone else of this generation, and is by nature unbelieving. He believes, but he is still plagued by doubt and not absolutely sure. So, on the one hand, the man knows that Jesus alone can help him and so he can truly answer that he believes. But he also is honest and knows his own weakness, which he now humbly confesses. 'I believe, but help my unbelief'" (author unknown).

What is to be tested in the arena of experience is not Jesus' ability, but the father's refusal to set limits to what can be accomplished through the power of God. In the struggle with temptation, faith must always free itself from the disastrous presumption of doubt, in the certainty that with God nothing is impossible, and that his majesty becomes most visible when human resources have become exhausted. Jesus thus calls for that faith which bows its head before the concealed glory of God (Stein, *The Gospel of Mark*, 333).

#### *Mark 9*

*25 When Jesus saw that a crowd was rapidly gathering, He rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, "You deaf and mute spirit, I command you, come out of him and do not enter him again."*

*26 After crying out and throwing him into terrible convulsions, it came out; and the boy became so much like a corpse that most of them said, "He is dead!"*

*27 But Jesus took him by the hand and raised him; and he got up.*

Jesus was not seeking self-glory, nor did He want to entertain miracle-seekers, so He healed the boy before more had gathered. Jesus' emphatic, "I command you" (ἐγὼ ἐπιτάσσω σοι- Mk. 9:25), combined with the disciples' inability to cast the demon out, heighten His personal authority (Stein,

435). His double rebuke to the unclean spirit made it clear that the demon's influence upon the boy was over. The demon's response shows its disdain for Jesus and gives us an indication of its strength and why it was so hard for the disciples to cast it out. In an extremely violent display it threw the boy in terrible convulsions and left the boy as dead. Although Mark makes it clear that the boy had not died, the mention of death and Jesus raising him up is terminology that reminds the readers of resurrection.

***9:42 (b) But Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit, and healed the boy and gave him back to his father.***

*Mark 9*

*28 When He came into the house, His disciples began questioning Him privately, "Why could we not drive it out?"*

*29 And He said to them, "This kind cannot come out by anything but prayer."*

The privacy of the house made instruction to the disciples easier.

Up to this point, the emphasis had been on faith; here the need of prayer is interjected. The two are related; prayer is an avenue for faith. Faith in the unlimited power of God is expressed through prayer. Perhaps the disciples had come to believe that the power Jesus had given them (Lk. 9:1) was at their disposal to use whenever they wanted. This would be a subtle form of unbelief, for it encouraged them to trust in themselves rather than God (Lane, NICNT, Mark, 335). They needed to learn that they were always to be dependent upon the power of God to do the work of God.

As in all the exorcism accounts in Mark, we find a strong Christological emphasis in the present passage. Jesus' surpassing greatness is found in that He performs a most difficult exorcism. The failure of the disciples to expel the demon serves to heighten the fact that Jesus, who easily expels it, is stronger and greater than them and the demon. By its location in Mark, the present exorcism serves to prove Jesus' sonship that was declared at the transfiguration; just as Jesus' greatness places Him on a different level than Moses and Elijah, so here He is also on a different level than the disciples. Other aspects in the account that emphasize Jesus' greatness and glory are the amazement He causes by His appearance (9:15) and the great crowd that gathers together (9:15, 25) because of His reputation and power to heal. That the crowd sees only "Him" (9:15) and not Peter, James, and John serves to focus the reader's attention on Jesus as the central figure in the narrative (Stein, 436).

***9:43 And they were all amazed at the greatness of God. But while everyone was marveling at all that He was doing, He said to His disciples,***

***9:44 "Let these words sink into your ears; for the Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men."***

***9:45 But they did not understand this statement, and it was concealed from them so that they would not perceive it; and they were afraid to ask Him about this statement.***

Jesus was sent to reveal the Father, and the miracle He had performed did just that; the people were amazed with God's greatness. As Acts 10:38 says, "You know of Jesus of Nazareth, how God anointed

Him with the Holy Spirit and with power, and how He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, *for God was with Him.*"

In verse 44, Jesus repeated that He was going to be delivered into the hands of men (cf. 9:22). The first rejection passage in 9:22 is tied to the Jews; this one is tied to all humanity. Opposition to God is not an ethnic condition, but a human condition – “the power of sin is in the world and in every human heart” (Edwards, 289). Though the prediction may seem alien to the context, it serves Luke's theological purpose. “Divine majesty will not meet with constant applause from humans but will encounter rejection. Many will fail to see that God works an even mightier deed on the cross with Jesus' death and resurrection” (Garland 404).

It is significant that Jesus announces His death *while* they were expressing their amazement over the miracle (9:43). This creates a paradox; though Jesus is the Chosen One of God to whom even the strongest demon must submit, men will not submit and will even crucify the Lord of glory.

Furthermore, in 9:44, God is involved in a way that was not apparent in the first prediction. God is the implied subject of the passive verb “delivered over.” This means that Jesus will be delivered over to be crucified by God. In Acts 2 Peter also says, “Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man. . . *delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God*, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death” (Acts 2:22-23).

“The verse reflects the language of the servant of Yahweh in Isaiah 53:6, 12 (LXX) and hints that Jesus will die for the sins of others. ‘It is just this meaning that Christian proclamation finds in Christ's death: His incomprehensible fate is for the benefit of the very ones at whose hands He died, and that benefit is in accordance with God's salvific will for humankind.’ But here as elsewhere in Scripture, God's will does not absolve humanity of its responsibility. ‘The Son of Man will go as it has been decreed. But woe to that man who betrays Him!’ (22:22)” (Edwards, 289).

From the beginning of His ministry Jesus demonstrated His authority. Unlike the religious teachers of His day, He spoke with authority. As time went on His authority expanded. He demonstrated His authority over diseases, then over demons and death. He had authority to delegate divine power to others (the apostles and later the seventy), to forgive sin, to execute judgment, and even to give up His own life and take it back again. The disciples could not conceive of how one who has authority over everything could “be delivered into the hands of men” (9:44). Luke simply says, “They did not understand this statement” (9:45). The words, “Let these words sink into your ears” highlight their incomprehension (Marshall, 393).

The disciples say nothing about Jesus' comment. The Bible attributes their silence to ignorance and fear (Matt. 17:23b; Mk. 9:32), but Luke adds that they were not yet meant to understand it; it was hidden from them (cf. Lk. 24:45–47). Just as Jesus' death is viewed as the sovereign will of God, so the disciples' ignorance was a divinely ordained action rather than willful resistance. Thus, “the emphasis on ignorance in verse 45 does not stress culpability on the part of the disciples. Rather, it is the necessary will of God until the final purpose of the Son of Man is achieved on the cross and empty tomb” (Edwards, 289).