

Christ's Power over Demons

Psalm 106:34–42, Luke 9:37–43

Today, we are taking a one-week break from our series on 2 Thessalonians. We have been considering chapter 2, which deals with a powerful enemy of the church described as “the man of sin, the son of perdition . . . the lawless one.” The “son of perdition” is almost certainly the “antichrist” of 1 John 2:18 where we read, “as you have heard that *the Antichrist* is coming, even now *many antichrists* have come, by which we know that it is the last hour.” This final Antichrist will oppose the true church but will ultimately be destroyed: “whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming” (2 Thess. 2:8). But until his final destruction he will wreak havoc in the church. His coming is “according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders” (v. 9).

But though Satan is a potent enemy, Christ is *omnipotent*, and “*He shall reign forever and ever*”! Church of Jesus Christ, you are in good hands—the powerful hands of him who at all times and in every situation works out all things according to his eternal purpose. *We* get nervous; we wonder if everything will turn out all right. But God is never nervous. “Deep in unfathomable mines of never-failing skill he treasures up his bright designs, and works his sovereign will.”¹

Today we are looking at Luke chapter 9. In this text the Lord, along with Peter, James and John, comes down from the Mount of Transfiguration. For a brief moment the veil of our Lord’s humanity had been drawn back, and the three disciples had a sudden glimpse of his deity. “The appearance of his face was altered, and his robe became white and glistening” (v. 29). A cloud overshadowed them, and they hear the voice of God out of the cloud, saying, “This is my beloved Son. Hear him.” Here is the responsibility of every man: to hear the voice of the Son of God.

When Jesus and the disciples come down from the mount they were met by a great multitude. Among the crowd was a father bringing his son to Jesus—the best thing that a parent could ever do.

I have four points this morning: (1) the son’s danger, (2) the disciples’ defeat, (3) the father’s delay, and (4) the Lord’s deliverance. First,

1. The son’s danger

“Behold, a *spirit* seizes him, and he suddenly cries out; it convulses him so that he foams at the mouth; and it departs from him with great difficulty, bruising him” (v. 39).

The word for “spirit” (*πνεῦμα*) is the same word used for the Holy Spirit, but this was not the *Holy* Spirit but a *foul* spirit, one of the devil’s host of demons. This

¹ <https://www.trinitypsalterhymnal.org/hymns/god-moves-in-a-mysterious-way/>

was one of the angelic beings who fell along with Lucifer in his rebellion when he said, “I will be like the Most High” (Isa. 14:14).

Satan is a cruel taskmaster. He had taken possession of this young lad and was abusing him—over and over again. All at once the circuitry of the boy’s brain stopped working normally. He would suddenly cry out and go into a convulsion, falling to the ground, foaming at the mouth. This is what is now called *seizure disorder*. A person may black out, go unconscious, experience tremors, make garbled sounds, be unable to control arms or legs.

When I first came here as pastor years ago there was a man in our congregation who was finishing a doctorate in electrical engineering at MSU. One evening he joined us for a midweek prayer meeting in our living room. As we prayed, all of a sudden he fell off his chair onto the floor, rigid. His eyes rolled up into his forehead and his voice made strange, otherworldly sounds. He couldn’t get up off the floor. Someone ran into the kitchen and called 911. Medics came and took him to the emergency room. He had suffered a *grand mal* seizure. He would not be able to drive until he had gone six months without a seizure. Eventually, his seizures were brought under control, and he went on to raise a large family to the glory of God.

Think of how frightening it must have been for the father of the lad in our story to have something happen to his son that he couldn’t control. The man specifically attributes this to an evil spirit: “a *spirit* seizes him.”

Christian sensibilities recoil at the thought of abusing a precious child, made in the image of God. “Children are an heritage of the LORD” and are supposed to be treated with kindness. The Savior is gracious and gentle, and we must be too.

The ultimate child abuse is to raise a little one and never introduce him to Jesus—to fill his life with things and pleasures and distractions and never get around to instructing him in God’s truth—to live life as though God were irrelevant.

But the devil is a cruel taskmaster and abuser of humankind, and his object is to destroy men’s souls. If he can do it by tempting a person to pursue the pleasures of this life and never get around to focusing on eternal things, that’s what he’ll do.

Does he have a foothold in your life? O saint of God, remember that “your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Pet. 5:8). He wants to devour you. He is a deadly enemy and we must not be complacent. But Peter tells us how we are to fight: “Resist him, steadfast in the faith” (v. 9). Victory can be obtained only by the power of Christ: without him I am powerless. Satan is a defeated foe. He was defeated at the cross and ultimately will be cast into the Lake of Fire. His doom is sure. But he doesn’t want you to believe in Christ. He wants to distract you with the pleasures of this life and keep you from thinking about the weightier matters of eternity.

Jesus didn't correct the father of the young man in our story. He didn't say, "No, a spirit didn't seize him; what happened to him was a purely natural phenomenon." The lad in our story was the object of the devil's active persecution. The Mark account adds other details. The evil spirit rendered him both deaf and unable to speak. The evil spirit would often seize him and throw him down so that he would foam at the mouth, grind his teeth and become rigid like a board.

How often the poor, distraught father had witnessed this abuse! When a fit seized him without any warning, he would suddenly cry out. His shrieks would pierce his father's heart.² The father was desperate. He loved his son. It tore him apart to see him hurting. The boy was his father's only child—his *μονογενής*—the same word used of our Lord himself in John 3:16—"the *only begotten* Son."

Here was a boy who had an evil spirit that prevented him from speaking. How excited parents are to hear their child's first words! But here was a father who never had that joy, for his son had never spoken. The devil robbed him of the gift of speech!

This lad was under the control of the devil. Not only was he damaged physically; even worse, his deafness would make it impossible for him to hear the Savior's preaching. Here was a boy who came to hear Jesus preach, and the devil was doing everything he could to keep him from hearing the life-giving words of the gospel.

Parents take their children any number of places for sports teams, dance and music lessons, tutoring. Yet what our children need most of all is Christ. Let us bring ourselves and our children to Christ.

Here was the son's *danger*—to grow up and never hear of Christ. Second, consider

2. The disciples' defeat

The distraught father told Jesus, "I implored your disciples to cast it out, but they could not" (v. 40).

Here were men who at the beginning of this chapter had been given "power and authority over all demons, and to cure diseases"—men who had been personally sent out by Christ to preach the gospel and to heal the sick.

Jesus doesn't answer the father directly. Instead, he delivers his remarks to the crowd: "O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you and bear with you? Bring your son here." The Lord was irritated, not with the father, but with a group of individuals. Who could they be? The context seem to indicate that it was the nine disciples who had not gone with Jesus up the mountain. They had tried to cast out the demon but could not do it. Our Lord's rebuke is stern: "O faithless and perverse generation."

² Matthew Henry

“Faithless” in this context cannot mean utterly devoid of faith, for these men had left all they had to follow Christ. They were our Lord’s disciples. But they had clearly forgotten their commission. They had forgotten how Christ had given them power and authority over all demons. He had given his disciples authority to command demons to come out of a person.

They had come back from their first preaching mission flush with excitement. As they would later say, “Lord, even the *demons* are subject to us in your name” (Luke 10:17).

But not now!

On this occasion they showed weakness, not power.

But what about the word “perverse”? “O faithless and *perverse* generation.” This seems to be a very strong word to push into the face of the apostles. Yet our Lord is not unduly harsh. He uses this word to get the attention of the disciples, and to warn them of the grave danger of flinching in spiritual battle. It is at just the point when we are under attack that we need the strongest faith, and faith must always be directed towards Christ alone.

“In all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us” (Rom 8:37). We are conquerors through Christ, but *only* through Christ.

Here was the disciples’ defeat—let us learn from that. Thirdly,

3. The father’s delay

Our text says, “as he was still coming.” The Greek implies that there was a delay. We are not told what precipitated the delay. After all, as any parent of small children can attest, it always takes longer to go anywhere with a child. Perhaps the frantic father had to go to the edge of the crowd to get the child from his mother. But whatever it was, there was a delay, and during this delay, Satan tried one last time to destroy the lad.

Oh, how we must never delay in coming to Jesus Christ. We must never be like Agrippa, who said to Paul, “You *almost* persuade me to become a Christian” (Acts 26:28).

“Almost” is not good enough. We must take advantage of the opportunities we have while we have them. We must use the means of grace—the Word, the sacraments, prayer. The time may come that we will be too sick or weak to use them.

While we have the time we must put ourselves under the preaching of the word of God. We must be present at the sabbath worship services. We must avail ourselves of the word and prayer at home as well—making time for personal and family devotions. Satan would love to make us delay—to put it off—but delay is dangerous and can be fatal. *Now* is the accepted time. *Today* is the day of salvation. After death there will be no second chance. Do you want to be delivered from hell

and accepted into heaven? There is only one way to be saved, and that is through Jesus Christ.

In the case of the demon-possessed lad in our story we read, “And as he was still coming, the demon threw him down and convulsed him.” The malignant, cruel spirit, conscious that his time was about up, tries one last time to kill his victim—and had Christ not been there, he might well have been successful.

Fourthly, consider

4. The Lord’s deliverance

“Then Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit, healed the child, and gave him back to his father. And they were all amazed at the majesty of God.” Notice the simple, straightforward and unembellished language: “Then Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit.” That’s all he had to do—just rebuke the spirit! He didn’t have to do incantations or carry out intricate ceremonies. One rebuke from the sovereign Lord Jesus Christ, and Satan and his minions were forced to flee. They were powerless before the Lord’s invincible word.

A couple weeks ago we sang Luther’s hymn “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God.” Its theme is that in the fallen world in which we live, our only protection is the God who has bound himself to us by covenant. The third stanza reads: “And though this world, with devils filled, should threaten to undo us, we will not fear, for God hath willed his truth to triumph through us. The prince of darkness grim, we tremble not for him; his rage we can endure, for lo, his doom is sure; one little word shall fell him.”

What is that “one little word” that will fell Satan? The next stanza gives the answer: “That Word above all earthly powers.” This is none other than “the Lord God omnipotent.”³ Here is the wondrous truth of the incarnation: the Lord Jesus Christ is none other than the “Lord God *omnipotent*” come in human flesh. “Omnipotent” means *possessing all power*. Church of Jesus Christ, you have a mighty Savior! Here in the healing of the demoniac is a marvelous demonstration of that truth. Here is a young lad oppressed by the devil. In the parallel account in Matthew 17 his father says, “Lord, have mercy on my son, for he is an epileptic and suffers severely; for he often falls into the fire and often into the water.” The father didn’t use the clinical term “epileptic,” meaning *a disorder marked by abnormal electrical discharges in the brain*. That word didn’t come into use until the seventeenth century. The word the father used was *lunatic*—literally, *moonstruck*—what is now called *seizure disorder*. People in ancient times did not understand seizures; they might as well have been caused by the moon. Even now, what causes abnormal electrical discharges in the brain is not fully understood. But the Christian knows that *whatever* evil—whatever adversity—we experience in

³ Κύριος ὁ Θεὸς ὁ παντοκράτωρ, Rev. 19:6

this vale of tears, is for God's glory and his people's good. The day is coming when the risen Christ will say, "Behold, I make all things new." On that day there will be no more death nor sorrow, crying nor pain. The former things will have passed away, and faith will be sight. Our Lord's healing of the boy with the unclean spirit is a preview of that glorious day.

Here is a young lad completely delivered, a young lad healed by Christ, now free to grow up and live a normal life, a boy who will come to realize what a debt of gratitude he owes to the Lord Jesus, a young lad given the chance to present his body as a living sacrifice to the Savior.

The church militant is still involved in spiritual warfare. We are involved in the titanic struggle between good and evil, between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan. By the power of Christ his people shall overcome.

Satan is a deceiver. The Israelites in the Old Testament didn't stay separate as God required. Shockingly, in our Old Testament text we read that the unfaithful Israelites "mingled with the Gentiles and learned their works; they served their idols, which became a snare to them. They even *sacrificed their sons and their daughters to demons*, and shed innocent blood, the blood of their sons and daughters, whom they sacrificed to the idols of Canaan; and the land was polluted with blood" (Ps. 106:35–38).

How tragic! Instead of trusting in the LORD Jehovah, who had bound himself to them by covenant, who had promised to be a God to them and to their seed forever, they began to adopt the ways of the Gentiles. Instead of devoting themselves to study the Holy Scriptures, they devoted themselves to study the evil incantations of the Gentiles. Instead of worshiping Jehovah, they served lifeless idols that are figments of human imagination. Incredibly, they sacrificed their sons and daughters—the holy seed—to demons—foul spirits under the command of the devil of hell. Here were the covenant people who had the truth. They were singularly privileged above all the peoples of the earth. The LORD had appeared to them at Mount Sini. He had given them his law. He had promised blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience. He had said, "If you devote yourselves to me, I will be a God to you and to your seed forever." They were promised the greatest blessing of all: fellowship with the living God—but they threw it away. Consequently, God would say, "Therefore I was angry with that generation, and said, 'They always go astray in their heart, and they have not known My ways.' So I swore in My wrath, 'They shall not enter My rest'" (Heb. 3:10).

This is the fate of all those who reject God's great salvation. There is salvation in no one else. If you refuse to come to God through Jesus Christ his Son, you will experience eternal wrath, and there will be no escape. You will be consigned to hear the cries of the damned forevermore.

But if you look to Christ by faith, confessing your sins, he will save you. He will give you his Spirit. He will make you his child. He will make you to hunger and thirst after righteousness. He will cause you to ride on the high places of the earth, and feed you with the heritage of our father Jacob. He will give you the desire to do those good works that are pleasing in his sight.

“Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.”

Church of Jesus Christ, we have a mighty Savior. He has power over the demons of hell. He, the incarnate Word, speaks the word, and Satan falls. The world threatens to undo us, but the Lord Jesus is our sure protection. Amen.