

## Prayers

### To God

*Consider what has happened to you in the last 24 hours, and think about the role God has had in these things. Praise Him for His faithfulness, and ask Him any questions that arise from your reflection*

### For myself

O my Lord and my God. Cover me with Your love this day. When You must expose my sin, lead me to full repentance. When You must lead me where I do not want to go, take me firmly by the hand. When the word You must speak to me may be hard for me to bear, open both my ears and my heart to Your will. And in this way, transform me this very day, I pray: **AMEN**

### For others

*Pray for those who will be preparing worship services and sermons for this coming weekend. Ask the Lord to bless His prophets in this age and give them courage.*

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## Meditation

When those who cannot accept Christ or the faith  
Make enquiries about truth and are willing to talk,  
Then the Kingdom of God is truly at hand  
In the words and the deeds of His servants.

When the sick who do not know where to turn for help  
Accept the offer of Christ's touch and His cure,  
Then the Kingdom of God is truly at hand  
For the healing and blessing of all peoples.

When the oppressed who are broken by earthly bondage  
Are set free through the pursuit of God's justice and love,  
Then the Kingdom of God is truly at hand  
As His people battle against evil by His Spirit.

When weak hands are strengthened and the blind can see  
When the lame will walk and the deaf can hear  
Then the Kingdom of God is truly at hand  
And the Lord has been faithful to His promises.

When creation sings for joy and streams flow in the desert  
And the world is recreated in all its splendour,  
Then the Kingdom of God has truly come  
And we will reign with the Saviour in all glory!

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## Bible Passage

### Luke 9:37-43

<sup>37</sup> Now on the next day, after they came down from the mountain, Jesus was met by a large crowd. <sup>38</sup> Just then, a man in the crowd shouted out,

*"Teacher, I beg you to show concern for my son, for he is my only child. <sup>39</sup> This is what happens; a spirit takes hold of him and he screams, without warning. It throws him into convulsions with foaming at the mouth, and hardly ever leaves him; it is crushing him. <sup>40</sup> I begged your disciples to cast it out, but they could not."*

Jesus responded, and said,

***<sup>41</sup> "You faithless and twisted generation, how long shall I stay with you and put up with you? Bring your son here."***

<sup>42</sup> Then, just as the boy was coming, the demon threw him to the ground in a convulsion. But Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit, healed the boy and gave him back to his father, <sup>43</sup> and all of them were amazed at the greatness of God.

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## Review

If this Scripture was simply about a child being healed, we would think of it as a beautiful story about the healing ministry of Jesus. But it is not, and we should be careful we do not misunderstand it, either by diminishing the role of the evil spirit or by taking our eyes off Jesus, who is exclusively the central character. This is a distressing incident in which a distraught father appealed to Jesus to help his son, who was convulsing with an evil sickness after the disciples had failed to help him. Jesus' response is twofold; He warned everyone around Him of the consequences of failing to accept God's work amongst them (9:41), and He dismissed the evil spirit forthwith. The people were amazed, but Jesus' words were still ringing in their ears; they were '*a faithless and twisted generation*' (9:41).

We begin by learning that a day has passed since the transfiguration (9:37 – but neither Matthew nor Mark are this specific), and yet again, a large crowd have sought Jesus out. In recent chapters of Luke, crowds have followed Jesus seeking His healing touch (5:29, 6:17,7:24, 8:40 etc.), and listening to His teaching. However, Jesus had now begun to set His face to Jerusalem and His final destiny (9:22,31), even though the world still pressed upon Him for His ministry and personal touch.

We may not have noticed this, because in our minds perceive the stories of Jesus' healing and deliverance ministry as jumbled up and lacking chronological order. However, this is the first story in Luke of Jesus healing a disease caused by a demon. The only demons we have encountered so far in Luke have been the one who complained at Jesus' preaching in the synagogue (4:33f.) and the peculiar case of Legion (8:26f.). Jesus had earlier commissioned the disciples to set people free from demons (9:1f.), but they were lacking examples of how to do this. It was time for Jesus to teach the disciples what to do. Now, the other Gospel writers present things differently (see below), but this is clearly Luke's theme.

Most of us can empathise with the cry of boy's father. To have a child who is convulsing uncontrollably is a fearful thing, and would drive any parent to drastic measures in seeking help. We can imagine that the father virtually screamed out to Jesus above the hubbub of the crowd (Luke says he '*shouted*' – 9:38), he would have done anything to attract the

attention of the only man in Israel capable of addressing the need of his son. It seems he was continually fitting, but we should not look down on ancient people for interpreting them as pure evil. Even in today's medical world there are myriad reasons for 'fits', but whatever medical condition, such a dangerous condition was still evil; the child could die.

The father complained that he had taken his son to the disciples. We should not, as some do, try and work out which ones were present, as if it could not have involved Peter, James and John because they were with Jesus on the mountain. It was at least a day later (9:37), and Luke does not single out any of the disciples (9:40).

As we try to make sense of what happened next, we may spot that although the basic story is the same as in Mark 9:14-29 and Matthew 17:14-21, each Gospel writer concludes the story differently. Matthew tells us that Jesus set the boy free but the disciples were upset by their failure and asked Jesus about it; He then told them that as yet, their faith was inadequate (Matthew 17:20,21). Mark tells us that Jesus told the disciples that '*this kind can come out only through prayer*', but it is difficult to compare this with other deliverance ministry stories in Scripture in order to illustrate or explain such a principle. It has to be taken by faith.

The closing of the story in Luke however is very different. Jesus rebuked those present, disciples and all, and offered them a hint of what was on His mind. He said, '*how long shall I stay with you and put up with you*' (9:41), not perhaps out of negative frustration, but with heartfelt concern for the work He had to do before His ministry could be completed. He had just warned the disciples about what would eventually happen to Him, and He was very concerned that they would learn how to fulfil the mission He had given them (9:1).

Luke misses out Jesus' interaction with the disciples, so that Jesus' words of rebuke come to the fore (9:41), and they stand in sharp relief at the climax of the story. So instead of agonising with the disciples about why they were not able to dismiss the demon, Jesus' words of rebuke appear to be His analysis of everything that had gone wrong. He declared the generation to be without faith, and '*twisted*', and this applied to the disciples as much as to everyone else. Despite Peter's earlier proclamation of faith (9:20), he was not now a perfect example of a faithful Christian, he and the others still lacked faith. Moreover, if they were not able to stand against evil, then their lives had not yet come into line with that of Jesus and they were in this sense '*twisted*'. Jesus' accusation may yet apply to us.

Too often Christians end up standing lightly to evil in its various forms, either by distancing themselves from it or ignoring it. Some believe in evil and cannot see how it affects them or anyone else, whilst others have lost sight of the basic moral questions that undergird our existence. It is what happens when the gift of life we have been given makes us think we can provide for ourselves and everything is fine. In truth, evil remains our enemy, and there is much evidence of the evils around us, whether they are torturing people's individual lives or rising up out of the more murky backrooms of some of our treasured institutions, such as banks, governments and big business, and even hospitals and universities. Like the disciples, we have failed thus far, and Jesus longs to set us free.

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## Going Deeper

### ***Notes on the text and translation***

**V38 'I beg you to show concern for my son'**

Other translations:

*'I beg you to look at my son'* (NIV)

*'I beseech thee, look upon my son'* (King James)

I have changed the word 'look' to 'show concern for'. It is only a small point, but the Greek word used here means to 'look upon with favour', and there are many ways in which it could be translated. The word 'look' is adequate, but does not capture the urgent sense of the man's call to Jesus to show favour. Because we do not use the word 'favour', I have used an appropriate alternative that is right for this sentence. 'Show concern for my son' seems to me to capture the sense of the Greek much better.

**V39 'This is what happens; a spirit seizes him ...'**

Other translations:

'Look, a spirit seizes him ...' (CEB)

'A spirit seizes him ...' (NIV)

At the beginning of this sentence is the Greek word 'idou', which is sometimes translated 'behold', or as the Common English Bible puts it, 'look ...'. It is a general connecting word that is often omitted, and you will find that most modern Bible versions start the sentence without any reference to it, as in the NIV above. I think it is worth allowing a loose translation such as mine, which expands appropriately on what 'look' or 'behold' might mean here, in current English, hence my translation 'This is what happens ...'

**V39 'it throws him into convulsions with foaming at the mouth'**

Other translations:

'it convulses him until he foams at the mouth' (NRSV)

'it shakes him and causes him to foam' (CEB)

It is simple enough to understand what is happening here, but we should be aware of two things. Firstly, Luke does not say that the boy 'had a fit' (as we might say today), he says that the fit was the direct result of the evil spirit. Neither should we water down the translation by saying that the boy was 'shaken' by the spirit (as we find in the CEB version above); the Greek word used here means no less than a violent fit. Secondly, the words 'at the mouth' do not appear in the Greek, which simply says 'with foaming'. The words are added simply to make sense of the expression in English.

## **Further Comments**

### **Scenes of distress at the foot of a mountain**

If you look back into the Old Testament, you will find that after Moses obtained the Ten Commandments on the mountain with God (Exodus 32), he came down to find a scene of dire evil let loose in Israel, and had to deal with it forcefully. The people of Israel had made a golden calf, and there was animosity towards God; there was wholesale rebellion. Moses dealt with this by addressing the evil head on, and a civil war ensued between Moses, supported by the tribe of Levi, and the rest of the people of Israel.

In another part of Scripture, Elijah dealt a great blow against the evil worshippers of Ba-al on a mountain top in Israel (1 Kings 18 – the confrontation on Mount Carmel), but when he came down in victory, he had great difficulty in dealing with the wife of King Ahaz, the famed queen Jezebel (1 Kings 19:1f.), and ended up running to another mountain, a long distance away, to find God (1 Kings 19:11-14)

How do these incidents relate to today's story? They are the background for its possible interpretation, for knowing this, Jesus would have expected trouble with evil when he came

down from the mountain of transfiguration. This great experience was the start of Jesus' intent on going to Jerusalem, and His pursuit of His God given calling was disturbing to all evil, satan and his demons. No wonder it reared its head; no wonder, also, that Jesus appeared very upset that the evil came in the form of the sickness of a child. By setting him free, He points us towards the ultimate victory He will have Himself over evil, on the Cross.

### ***Jesus' words of complaint***

When Jesus says, '*you faithless and twisted generation ...*' (9:41), His words reflect many similar outbursts recorded in the Old Testament, particularly from the lips of Moses. In Numbers 14:11, Moses complains to God when Israel rebels against him in the wilderness and refuses to believe the 'signs' performed for Israel, saying, '*How long will this people despise me ...*'. Similarly, in Deuteronomy 32:5, Moses calls Israel '*a perverse and wicked generation*'. When Jesus uses similar words, he invites us to spot these connections and learn from them. The stories of the people of Israel as they travelled through the wilderness are a manual for discipleship and walking with God. They certainly deal with the subjects of wilful sin to the effects of evil.

### ***The consequences of lack of faith***

There is no doubt that this passage highlights the lack of faith of the disciples. As such, it points us forward to the Cross of Jesus, for if Jesus' followers had found sufficient faith in Him just by observing His deeds and listening to His teaching, then Jesus' Galilean ministry would have been all that was required for people to have saving faith in Him. But we know this is not the case. Lack of faith (9:41) and the inability to complete the mission of Christ (9:1f.) are some of the reasons why Jesus must continue His work 'to the end', and go to the Cross.

Jesus' Galilean ministry is nearing its end. We need to learn that hearing the Gospel and doing it are two quite different things from accepting it and being saved by Christ.

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## **Discipleship**

### ***Application***

#### ***Understanding evil within the church***

Within the church, one of the troubles we have today is the lack of consensus in understanding evil, and much misunderstanding of Jesus' deliverance ministry. This is a large topic, but one that people fight shy of, fearing either that they will be misunderstood themselves, or that 'evil' is too difficult an idea to tackle. But let there be no mistake, Jesus died on the Cross as a result of all the world's evil, and He did so to deliver us from it, and be saved. Evil remains a present reality in the world, in all its forms, and if we do not think the Gospel message is about deliverance from evil then we have been sold an inadequate copy of it and not the real thing.

#### ***Taking evil seriously***

Our passage reminds us that we must take all forms of evil seriously. Just like the boy in this story, there are people, young and old, literally dying for want of freedom from the evils that bind them, whether in sickness, social bondage, or in any of the myriad ways in which satan goes about his work, even today. When we talk with people in the midst of their troubles and illnesses, we should not be surprised to find that many talk of the evil that has afflicted them. In my experience, it is the starting point of deliverance ministry when we take such comments from people seriously, and pray about these things. Jesus teaches us to rebuke the evil and

pray directly about people's stated concerns, and tell them that in Christ's name they are free. What is embarrassing about this? it is glorious!

Deliverance ministry has many forms and this is not the place to explore them, though it is a start. Remember, today's story was the first example of deliverance ministry for the sick Jesus gave to the disciples.

### ***Ideas for what to do***

- Look up some of the other passages of Scripture about Jesus' deliverance ministry, and explore them. What do they teach us about how to deal with evil. What do you feel about the possibility of ministering to people who are sick or in need of 'deliverance'?
- Think carefully about your own life and consider whether satan has had a hand in some of the things that have happened to you. But do not fear, dismiss Him in Jesus' name. He cannot stand anywhere near you if you are close to your Lord, and if your struggle with this, then speak to someone who can support you as you deal with this.

### ***Questions (for use in groups)***

1. What does deliverance ministry mean to you, and have you ever known of people being healed because of deliverance ministry? Share your thoughts.
2. Does it matter whether the boy had epilepsy or was possessed by a demon? Are the two the same or different, and what medical conditions might also be the consequences of evil or related to evil in some other way?
3. Jesus' rebuke stands against the disciples for not being able to deliver a boy from a demon and heal him. Does Jesus' rebuke fall on us today, for similar reasons? If so, why and how?

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## **Final Prayer**

Lord Jesus Christ, You saved people from the power of evil in a remarkable number of different ways. Save us we pray, that we may not fall foul of the evil one but stay close to You every day. Then, as we go about our work within this world, help us to be aware of the works of the evil one and therefore be willing to deliver people in Your name: **AMEN**

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