

Tuesday Evening Bible Study Group Notes

A Case of Epilepsy

Scripture Readings: Luke 9.37-43, Matthew 17.14-20, Mark 9.14-29

This event is found in all three synoptic Gospels between the record of the Mount of Transfiguration and the first detailed teaching of Jesus concerning His coming crucifixion.

The Mount of Transfiguration must be understood as that moment when Jesus as God's anointed was seen to have won acceptance with God. He having been miraculously born of a virgin, without the seed of man, was not thereby subjected to carry as we do the inherited sin of Adam. Having passed every test, His presence radiated the glory of His righteousness. He is the spotless lamb. It is here that He offers Himself as man Hebrews 10.9&10 and Philipians 2.8&9. (He had already offered Himself in glory in eternity as the Eternal Son Philipians 2.6&7). The Father is satisfied with Him. Now he becomes the sacrificial lamb. The heavenly messengers speak with Him concerning His death and resurrection which He is to accomplish at Jerusalem. Luke 9.30&31. From this time he set his face to go to Jerusalem Luke 9.51.

The Symptoms Described.

The three gospels differ slightly in the words used for the father's description of his son's symptoms. Matthew says he was 'lunatic', or 'moon struck', but is rendered more freely as 'epileptic' in the NIV v15. Mark records the description as a 'dumb spirit' v17 but Dr Luke modifies this to simply 'a spirit'. We ought to remember that in instances as these, 'a spirit' should first be understood to be that which motivates and controls human behaviour. Matthew is the only Bible writer to use the word lunatic and he does this twice. Look up Matthew 4.24 where it clearly distinguishes this kind of illness from that of demon possession. Probably the NIV is correct in translating to epileptic. It is clear that the father reported to Jesus that the son was suffering from a physical disorder of the body, specifically one of the mind. Dr Luke reported the father's description and did not use the word epileptic (from the Greek *epilepsia* or seizure) because the disease had not been differentiated in his day. It is 'a disorder characterised by a tendency to recurrent seizures due to

the paroxysmal discharge of cells within the central nervous system.' (Saunders) and can have various causes. Its symptoms can accord with the descriptions in Matthew 17.15, Mark 9.14 and Luke 9.39. One in every 200 people suffer from some form and degree of epilepsy today.

The Disciple's Failure

Whilst Jesus, Peter, James and John were in the mount, the father came seeking a cure for his son. He found only the other disciples and explained the problem. They tried to cure the boy, but could not v40. Why should they presume to do so? Jesus had recently given them the authority to cure the sick and exorcise demons when he assigned them to a tour of ministry. Luke 9.1&2. Having found their authority effective they obviously presumed that they were still empowered. Despite their act of faith, they failed. No doubt they were more than bitterly disappointed, they were embarrassed before the leaders of Israel, for the scribes were there. They took them to task. Mark 9.14. Jesus questioned the crowd "What

are you putting on them?" v16 (Literally yoking together). It was a rebuke as well as a request. No one answered but the lad's father.

The Lord's Cure

Luke's account is surprisingly brief. Note that Jesus listened to the father's history of the case. Mark 9.21&22, and observed the child as he went into a spasm Mark 9.20. He then treated the cause illness as one of demon possession, not the symptoms of epilepsy. His diagnosis was different to that of the father and subsequently that of the disciples who were treating the illness as physical.

Only Luke tells us that the spirit was an unclean or foul demon. It had taken control of the boy's body blocking the sense of hearing and speech thereby using his body to control the actions of his family who had to care for him. Jesus's method was that of confronting the unclean spirit. He addressed and sentenced it v42. 'Rebuke' here means to 'set a value on', as a judge sets the appropriate penalty against a proven crime. The suggestion is that it was consigned to the abyss Luke 8.31, as was the habit of Jesus. It was not permitted to return.

How we too need to learn this lesson. It is not only those engaged in healing who need to recognize a spiritual (here meaning the sphere of spirit) when there is one. We need to recognise the difference between the body, the soul (mind, will and emotion) and the spirit (See 1 Thessalonians 5.23) and minister to the whole man.

In our own lives we also need to make this same distinction, for we can live lives centred in the body and its appetites and demands (Ephesians 2.3 and 1 Peter 4.2) or lives which are more refined and centred in the soul (Hebrews 11.12) or lives which are directed by a spirit quickened and controlled of the Spirit of God (Romans 8.14 and Galatians 5.18).

The Teaching Given

First, Jesus taught the disciples that physical problems have physical answers, but spiritual problems only respond to spiritual means. Faith is one means, Prayer and fasting is another. They did not understand the difference Matthew 17.19-21 and Mark 9.28&29. It is a matter of derived authority. In matter like this the power is of God, not of a resident gift. Therefore they (and we) must wait prayerfully on God until the answer to the problem is God given. Second Jesus called the people living at that time faithless and perverted. This sounds quite immoral. But the words he used and their context need to be examined. 'Faithless' as used here simply means 'devoid of faith' and does not carry our added modern value of a breach of trust. 'Perverted' means 'twisted' or 'turned aside from the right path.' They were going in the wrong direction. They were looking on the problem as a physical phenomenon, not looking to God for understanding and guidance. 'How much longer will I be with you to bear with you' v41, time was short as His face already was turned toward Jerusalem and they had much to learn.

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Lower Road, Eltham North
Sundays 10.30 am

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