

Faith, failure, and the insanity of this world, Matthew 17:14-27.

The notion of faith, as we perceive it today, is both elusive and deceptive. It is elusive in that it is hard to achieve and easy to lose. It is deceptive in that most seek faith in themselves and for their benefit, though they are deluded by notions of a benevolent purpose and supernatural assistance. True faith, though, is not faith in oneself, but rather in God and his purposes. This faith can also be expensive, in that it almost always insists on a sacrifice on our part.

First the insanity part, v.14-18.

- A son, “possessed”, described as a “lunatic”, with symptoms of epilepsy. _____
 - Parallel passages: Mark 9:14-28, Luke 9:37-43.
 - Both Mark and Luke describe him as possessed by a “spirit”, (pneuma; gr.). _____
 - Both also describe him as suffering from epileptic symptoms: grand mal or “tonic-clonic” seizures. _____
- “Lunatic”, (seleniadzetai’ gr.): *moonstruck*.
 - Pre-twentieth century history of treatment of the insane. _____
 - Colloquial notions of epilepsy. _____
- The biblical element of demonic possession.
 - Demonic activity in Jesus’ time. _____
 - Lack of O.T. accounts. _____
 - “Demonic” lore. _____

Failure: the inability to exercise faith, v.17, v.19-20.

- *O unbelieving and perverted (twisted) generation, v.17.*
 - Unbelieving, or without appropriate faith. _____
 - Twisted, or perverted: with wrong motive or intent. _____

The outer condition of a person’s life will always be found to reflect their inner beliefs.
James Lane Allen

Faith: as a mustard seed, v.20.

- *Shall move a mountain with a word.*
 - Is this a literal or figurative proposal? _____
- The possibilities of faith. The root of both “faith” and “believe” are the same in both Hebrew and Greek. _____
 - *Emunah, (Heb.), support, as in “I shall do what I can to support God.”* _____
 - *Pistis, (Gr.), a firm conviction or persuasion based upon hearing (or seeing), to believe and act upon this with faith.* _____
- The disciples, “why couldn’t we do it?” _____
 - The “littleness” of their faith. _____
 - Perhaps, also the goal of their actions: to gain credit for themselves. _____

The pursuit of faith today.

- *And nothing shall be impossible to you.*
 - What were the disciples seeking to do? _____
 - What, then, do we seek to do? _____
- Faith and possibilities.
 - Faith in whom? _____
 - Faith to do what? _____
- Faith failures.
 - Faith to succeed in personal goals. _____
 - “Why is my life such a mess?” _____
 - Seeking to improve our personal situation. _____
 - Seeking to do things which glorify us more than God. _____
- Faith successes.
 - Peter, James, and John. _____
 - Aligning our goals with God’s. _____
 - Faith with a price, not a payoff. _____
 - With a divine and eternal goal. _____

Perhaps some perspective. “Lest we give them offense” (v.27), the closing note of this chapter, indicating submission to arbitrary authority, provides a final note of sobriety in pursuing God’s kingdom in this world. The practice of our faith is not a license to do as we please.