

Mark 9:14-29, Healing the Demoniac Boy
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Overview

8:27-10:15 is structured as two chiasms.

1. 8:27-9:13 deals mostly with the Twelve, focusing on the cost of discipleship (Lafontaine and Beernaert).
 - a) Questions about Prophecies (Past) 8:27-28 9:11-13
 - b) ID of Jesus (Present, Secret) 8:29-30 9:7-10
Peter Father
 - c) Prediction (Future, Peter) 8:31-33 9:2-6
Passion Res'n
 - d) Cost of Discipleship 8:34-9:1
2. By contrast, 9:14-10:52 involves other people, and focuses on the need for faith and the simplicity of salvation.
 - a) Begins and ends with a healing that depends on faith
 - 1) 9:14-29, Healing & Faith: Demoniac Boy and his Father
 - 2) 10:46-52, Healing & Faith: Bartimaeus
 - b) Then an alternation between announcement of the passion and the disciples' failure to appreciate the cost (application of the lesson from the initial chiasm)
 - 1) 9:30-32, Second Announcement of his Passion
 - 2) 9:33-50, Inappropriate Response: Who shall be first?
 - 3) 10:32-34, Third Announcement of his Passion
 - 4) 10:35-45, Inappropriate Response: James and John
 - c) In the center, 10:1-31, three encounters by the way, illustrating the soils once again, with the good soil in the middle, the simple faith of children.
3. The healing by faith in 9:14-29 has the public + private contrast typical of instruction to the disciples. NB: Matt. 17:14-20 places the burden of unbelief on the disciples; Mark places it only on the father. The disciples are the last in a series of individuals with whom the Lord deals in this section: the scribes, the father, the demon, and the boy.
4. He confronts the father and the demon each two times, once to set up their problem, the second time to deal with it. Mark calls our attention to the differences between their responses.

A. 14-15, The Setting

1. The scene is like an argument with Stony on the Diag; the disciples and the scribes locked in debate, with a crowd gathered around them.
2. Mark makes a special point of the crowd's response to the Lord in

15: "when they beheld him, [they] were greatly amazed."

- a) A strong word for terror or dread, used of the disciples when seeing the angel at the tomb (16:5), of the Lord confronting death in the garden (14:33), and (adjective) of the people seeing the healing of the lame man (Acts 3:11).
- b) What justifies this strong word? Not just the Lord's approach. Most likely theory: the lingering radiance of the transfiguration.
 - 1) Compare Ex 34:29-30, the people fear the glow on Moses' face after his mountaintop conversation with the Lord.
 - 2) Contrast: there, the glow made them afraid to come near. Here, it attracts them. 2 Cor. 3:7-9. The superior glory of the Lord Jesus to that of the law.

B. 16-19, The Lord and the Father (first encounter)

- 1. 16, The Lord's initial address is to the scribes, not the father. He is coming to the defense of the disciples. "What seems to be the problem here?"
- 2. 17-19, The father butts in with the explanation--unless he is a scribe or in league with them. Three characteristics of his statement bear noting for later comparison.
 - a) Note mode of address: "Master," that is, "Teacher." A title of respect, acknowledging the Lord Jesus as a peer to the scribes. The father speaks for the scribes, to the Lord as a scribe. He grants him professional peer-to-peer courtesy.
 - b) His attitude is a demanding one. (Not in Matt and Luke, but Mark does present it this way.)
 - 1) "I have brought unto thee my son."
 - 2) "I spake to thy disciples that they should cast him out." Not "ask" or "request," but "spake." "I told them to cast him out."
 - 3) Cf. the king of Syria to the king of Israel re. Naaman, 2 Kings 5:1-8.
 - 4) Perhaps the scribes have put him up to this, as a way to challenge the Lord.
 - c) His analysis of the disciples' failure: "they could not." "could" = *isxuw*. "They were too weak." They failed; did not have the goods. Places the fault on them.
- 3. 19, the Lord's reply. To "him" (the father), but plural, like his question in 16, suggesting that he links the father closely with the scribes.
 - a) "Generation": recall discussion from 8:12. Not a physical generation of 20-40 years, but those who inhabit the present

aiwn or age (cf. Luke 16:8), which is intrinsically evil (Gal. 1:4). In Mark and Luke, serves much as *kosmos* does in John.

- b) Characterized as "unbelieving," a point that will come out in more detail in the Lord's second confrontation with the father. The man's presumptive attitude is seen by the Lord as indicative of a lack of faith. Faith is trust in God; the man shows trust of a sort, but not in God! More on this later.
- c) Note the Lord's frustration: 2x "How long...?" Not often are we allowed to see how difficult it must have been for the holy, all-powerful, all-wise Son of God to deal with sinful, weak, stupid people, but the glimpse here suggests what a burden it was for him. His forbearance with us should be an example for us in dealing with one another.

C. 20, The Lord and the demon (first encounter)

When the spirit sees the Lord (nominative ptc; same subject as finite verb), he throws the boy into convulsions. Throughout Mark, the demons recognize the Lord and acknowledge him before he challenges them; cf. 1:24; 3:11; 5:7. Here also the demon bows down before the Lord in the body of the possessed boy. "Every knee shall bow, ... of things under the earth" (Phil 2). "The demons believe, and tremble" (James 2:19).

D. 21-24, The Lord speaks with the father.

- 1. 21, The Lord's initial question draws out just how desperate the man's situation was with his son: a life-long, life-threatening condition. He may be faithless, but he is also in great need. In condemning the one, we must not lose compassion for the other.
- 2. Through the conversation, three shifts take place from the father's attitude in his initial statement to the Lord:
 - a) Instead of the demanding tone, he now asks the Lord (22), "have compassion on us, and help us." Acknowledges
 - 1) His own inability: "help us." Before he was complaining about what the disciples could not do. Now he is acknowledging what he cannot do.
 - 2) His own unworthiness: "have compassion on us." He has no right to the healing, but asks for the Lord's mercy.
 - b) The disciples were unable; he now asks the Lord to help "if thou canst do anything." "canst" = *dunamai*, a more abstract term than *isxuw*. This expression leads to an interchange:
 - 1) The Lord corrects him (23): "the question is not whether I can act, but whether you can believe." Lit, "This 'If thou canst' has to do with believing."
 - 2) His response (24) acknowledges his own unbelief, and asks

the Lord for help with that belief, using the same word he had previously used to ask for help with his son.

- 3) This interchange shows that the real problem is not the demon possession, but the father's unbelief, and incidentally recognizes that even faith is something that God must generate within us.
- c) The third point of contrast is in the title with which he addresses the Lord. After being rebuked for his lack of faith, he calls Jesus, "Lord" (24).
- 1) It was presumptuous and "faithless" for him to approach Jesus only as "teacher" and demand healing for his son--faithless not because he did not believe a healing would be forthcoming, but because his trust was in Jesus as a man and in his own worthiness.
 - 2) Now that he has abandoned any claim to his own worthiness and cast himself on the mercy of the Lord, he manifests faith that brings results.

E. 25-26a, The Lord speaks to the demon.

1. The linking ptc in v.25 takes us back to the running crowd, thus making this section parallel to the previous two discussions.
2. The Lord commands the demon directly, with authority, without any magic incantations.
3. Note the demon's response: "cried," just as the father did in 24. Mark wants us to compare the responses of the two individuals with whom the Lord has been engaged. The father takes the option of faith; his "cry" is for help, and he is delivered. The demons have no such option; their "cry" is of despair and anguish before their judge, and such will be the cry of all who do not cast themselves on the mercy of the Lord.

F. 26b-27, The Lord revives the boy.

He has vanquished the demon, and won the father's submission in faith, but how about the boy?

1. The demons used him as their playground.
2. If the father was in league with the scribes, they likely used him as a decoy.
3. The Lord does not use him, but has compassion on him and restores him to full health.

G. 28-29, The Lord instructs the disciples.

1. The father is not the only one who was disappointed in the disciples' lack of ability. When the Lord sent them out two by two, they were successful over demons (6:7, 13). Why not now?

2. His answer: they were presumptuous, not humbling themselves before God in prayer and fasting. They had apparently presumed that they possessed the power to cast out demons intrinsically, and did not cast themselves on the Lord for this case. The Lord had been on the mountain, in prayer and probably fasting as well, and so he was able to deliver the lad.

H. Moral on Faith

1. The attitude of the disciples in the case of this demoniac is the same as the father's, one of proud presumption rather than self-humbling and beseeching.
2. The Lord diagnoses this attitude on the part of the father as "faithless" (v.19), and we might very well describe it in the same way for the disciples (as the Lord in fact does in Matt 17:20).
3. This notion of "faithlessness" differs from our usual understanding.
 - a) We think of someone as "faithless" if they do not believe that something will happen, e.g., Peter trying to walk on the water, but being distracted by the wind and waves.
 - b) Here, the father and the disciples are faithless for believing that something will happen, but for the wrong reason, without appropriate recognition of the One in whom their faith must be lodged.
 - 1) The father's faith was in Jesus as a mere teacher, not as the Lord; he needed to humble himself by confessing his unworthiness before Jesus as Lord.
 - 2) The disciples' faith was in themselves, based on their own past experience; they needed to humble themselves before the Heavenly Father in prayer and fasting.
 - c) In sum: faith is trusting God, and we can come short either by failing to trust or by trusting the wrong source. Confidence that things will work out OK is not faith, unless it rests on a recognition of our own unworthiness and inability, and represents a complete surrender to the Lord's power.
 - d) Other examples of faith that isn't faith:
 - 1) John 4:50, 53; cf. 1 John 5:13. faith for different objects.
 - 2) James 2:19, faith that does not lead to submission and obedience.

Analysis

In the interests of understanding the respective roles of narrative clauses with and without preposed participles, I'm recording the main sequence here (omitting or summarizing quotations), with the simple clauses (those without ptcs) marked by *.

A. 14-27, Public Healing

1. The Setting
 - a) 14 Kai\ e)lqo/ntes pro\s tou\s maqhta\s ei)^don <crowd + scribes>
 - b) 15 kai\ eu)qu\s pa^s o(o)/xlos i)dw/n au)to\n e)ceqambh/qh,
 - c) kai\ prostre/xontes h)spa/zonto au)to/n.
2. The Lord speaks with the Scribes
 - a) * 16 kai\ e)phrw/thsen tous grammateis <What's going on?>
 - b) 17 kai\ a)pokri/qeis ei(^s e)k tou^ o)/xlou, eipe <report about failure to heal son>
 - c) 19 o(de\ a)pokriqei\s au)toi^s le/gei, <unfaithful generation; bring the boy here>
3. The Lord confronts the demon
 - a) * 20 kai\ h)/negkan au)to\n pro\s au)to/n.
 - b) kai\ i)dw\n au)to\n euqus to\ pneu^ma espa/racen au)to/n,
 - c) kai\ pesw\n e)pi\ th^s gh^s e)kuli/eto a)fri/zwn.
4. The Lord speaks with the father
 - a) * 21 kai\ e)phrw/thsen to\n pate/ra au)tou^,
 - 1) Po/sos xro/nos e)sti\n w(s tou^to ge/gonen au)tw^|;
 - b) * o(de\ ei)^pen, <narrative of the condition>
 - c) * 23 o(de\)Ihsou^s ei)^pen au)tw^|,
 - 1) To\ Ei) du/nasai pisteusai;
 - 2) pa/nta dunata\ tw^| pisteu/onti.
 - d) 24 kai eu)qu\s kra/cas o(path\r tou^ paidi/ou meta dakruwn e)/lege, <Lord, I believe, help my unbelief>
5. The Lord speaks to the demon

The linking ptc in v.25 takes us back to the running crowd, thus making this section parallel to the previous two discussions.

 - a) 25 i)dw\n de\ o()Ihsou^s o(/ti e)pisuntre/xei o)/xlos e)peti/mhsen tw^| pneu/mati tw^| a)kaqa/rtw| le/gwn au)tw^|, <leave the boy!>
 - b) 26 kai\ kra/can kai\ polla\ spara/can auton e)ch^lqen:
6. The Lord revives the boy.
 - a) * kai\ e)ge/neto w(sei\ nekro/s,
 - 1) w(/ste pollou\s le/gein o(/ti a)pe/qanen.
 - b) 27 o(de\)Ihsou^s krath/sas auton th^s xeiro\s h)/geiren au)to/n,
 - c) * kai\ a)ne/sth.

B. 28-29, Debriefing the Disciples

1. 28 kai\ ei)selqo/nta au)ton^ ei)s oi)^kon oi(maqhtai\ au)tou^ kat' i)di/an e)phrw/twn au)to/n, <why couldn't we cast it out?>
2. 29 kai\ ei)^pen au)toi^s, <need for prayer and fasting>