

• *Down from the mountain*

The disciples come down from the greatest experience they had ever had in their lives. They have learnt who Jesus is, and they have been told what will happen to Him. They have experienced a confirmation of His deity. But when they return to the other disciples staying below they arrive to find a troublesome situation which the other disciples have not been able to handle.

**1. Practical challenges**

1. **Great privileges may be followed by practical challenges.** The three disciples had wanted to stay for a long time on the mountain of transfiguration, but Jesus would not allow it, and they had to come back down to ordinary life. Their experience on the mountaintop ought to help them in facing the practical difficulties below. What is the use of seeing the glory of God with our very eyes if we then are not able to be of any use to people in need?

• *Unexpected return*

They find a crowd of people<sup>□1</sup>, including the enemies of Jesus, the teachers of the law<sup>□2</sup>. The people are surprised by Jesus' sudden arrival. They had expected Jesus to be away for a long time<sup>□3</sup>. When Moses ascended Sinai on one famous occasion He stayed for forty days. Jesus went up one day and came down the next. There had been at least six days' preparation **before** He ascended the mountain<sup>□4</sup>.

□1 9:14

□2 9:14

□3 9:15

□4 see 9:2

• *A difficult case of demonisation*

Jesus asks what is happening<sup>□1</sup> and learns about a case of demonisation which seems to be exceptionally difficult<sup>□2</sup>. The difficulty arises from the unbelief of the people<sup>□3</sup>. The boy could have been delivered earlier if some people of faith had ministered to him. Jesus begins to help the boy. He asks some questions and finds out that the problem is severe and longstanding<sup>□4</sup>. Unlike the disciples He is ready and able to help.

□1 9:16

□2 9:17-18

□3 9:1 9a

□4 9:19b- 22

**2. Strong faith**

2. **Practical challenges may require strong faith.** Such a situation requires boldness and strong confidence in God. The boy's father is a mixture of faith and doubt. He had faith enough to bring his son to the disciples, but his experience with the disciples have been discouraging. He hopes Jesus will be able to help but he also has serious doubts. 'I believe; help my unbelief', he says<sup>□1</sup>. Jesus is confronted with unbelieving opponents, powerless disciples and doubting friends.

□1 9:24

Jesus faces the great difficulty of this particular problem<sup>□1</sup>. The man has faith but his faith needs strengthening and he knows it<sup>□2</sup>. Jesus orders the spirit to leave<sup>□3</sup>. The result is discouraging at first<sup>□4</sup>. It seems as if the boy has died, but Jesus raises the boy from his death-like state<sup>□5</sup>.

□1 9:1 9b-22

□2 9:23-24

□3 9:25-26a

□4 9:26b

□5 9:27

• *Unbelief – the root of human wickedness*

The story makes the point that some situations require strong faith. What God wants from us more than anything is faith. The wickedness of the human race is rooted in unbelief and the doubting of God's word and God's power. The situation before the disciples is very extreme. Only great trust in God will be able to bring any help.

**3. Strong faith through prayer**

3. **Strong faith comes through prayer.** The conversation between Jesus and the disciples drives home the lessons of what has happened. 'Why could we not drive out the demon?' they asked<sup>□1</sup>. Jesus answered: 'This kind can come out only by prayer'<sup>□2.1</sup> Evil powers vary in strength. Some situations are dealt with very easily. The simple preaching of the gospel may drive back weak demons, but there

□1 9:28

□2 9:29

• **A word of command from Jesus**

simple preaching of the gospel may drive back weak demons, but there is such a thing as ‘this kind’. Demons evidently vary in power. Some require special prayerfulness before they yield to a word of authority. Jesus actually does not pray. He orders the demon to leave, and the demon yields to a word of command from Jesus. It must be remembered however that Jesus has just taken time away on the top of the mountain nearby. Part of the purpose of His going to the high mountain was to get solitude. He wanted to be able to seek God and receive revelations from Him. Jesus was **already** sufficiently a man of prayer. He had been on the mountaintop and was able to give a word of command which the demon would instantly obey. The disciples apparently were much weaker than Jesus in this respect. When the demonised child was brought to them they were not sufficiently men of prayer and faith to be able to give the word of command which the demon would obey.

• **Variations of difficulty**

So Jesus seeks to help them. ‘This kind does not come out except by prayer’. There are variations of difficulty within the challenges that confront the Christian. Some of them are easily dealt with. A little knowledge, a little faith, a little prayer – and the problem goes. Yet there are other situations that are much more severe. The problem may have been around for many years<sup>□1</sup>. The symptoms might be extreme<sup>□2</sup>. The demon may yield only with displays of violence<sup>□3</sup>.

□1 as 9:21 indicates

□2 see 9:18, 20b, 22  
□3 9:26

• **A life of faith and prayerfulness**

What is required in such situations is a **previous** history of great faith and great prayerfulness. Three of the disciples have just had the greatest experience of their lives; they have seen with their very eyes the radiating divine glory of Jesus the Son of God. But this great ‘experience’ in itself will do them no good unless it leads them into a life of faith and prayerfulness. The experience of the divine glory is simply an encouragement to them.

They will still need to face the great challenges of life and they will need to become men who, like their Saviour, spend time with God.

**Endnote**

<sup>1</sup> The ‘King James’ translation adds ‘*and fasting*’ but these word were added much later at a time when asceticism was becoming popular in the church. Scribes of later centuries had a tendency to add references to fasting.



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Dr Michael Eaton is highly respected internationally as a theologian, author, preacher and teacher. He lives in Kenya where he is one of the leaders of the Chrisco Fellowship. His *Preaching Through The Bible* (PTTB) books are highly popular worldwide. Michael Eaton puts the theological and practical meaning of the Bible in a clear and down-to-earth way so that what is written can be easily understood by the reader.



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