

KEEP THY HEART

A Bible-Based Devotional

Turn to: **Matthew 17:14-27**

“Ask Jesus”

Maybe you've wondered how many things God wants to give us but doesn't because we never ask for them (James 4:2). Or maybe we spend too much time asking for things that don't matter so much, to the neglect of asking for what matters most. In this passage, we will see four things we can ask of Jesus.

1: Salvation from the devil (v14-18). The most important thing we need from Jesus is to be freed from the grip of the devil. When the disciples **were come to the multitude** after seeing the amazing vision earlier, perhaps they felt like we do on Monday mornings sometimes after a blessed Sunday; they had a great spiritual time of refreshment, but now it's time to deal with all the daily problems of everyday life once more. Jesus was so unselfish in giving up His comfort to help us with our problems.

(v15) And this particular problem is very difficult. The devil is wicked and encourages suicide, pushing this boy to **fall into the fire and into the water**, not just occasionally, but **oft**. Only Jesus is strong enough to cast the devil out of our lives and hearts. Because Satan is miserable and utterly without peace, I think Satan wants everyone else to be that way, too. He's no one's friend. **(v16)** I think the father has a bit of frustration and unbelief in his voice as he perhaps lashes out at **Jesus' disciples** who **could not cure him** (cf. Mark 9:22). **(v17)** When a **generation** starts to decay, first it becomes **faithless**, rejecting the Bible and Jesus Christ from its public institutions; then it becomes **perverse** and unsafe, as morality becomes relative to the whims of man. Like Jesus, we should feel extremely "out of place" in this world, wondering **how long** we will **be with it**. Do you feel that way, or do you pretty much "fit in" with this generation? We hear a lot about "tolerance" today, especially regarding the LGBT movement; they want us to affirm other people's **perverse** beliefs; but Jesus defines

what godly tolerance is: He **suffers**, or "puts up with," our sin in His mercy for a **long** time, but not forever.

But how does Jesus respond with this frustrating generation, which lashes out at Him even though His disciples have only tried to help? Does He tell this father to go figure it out on his own, if he's so smart? No; in patience He asks the father to "**bring him hither to me.**" It's not easy to keep praying and trying to help other people when they are ungrateful, unbelieving, and even bitter at us for doing so, but amazingly, Jesus was remarkably longsuffering.

(v18) This boy had given up lots of spiritual ground to the devil bit by bit over the years, yet Jesus instantly recovers it **that very hour**. Just be sure you are sincere with God, because I've seen some people supposedly get saved, seeming to be new people for a little while, but within a couple of weeks or months, they are worse than ever. It isn't enough to cast out the devil; you must truly invite Jesus Christ into your heart to be safe forever (Matthew 12:43-45).

2: Ammunition in spiritual warfare (v19-21). Once you're saved, you'll be thrust into the heat of spiritual battles. So next, let's ask Jesus for the spiritual ammunition we need. I imagine **the disciples** were embarrassed, and some conversations are best done **apart** in private. Can you imagine them trying to cast out this demon, who simply ignored or maybe mocked their attempts? The disciples must have felt disheartened and confused.

Some people say about their lifestyle, "The devil made me do it"; they can never seem to get rid of his influence in their lives. Why? What's the real problem? Is the devil too strong for God? **(v20)** Certainly not; it is "**Because of your unbelief**". You can't simply "try Jesus" the way you might try a new flavor of pizza to see if it works out for you. No, you must be absolutely committed to Him. It's okay if your **faith** is small, **as a grain of mustard seed**, so long as it has genuine life in it.

Maybe you wonder, Was Jesus *literally* saying that we could **Remove a mountain** with faith? Or is He just speaking spiritually, or using hyperbole? Of course, I believe spiritual "mountains" are included, but I do believe the literal, face-value meaning is true as well. But

you must first meet the conditions stated elsewhere (asking in the will of God, in Jesus' name, with faith in God, abiding in Jesus, etc.) If you *really* thought the mountain would move, you would be warning everyone who lived on that mountain to flee away to save their lives, and warning all those on the coasts to prepare for a tsunami. There is a big difference between genuine faith and make-believe. Before you can have strong, genuine faith like that (I Corinthians 13:2), perhaps first, you need to make sure you've been removing spiritual mountains and strongholds in your own life, building up your faith, and learning God's will and ways. (And, I think you'd need to run into a situation where moving a mountain is necessary to do God's will!) But the word **impossible** should be used about **nothing** in the Christian's vocabulary.

(v21) The specific problem in the disciples' case was that **this kind** of demon required unique technique to cast it **out—prayer and fasting**. Sometimes, we may think of faith as blindly trying the same things over and over without results; but real faith often scrutinizes the approach, asking if it is correct. For example, a person who knows his lawn mower is in top condition doesn't continue pulling the rip cord over and over incessantly when it doesn't start. Instead, he checks to see if maybe he accidentally flooded the engine or forgot to put gas into it, and *then* he pulls the rip cord again. There are times when all we can do is pray, but we must also ask God whether He is expecting us to take some action, like special fasting and prayer, or confronting a person or situation (Joshua 7:10-12).

3: Grace through suffering (v22-23). Third, ask Jesus for grace through suffering. Jesus really does feel our pain, since He was the **Son of man**. He felt the sting of a scraped knee and the nastiness of having the flu. He feels our betrayals because He Himself was **betrayed**. He understands the pain of the prisoner who is **in the hands of men**. **(v23)** He even understands how it feels to be **killed** in a horrible way. But Jesus looked forward to being **raised again on the third day**; and likewise, thinking about heaven helps saints get through suffering today. The disciples **were exceeding sorry**, probably because of how sad these words

are, compounded by the frustration of dealing with the demon earlier, I imagine.

4: Guidance in specifics (v24-27). Fourth, ask Jesus for guidance in specific situations. The Bible doesn't explicitly tell us which city to live in, which church to join, or how God would have us spend a particular free afternoon (though it does provide general principles as a starting point). For daily questions like these, I believe we should ask the Holy Spirit for specific guidance in the moment. **Peter** was asked, "**Doth not your master pay tribute?**" Be careful answering sneaky questions about Jesus that have embedded presuppositions! Today, people may ask, "Wouldn't Jesus support everyone? Wasn't He opposed to Christians being mean and judgmental?" **(v25)** With Peter, Christians may be tempted to answer without thinking, "**Yes.**" Of course Jesus wouldn't *fail* to pay his taxes, right? Peter probably meant to protect Jesus' reputation, but he got into a sticky situation because of a rash answer. So **Jesus prevented him** (I picture Jesus blocking the doorway just as Peter is about to go into it, signaling He wanted to speak to him privately). I wonder whether Peter was surprised that Jesus knew about his conversation (cf. John 21:17); He is God and knows everything about us. **(v26)** The tribute was unfair, **(v27)** but **Notwithstanding**, Jesus pays it to avoid **offending them**, using an amazing miracle. Only Jesus could get Peter out of the mess he had trapped himself into (Jesus doesn't mention the other disciples paying this tribute). If you find yourself in a mess because of something stupid or rash you've said (as I often have), ask Jesus to help you know how to clean it up. And ask Him how to respond to sticky questions and situations. Jesus cares about everything—from the obviously spiritual topics to every-day stuff like **money** for taxes and **fish**. We can ask Him anything! He actually thinks about us *a lot*. I like how Psalm 139:17-18 says that He is there for us all through the night, even when we're asleep, waiting right there to fellowship with us when we wake up again. We have to simply draw near to Him more often.