

## Matthew: 17:14–21

14. And when they were come to the multitude, there came to him a certain man, kneeling down to him, and saying,

15. Lord, have mercy on my son: for he is lunatick, and sore vexed: for oftentimes he falleth into the fire, and oft into the water.

16. And I brought him to thy disciples, and they could not cure him.

17. Then Jesus answered and said, O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you? how long shall I suffer you? bring him hither to me.

18. And Jesus rebuked the devil; and he departed out of him: and the child was cured from that very hour.

ORIGEN. Peter, anxious for such desirable life, and preferring his own benefit to that of many, had said, It is good for us to be here. But since charity seeks not her own, Jesus did not this which seemed good to Peter, but descended to the multitude, as it were from the high mount of His divinity, that He might be of use to such as could not ascend because of the weakness of their souls; whence it is said, And when he was come to the multitude; for if He had not gone to the multitude with His elect disciples, there would not have come near to Him the man of whom it is added, There came to him a man kneeling down, and saying, Lord, have mercy on my son. Consider here, that sometimes those that are themselves the sufferers believe and entreat for their own healing, sometimes others for them, as he who kneels before Him praying for his son, and sometimes the Saviour heals of Himself unasked by any. First, let us see what this means that follows, For he is lunatic, and sore vexed. Let the physicians talk as they list, for they think it no unclean spirit, but some bodily disorder, and say, that the humours in the head are governed in their motions by sympathy with the phases of the moon, whose light is of the nature of humours. But we who believe the Gospel say that it is an unclean spirit that works such disorders in men. The spirit observes the moon's changes, that it may cheat men into the belief that the moon is the cause of their sufferings, and so prove God's creation to be evil; as other dæmons lay wait for men following the times and courses of the stars, that they may speak wickedness in high places, calling some stars malignant, others benign; whereas no star was made by God that it should produce evil. In this that is added, For oftentimes he falls into the fire, and oft into the water,

CHRYSOSTOM. is to be noted, that were not man fortified here by Providence, he would long since have perished; for the dæmons who cast him into the fire, and into the water, would have killed him outright, had God not restrained him.

JEROME. In saying, And I brought him to thy disciples, and they could not heal him, he covertly accuses the Apostles, whereas that a cure is impossible is sometimes the effect not of want of power in those that undertake it, but of want of faith in those that are to be healed,

CHRYSOSTOM. See herein also his folly, in that before the multitude he appeals to Jesus against His disciples. But He clears them from shame, inputing their failure to the patient himself; for many things shew that he was weak in faith. But He addresses His reproof not to the man singly, that He may not trouble him, but to the Jews in general. For many of those present, it is likely, had improper thoughts concerning the disciples, and therefore it follows, Jesus answered and said, O faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you, how long shall I suffer you? His How long shall I be with you? shews that death was desired by Him, and that He longed for His withdrawal.

ORIGEN. Or; Because the disciples could not heal him as being weak in faith, He said to them, O faithless generation, adding perverse, to shew that their perverseness had introduced evil beyond their nature. But I suppose, that because of the perverseness of the whole human race, as it were oppressed with their evil nature, He said, How long shall I be with you?

JEROME. Not that we must think that He was overcome by weariness of them, and that The meek and gentle broke out into words of wrath, but as a physician who might see the sick man acting against his injunctions, would say, How long shall I frequent your chamber? How long throw away the exercise of my skill, while I prescribe one thing, and you do another? That it is the sin, and not the man with whom He is angry, and that in the person of this one man He convicts the Jews of unbelief, is clear from what He adds, Bring him to me.

CHRYSOSTOM. When He had vindicated His disciples, He leads the boy's father to a cheering hope of believing that he shall be delivered out of this evil and that the father might be led to believe the miracle that was coming, seeing the dæmons was disturbed even when the child was only called;

JEROME. He rebuked him, that is, not the sufferer, but the dæmons.

JEROME. Or, His reproof was to the child, because for his sins he had been seized on by the dæmons.

AUGUSTINE. (Quæst. Ev. i. 22.) Or the fire pertains to anger, which aims upwards, water to the lusts of the flesh.

ORIGEN. Of the changefulness of the sinner it is said, The fool changes as the moon. (Ecclus. 27:12.) We may see sometimes that an impulse towards good works comes over such, when, lo! again as by a sudden seizure of a spirit they are laid hold of by their passions, and fall from that good state in which they were supposed to stand. Perhaps his father stands for the Angel to whom was allotted the care of this lunatic, praying the Physician of souls, that He would set free his son, who could not be delivered from his suffering by the simple word of Christ's disciples, because as a deaf person he cannot receive their instruction, and therefore he needs Christ's word, that henceforth he may not act without reason.

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19. Then came the disciples to Jesus apart, and said, Why could not we cast him out?

20. And Jesus said unto them, Because of your unbelief: for verily I say unto you, If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you.

21. Howbeit this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting.

CHRYSOSTOM. The disciples had received from the Lord the power over unclean spirits, and when they could not heal the dæmoniac thus brought to them, they seem to have had misgivings lest they had forfeited the grace once given to them; hence their question. And they ask it apart, not out of shame, but because of the unspeakable matter of which they were to ask. Jesus said unto them, Because of your unbelief.

HILARY. The Apostles had believed, yet their faith was imperfect; while the Lord tarried in the mount, and they abode below with the multitude, then faith had become stagnant.

CHRYSOSTOM. Whence it is plain that the disciples' faith was grown weak, yet not all, for those pillars were there, Peter, and James, and John.

JEROME. This is what the Lord says in another place, Whatsoever ye shall ask in my name believing, ye shall receive. (John 16:23.) Therefore when we receive not, it is not the weakness of Him that gives, but the fault of them that ask. Mat. 21:22.)

CHRYSOSTOM. But it is to be known, that, as oftentimes the faith of him that draweth near to receive supplies the miraculous virtue, so oftentimes the power of those that work the miracle is sufficient even without the faith of those who sought to receive. (Acts 10:4.) Cornelius and his household, by their faith, attracted to them the grace of the Holy Spirit; but the dead man who was cast into the sepulchre of Elisha, was revived solely by virtue of the holy body. (2 Kings 13:21.) It happened that the disciples were then weak in faith, for indeed they were but in an imperfect condition before the cross; wherefore He here tells them, that faith is the mean of miracles, Verily I say unto you, if ye shall have faith as a grain of mustard-seed, ye shall say to this mountain, Remove hence, and it shall remove.

JEROME. Some think that the faith that is compared to a grain of mustard-seed is a little faith, whereas the Apostle says, If I shall have such faith that I could remove mountains. (1 Cor. 13:2.) The faith therefore which is compared to a grain of mustard-seed is a great faith.

ORIGEN. Or, all faith is likened to a grain of mustard-seed, because faith is looked on with contempt by men, and shews as something poor and mean; but when a seed of this kind lights upon a good heart as its soil, it becomes a great tree. The weakness of this lunatic's faith is yet so great, and Christ is so strong to heal him amidst all his evils, that He likens it to a mountain which cannot be cast out but by the whole faith of him who desires to heal afflictions of this sort.

CHRYSOSTOM. So He not only promises the removal of mountains, but goes beyond, saying, And nothing shall be impossible to you.

CHRYSOSTOM. If you shall ask, Where did the Apostles remove mountains? I answer, that they did greater things, bringing many dead to life. It is told also of some saints, who came after the Apostles, that they have in urgent necessity removed mountains. But if mountains were not removed in the Apostles' time, this was not because they could not, but because they would not, there being no pressing occasion. And the Lord said not that they should do this thing, but that they should have power to do it. Yet it is likely that they did do this, but that it is not written, for indeed not all the miracles that they wrought are written.

JEROME. Or; the mountain is not said of that which we see with the eyes of the body, but signified that spirit which was removed by the Lord out of the lunatic, who is said by the Prophet to be the corrupter of the whole earth,

GLOSS. (interlin.) So that the sense then is, Ye shall say to this mountain, that is to the proud devil, Remove hence, that is from the possessed body into the sea, that is into the depths of hell, and it shall remove, and nothing shall be impossible to you, that is, no sickness shall be incurable.

AUGUSTINE. (ubi sup.) Otherwise; That the disciples in working their miracles should not be lifted up with pride, they are warned rather by the humbleness of their faith, as by a grain of mustard-seed, to take care that they remove all pride of earth, which is signified by the mountain in this place.

CHRYSOSTOM. And this He says not of lunatics in particular, but of the whole class of dæmons. For fast endues with great wisdom, makes a man as an Angel from heaven, and beats down the unseen powers of evil. But there is need of prayer as even still more important. And who prays as he ought, and fasts, had need of little more, and so is not covetous, but ready to almsgiving. For he who fasts, is light and active, and prays wakefully, and quenches his evil lusts, makes God propitious, and humbles his proud stomach. And he who prays with his fasting, has two wings, lighter than the winds themselves. For he is not heavy and wandering in his prayers, (as is the case with many,) but his zeal is as the warmth of fire, and his constancy as the firmness of the earth. Such an one is most able to contend with dæmons, for there is nothing more powerful than a man who prays properly. But if your health be too weak for strict fast, yet is it not for prayer, and if you cannot fast, you can abstain from indulgences. And this is not a little, and not very different from fast.

ORIGEN. If then we shall ever be required to be employed in the healing of those who are suffering any thing of this sort, we shall not adjure them, nor ask them questions, nor even speak, as though the unclean spirit could hear us, but by our fasting and our prayers drive away the evil spirits.

GLOSS. (ord.) Or; This class of dæmons, that is the variety of carnal pleasures, is not overcome unless the spirit be strengthened by prayer, and the flesh enfeebled by fast.

## **From Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture:**

### **17:14–15 Lord, Have Mercy on My Son**

#### **The Boy Suffers Terribly.**

Origen: If every disease and weakness which our Savior cured at that time among the people represents different symptoms in the soul, it stands to reason that by the paralytics are symbolized the palsied in soul, who keep it lying paralyzed in the body. By those who are blind are symbolized those who are blind in respect of things seen by the soul alone, and these are really blind. And by the deaf are symbolized those who are deaf in regard to the reception of the word of salvation. On the same principle it will be necessary that the matters regarding the epileptic should be investigated. This disease attacks those who suffer from it at considerable intervals, during which time he who suffers from it seems in no way to differ from the man in good health, at the season when the epilepsy is not working on him. You will find some souls that are often considered to be healthy suffering from symptoms like these in their chastity and the other virtues. But there comes a time when they are attacked by a kind of epilepsy, and then they seem to fall from their solid foundation and are seized by the deceits and other desires of this world. Commentary on Matthew 13.4.

### **17:16 The Disciples Could Not Heal Him**

#### **Help My Unbelief.**

Chrysostom: The Scripture shows that this man is very weak in faith. This is evident from many things: from Christ's saying, "All things are possible to him who believes," and from the fact that the man himself as he approached said, "Help my unbelief." And it is evident from Christ's ordering the demon "never to enter him again" and from the man's saying again to Christ, "If you can." But you will say, "If his unbelief was the reason why the demon had not gone out of the boy, why does he blame the disciples?" To show that they can often cure the sick, even though no one brings them in with faith. For just as the faith of the one bringing in the sick was often sufficient for receiving a cure even from lesser ministers, so the virtue of the minister was also sufficient to achieve a miracle even without the faith of those bringing them in. Both of these are demonstrated in the Scriptures; for those around Cornelius drew to them the power of the Spirit by their faith. And in the time of Elisha, when no one believed, a dead man was raised. The Gospel of Matthew, Homily 57.3.

## **17:17 A Faithless and Perverse Generation**

### **O Perverse Generation.**

Origen: When the Savior says, “O faithless and perverse generation,” he shows that wickedness has entered us through perversity, that it is contrary to nature and makes us perverse. And I think that he was irked at the whole human race on earth for its wickedness. So he said, “How long am I to bear with you?”  
Commentary on Matthew 13.7.

### **How Long Am I to Bear With You?**

Chrysostom: Note this man’s lack of sense in another instance: in full view of the crowd he pleads to Jesus against his disciples, saying, “I brought him to your disciples, and they could not cure him.” But Jesus dismissed these complaints before the people and blamed him the more, saying, “O faithless and perverse generation, how long am I to be with you?” He is not addressing this person alone, so as not to upset him, but he is addressing all the Jews. For it is likely that many had been offended and thought ill of the disciples.

But when he says, “How long am I to be with you?” he shows how welcome death is to him and his desire of passing on from here. He longs for his departure. It is being with them, and not so much the crucifixion, that is grievous.

He did not put up with their complaints, but what does he say? “Bring him here to me.” And he himself further asks him, “How long has this been this way?” He is thereby both defending the disciples and leading the man to a better hope, that he should believe that there will be an end to his troubles. And Jesus lets him be convulsed, not for display (for when the crowd gathered he rebuked the demon) but for the father’s sake, that when he saw the demon being put to flight at Christ’s mere call, so at least, if in no other way, he might be led to believe the coming miracle. The Gospel of Matthew, Homily 57.3.

## **17:18 The Boy Cured Instantly**

### **Jesus Rebuked Him.**

Jerome: Note that it was not the suffering victim but the demon who had to be directly rebuked. It may be that he indirectly rebuked the boy and the demon went out of him because it was owing to his sins that the demon had oppressed him. Commentary on Matthew 3.17.18.

## **17:19 The Disciples Question Jesus Privately**

### **Why Could Not We Cast It Out?**

Hilary of Poitiers: The disciples are surprised that they could not throw out the demon. All power, not only of besting demons but even of raising the dead, had been given them. Furthermore, because the law was soon to be transcended, Jesus says, "O faithless and perverse generation, how long am I to be with you?" He does not seem to be saying this to those whom he had set apart. Those who did not have faith were going to lose the very law that they had. If they had had this faith within them, they would have been like the grain of mustard seed. By the power of the Word they would have thrown out this burden of sins and the heavy mass of their unbelief. They would have transferred it, like a mountain into the sea, to the activity of the pagans and secular people. On Matthew 17.8.

### **Praying to Cast Out One's Own Demons.**

Augustine: In this chapter the Lord urged us to pray when he said, "Because of your little faith you could not cast out this demon." For urging us to prayer he thus concluded, "This kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting." If a man prays so that he may throw out someone else's demon, how much more so that he may cast out his own avarice? How much more so that he may cast out his own drunkenness? How much more so that he may cast out his own dissipation? How much more so that he may cast out his own impurity? How great are the sins in human beings! If they persevere in them, they do not allow them to enter the kingdom of heaven! Sermon 80.3.



## **17:20 Because of Your Little Faith**

### **Faith as a Grain of Mustard Seed.**

Origen: The mountains here spoken of, in my opinion, are the hostile powers that have their being in a flood of great wickedness, such as are settled down, so to speak, in some souls of various people. But when someone has total faith, such that he no longer disbelieves in anything found in holy Scripture and has faith like that of Abraham, who so believed in God to such a degree that his faith was reckoned to him as righteousness, then he has all faith like a grain of mustard seed. Then such a man will say to this mountain—I mean in this case the deaf and dumb spirit in him who is said to be epileptic—“Move from here to another place.” It will move. This means it will move from the suffering person to the abyss. The apostle, taking this as his starting point, said with apostolic authority, “If I have all faith, so as to remove mountains.” For he who has all faith—which is like a grain of mustard seed—moves not just one mountain but also more just like it. And nothing will be impossible for the person who has so much faith.

Let us examine also this statement: “This kind is not cast out except through prayer and fasting.” If at any time it is necessary that we should be engaged in the healing of one suffering from such a disorder, we are not to adjure nor put questions nor speak to the impure spirit as if it heard. But [by] devoting ourselves to prayer and fasting, we may be successful as we pray for the sufferer, and by our own fasting we may thrust out the unclean spirit from him. Commentary on Matthew 13.7.

### **Say to This Mountain: Move.**

Chrysostom: The disciples seem to me to be in anxiety and fear that they had lost the grace with which they had been entrusted. For they had received power over unclean demons. So they approached him in private and asked him the question, not out of shame (for if the matter had got out and they were criticized, it would have been superfluous for the future to have been ashamed of admitting it in their words) but because what they were going to ask him was secret and of great moment.

What, then, does Christ say? “Because of your little faith. For truly, I say to you, if you have faith as a grain of mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move; and nothing will be impossible to you.” But if you say “Where did they move a mountain?” I will say that they did things much greater than that in raising up innumerable dead. For moving a mountain and moving death from a body are not at all comparable. After them other saints, far inferior to the disciples, are said to have moved

mountains when necessity demanded. It is clear that the disciples also would have done so had necessity demanded. But if there was never need at that time, do not find fault with them. The Gospel of Matthew, Homily 57.4.