

Rightly Dividing the Gospels

—Installment 70—

Jesus heals the demoniac boy

Gaulanitis

Summer, ~ 29 A.D.

Albuquerque 11 December 2016

I. Review of recent events

- A. In the summer of the final year of his ministry, the Year of Opposition, we find Jesus laboring against multiple threats
 - 1. Murderous persecution
 - 2. Misguided support
 - 3. Unfaithful disciples
- B. In this period of much travel he heads north toward Mount Hermon
- C. Near Caesarea Philippi Jesus questions his disciples regarding his identity
 - 1. Peter answers with his second great confession, that Jesus is the Christ
 - 2. Jesus responds with a declaration of apostolic authority in his kingdom, the church
 - 3. He gives Simon the name Peter, calling his confession the bedrock of the church
- D. Jesus foretells his death and resurrection
 - 1. Peter, not yet understanding the nature of Jesus' mission, rebukes him
 - 2. Jesus sternly chastens him and delivers a sermon about the sacrificial calling he and his true disciples must heed
- E. Jesus ascends Mt. Hermon with Peter, James and John
 - 1. He is transfigured before them with Moses and Elijah
 - 2. God endorses Jesus to the three apostles and the archetypes of the Law and Prophets
 - 3. Jesus forbids the three to tell anyone what they have seen until after the resurrection

II. Jesus returns from Mount Hermon with the three apostles Matt. 17: 14; Mark 9: 14–16; Luke 9: 37

- A. He finds the nine apostles in distress amid an excited multitude, arguing with the scribes
 - 1. Their failure to cure a demoniac boy had raised a tumult and provided an opening for the scribes to discredit Jesus
- B. The crowd is amazed at his return
 - 1. Many commentators suppose that Jesus' face continued to shine in a residue of his transfiguration
 - a. As had Moses' face on his return from Sinai Ex. 34: 29

- b. This theory easily explains the amazement of the crowd
 - c. But it does not explain why they hailed him instead of fearing him
 - i. The Shekinah of God always terrifies men..... Ex. 34: 30
 - d. And it is incoherent with Jesus' instruction to the three to tell no man what they had seen
 - e. None of the three narrators mention any residual transfiguration on Jesus
 - f. We conclude that this common supposition is mistaken
2. I think the multitudes supposed he would not be returning
- a. The multitude had found Jesus near Caesarea Philippi a week earlier..... (Mark 8: 34)
 - b. They seem to have concluded that Jesus abandoned the nine when he ascended the mountain with the three
 - c. They likely witnessed the transfiguration from miles away as a powerfully luminous storm, like the sun come to earth
 - d. The nine's distress seems to have led the crowd to conclude that Jesus was dead or fled in that storm and that his disciples would fail without him
 - i. This is the only recorded case of the disciples failing to perform an attempted miracle
 - e. The crowd's amazement is consistent with the unexpected return of a hero in a moment of need
- C. Jesus asks the scribes about their questioning the disciples
- 1. They do not answer him
 - a. The verb συζητέω *suzeteo* can mean *question* or *argue*
 - b. The circumstances of the story suggest they were quarreling with the disciples
 - i. Their refusal to speak of their line of questioning
 - ii. Evidence that the crowd was driven to unbelief by the scribes' influence
 - (i) Their amazement at Jesus' return
 - (ii) Jesus' rebuke for their unbelief and perversity

III. Jesus heals the demoniac boy Matt. 17: 14–18; Mark 9: 17–27; Luke 9: 38–43a

- A. The boy's father explains what the scribes will not
 - 1. The disciples have tried and failed to heal his demon-tormented son
- B. The child is horribly afflicted
 - 1. He is dumb and deaf
 - 2. He is lunatic, i.e. obsessed with the moon
 - 3. He cries loudly and suddenly
 - 4. He foams and gnashes his teeth
 - 5. He pines away, i.e. becomes shriveled and drawn
 - 6. The demon tears and bruises him sorely and hardly ever leaves him
 - 7. The demon throws him to the ground, into the water and into the fire to destroy him

- C. Some translations and commentaries (including M&P) describe the boy as epileptic
 - 1. The word *σεληνιαζομαι seleniazomai* means lunatic
 - a. But in later years also came to mean epileptic, since epileptics can be strongly affected by the phase of the moon
 - b. This understanding of the word is anachronistic to the medicine of the day
 - 2. Furthermore, a naturalistic explanation subverts the plain declaration of the narrators, that the boy's afflictions are driven by the evil spirit
 - a. It is possible that he was also ill with epilepsy, and Jesus did heal him afterward; but all his afflictions ceased at the departure of the spirit
- D. The distressed father kneels at Jesus' feet, calls him Lord and Master, and begs mercy on the child
 - 1. He explains that he sought relief from the disciples, but they were unable to cure him
- E. Jesus answers him with a broad rebuke of the multitude
 - 1. Faithless and perverse generation
 - a. Perverse: turned away from the right
 - i. A natural consequence of unbelief
 - 2. How long shall I be with you
 - 3. How long shall I bear with you
 - a. The faithless and perverse have only limited opportunity to repent and receive the Lord's blessing
- F. Bring him to me
 - 1. Despite Jesus' weariness with his unbelieving countrymen, he continues to serve them
- G. Upon seeing Jesus, the demon convulses the boy until he lies wallowing and foaming on the ground
- H. Jesus asks the father how long the boy had suffered
 - 1. From a child; i.e. an early age
- I. The father explains that the demon often has tried to destroy the child
- J. If you can do anything, have compassion and help us
- K. If you can! All things are possible to him that believes
 - 1. This Jewish father draws Jesus' astonishment for unbelief
 - a. In contrast to a Gentile centurion who drew astonishment for faith (Matt. 8: 10)
- L. I believe; help my unbelief
 - 1. The father recognizes the poverty of his faith and asks help with it
 - a. This is the only such request in the record of scripture
 - b. God does not give us our faith, it being our one true gift to him
 - c. But he can and does help with it
 - i. He provides all the foundation for it in his Word and his ministrations
 - ii. Our prayers to him serve to strengthen our faith, as this desperate prayer did for the father of the boy

- M. The excited crowd presses in to see the healing
- N. Jesus rebukes the demon as a person: thou deaf and dumb spirit, I command thee, come out of him and enter him no more
 - 1. This demon is unusually willful and forceful
 - a. Compare the meek supplication of the legion afflicting the Gergesene demoniacs..... Mark 5: 6–12
 - b. This explains Jesus’ unusual command, “enter him no more”
- O. The demon obeys, but only with a convulsion that leaves the boy as dead
 - 1. Part of the crowd believes him dead
- P. Jesus heals him, taking him by the hand and helping him up, and returns him to his father
- Q. All were astonished at the wonderful power of God

IV. Jesus explains the disciples’ failure Matt. 17: 19–21; Mark 9: 28–29

- A. The disciples wish to know why they failed
- B. Jesus’ answer is simple: your faith is small
 - 1. The connection between faith and miraculous power is evident in numerous scriptures
 - a. Sometimes on the part of the recipient
 - i.* This case
 - ii.* The centurion
 - iii.* The Nazarenes..... Mark 6: 5
 - b. And sometimes on the part of the miracle-worker
 - i.* Peter walking on the sea Matt. 14: 28–30
 - ii.* Peter and John in the temple Acts 3: 16
- C. Faith as a grain of mustard seed
 - 1. The archetype for small things..... Matt. 13: 32
- D. Say to this mountain, be removed and cast into the sea
 - 1. He evidently means Mt. Hermon from which he had just descended, a massive spreading mountain located 30 or 40 miles from any sea
 - 2. In the age of miracles granted to the first-generation church, even such small faith as theirs would accomplish world-changing feats
 - 3. We modern Christians do not live in an age of obvious miracles, but our ability to serve God still varies directly with our faith
- E. This kind comes out only by prayer
 - 1. The “and fasting” in the KJV is probably not authentic to the original narrators
 - a. The narrators tell of no fasting, nor does the rapid sequence leave any time for it
 - 2. But the narrators do tell of the father’s urgent prayers, which produced sufficient faith in him to enable the miracle