

Matthew 17:16

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

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

Analysis

And I brought him to thy disciples, and they could not cure him. This father's desperate complaint (Greek ἤνεγκα, ēnegka, "I brought") exposes the disciples' spiritual impotence. Jesus had previously granted them ἐξουσία (exousia, authority) over unclean spirits (Matthew 10:1, 8), and they'd successfully cast out demons during their mission (Luke 10:17). Yet now they fail spectacularly before a crowd watching.

The inability to cure (θεραπεῦσαι, therapeusai) indicates more than lack of technique—it reveals deficient faith and prayer life (v. 20-21). While Jesus was on the mountain experiencing transfiguration glory with Peter, James, and John, the remaining nine disciples faced demonic opposition in the valley and failed. Their failure contrasts sharply with Christ's immediate success (v. 18), highlighting the disciples' dependence on His presence and power rather than their own supposed authority.

The father's statement carries rebuke: "I brought him to **thy disciples**"—your followers, whom one would expect to have your power. The implication stings: if Jesus's own disciples cannot help, what hope remains? Yet this sets up Christ's stunning demonstration of compassion and power, teaching that authentic ministry flows from intimate relationship with God, not mere positional authority or past success.

Historical Context

This incident occurred immediately after the transfiguration, creating stark contrast between mountaintop glory (where Christ's divine nature shone forth) and valley ministry (where human weakness confronts demonic power). Mark's parallel account (9:14-29) provides additional details: the boy suffered violent seizures, foaming, grinding teeth—symptoms consistent with epilepsy but attributed to demonic possession. Ancient readers wouldn't have separated "natural" and "supernatural" causes as moderns do; all affliction ultimately traced to the fall's consequences.

The disciples' failure recalls Israel's pattern: empowered by God, they grew self-confident and failed. This humbling experience taught crucial lessons about dependence, prayer, and faith. The church fathers noted that ministry effectiveness requires ongoing spiritual vitality, not resting on past accomplishments. Luther observed that the disciples presumed on previous success without maintaining prayerful dependence—a danger for all ministers.

Related Passages

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Study Questions

1. What spiritual disciplines or heart attitudes might the disciples have neglected that led to their inability to cast out this demon?
2. How does the contrast between Christ's transfiguration glory and the disciples' valley failure illustrate the gap between divine power and human weakness?
3. When have you experienced ministry failure due to presuming on past success rather than present dependence on God?

Interlinear Text

καὶ προσήνεγκα αὐτὸν τοῖς μαθηταῖς σου καὶ οὐκ

And **I brought** **him** **disciples** **to thy** **And** **not**

G2532 G4374 G846 G3588 G3101 G4675 G2532 G3756

ἡδυνήθησαν αὐτὸν θεραπεῦσαι

they could **him** **cure**

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