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Sermons on Matthew

Deadly Redemption

Matthew 12:43-45

With Study Questions

*Pastor Paul Viggiano
Branch of Hope
Orthodox Presbyterian Church
2370 W. Carson Street, #100
Torrance, CA 90501
(310) 212-6999
pastorpaul@integrity.com
www.branchofhope.org
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When an unclean spirit goes out of a man, __ he goes through dry places, seeking rest, and finds none. ⁻⁴⁴⁻ Then he says, ' I will return to my house from which I came. ' And when he comes, he finds *it* empty, swept, and put in order. ⁻⁴⁵⁻ Then he goes and takes with him seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter and dwell there; __ and the last *state* of that man is worse than the first. So shall it also be with this wicked generation. (Matthew 12:43-45)

Preface

Waiting for my pizza to cook, I ran into an old high school friend, a former teammate. He was a good athlete and always a nice guy. But during the course of his life he became entangled in numerous addictions. We hadn't spoken in years. He lived out of state. He was happy to see me and was quick to assure me that all was well with him. He wanted me to tell others he was fine. I was glad to hear it. It's always better not to be overwhelmed by addictions—demons. Yet at the same time...

Self-improvement can be deadly. Never is one more convinced of their lack of need for a Savior than when their demons are on hiatus. The golden calves of the twenty-first century amass their troops—the idols and false gods are in joyous conference when their *intelligence* brings news of their client's new found self-assurance. The demons, on the other hand, are restless. The sling is spinning and they wait for the order, at which time they will fly, leaving their victim, as Jesus warns, than they had previously been.

I. Historical Context

One of my professors was fond of saying, "Modern man is just an old time sinner dressed up in a space suit." At some level all the warnings in the Bible, no matter when and where they are given, are useful warnings to men of all generations and all nations. The generation, however, at the time of Jesus had reached a fever pitch of ungodliness. They were ripe for judgment (Matthew 3:10, 12; 10:23; 16:28; 23:36; 24:34). One might think they were engaging in rampant moral licentiousness! Did a stroll through Galilee bear an eerie resemblance of Sodom? Surprisingly, Jesus taught it

was going to be easier on Sodom on the Day of Judgment than for His current generation (Matthew 10:15). What made this generation so evil?

Very Religious/Pious

There are few things which yield a more horrid stench in the nostrils of God than a false pursuit of piety (an outward and superficial religion). The generation which inspired the “woes” of Christ was meticulously devout.

_Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! __For you pay tithe of mint and anise and cumin __have neglected the weightier *matters* of the law: justice and mercy and faith. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone. (Matthew 23:23)

Imagine opening the spice drawer and measuring out ten percent to give to God! They were doing that, and Jesus here teaches they ought to have. But they were neglecting the weightier matters of justice, mercy and faith. They loved to strain at gnats. Driving the point home with greater power, Jesus followed with a stronger indictment.

Even so you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness. ⁻²⁹⁻ __Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! Because you build the tombs of the prophets and __adorn the monuments of the righteous, ⁻³⁰⁻ and say, ‘_If we had lived in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets.’ ⁻³¹⁻ Therefore you are witnesses against yourselves that _you are sons of those who murdered the prophets. (Matthew 23:28-31)

Confident in Own Righteousness

A false and hypocritical pursuit of religion stinks! Jesus’ religious contemporaries certainly fell into that category. Ironically, they also somehow developed a great confidence in their own righteousness. The parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector has the preamble:

-Also He spoke this parable to some __ who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others. . . (Luke 18:9)

Numerous encounters in the gospel reveal this ungodly self-estimation.

So he answered and said to *his* father, ‘_Lo, these many years I have been serving you; I never transgressed your commandment at any time. . . (Luke 15:29a)

And He said to them, “_You are those who __justify yourselves __before men, but __God knows your hearts.” (Luke 16:15a)

Jesus is Rabbi—Not Savior

Of course this confidence in their own righteousness made Jesus quite expendable. Like so many today, they were willing to grant Jesus the office of teacher (Matthew 12:38; 22:15-17), but Prophet? Priest? King? Savior? the Christ? Son of God? They would have none of that.

_And the high priest arose and said to Him, “_Do You answer nothing? What *is it* these men testify against You?”⁻⁶³⁻ But __Jesus kept silent. And the high priest answered and said to Him, __“_I put You under oath by the living God: Tell us if You are the Christ, the Son of God!”⁻⁶⁴⁻ Jesus said to him, “_It is *as* you said. Nevertheless, I say to you, _¹hereafter you will see the Son of Man __sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven.”⁻⁶⁵⁻ _Then the high priest tore his clothes, saying, “_He has spoken blasphemy! What further need do we have of witnesses? Look, now you have heard His _blasphemy!⁻⁶⁶⁻ What do you think?” They answered and said, __“_He is deserving of death.” (Matthew 26:62-66)

So it is a religious, pious, confident generation who are willing to accept Jesus as a teacher but not as a Savior who receive this warning from Jesus. It doesn't seem like much of a leap to see similar sentiments in our current culture.

Generals view satellite displays and receive intelligence reports that they might know how to properly engage the enemy. Professional coaches watch films of their opponents so they can predict what plays they might run in particular conditions—they want to know the strengths and weaknesses of their opponents. Jesus informs us here of the nature of our enemy.

II. Nature of Evil

When an unclean spirit goes out of a man, __he goes through dry places, seeking rest, and finds none. ⁻⁴⁴⁻ Then he says, ‘_I will return to my house from which I came.’ (Matthew 12:43, 44a)

Doesn't Rest

Expelled evil doesn't rest. Jesus created His own classroom. It was no secret that Jesus had been casting out demons from **“Galilee, and from _Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and beyond the Jordan.” (Matthew 4:25b).** Jesus seems to be suggesting that those people who had been delivered from their demons—their unclean spirits—had something potentially worse to worry about. The nature of evil is that it wants to come back and won't rest until it does. Evil doesn't rest unless it's doing evil.

_Do not enter the path of the wicked, and do not walk in the way of evil. ¹⁵ Avoid it, do not travel on it; turn away from it and pass on. ¹⁶ For they do not sleep unless they have done evil; and their sleep is __taken away unless they make someone fall. (Proverbs 4:14-16)

Let us not think for a second that the devil has been vanquished because we have overcome some moral, or even demonic, trial in our lives. Sometimes it makes me nervous when my Christian friends speak of their Christianity in these terms. “How are you?” I ask. “God has been delivering me from so many weaknesses. I've really gotten the victory over (*you-name-it*),” they answer.

When our statement of faith somehow revolves around our personal victories (not that I'm against victory and not that I doubt that this happens), I fear that we may be missing the point—and fodder (food) for future devastation. Evil at one time owned us all (Ephesians 2:1-3) and feels he has squatter's rights to our souls. He's in the next bush. The Lord

said to Cain, “. . .sin lies at the door. And its desire is __for you but you should rule over it.” (Genesis 4:7)

Seeks to Devour

Understand that there is an enemy who wishes to devour us. How foolish would we consider the commander who denied the existence of his enemy! How unprepared the captain who underestimates the formidable nature of the rocks inches below the hull! It was to believers that Peter wrote

Be _sober, be __vigilant; _because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. ⁻⁹⁻ Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world. (1 Peter 5:8, 9)

Multiplies Under Certain Conditions

Jesus teaches that the ferocity of this enemy multiplies under certain conditions. Those who have been acquainted with the delivering power of Christ have, as it were, a bulls-eye on their back. Jesus will address this shortly in the ‘Parable of the Sower.’ (Matthew 13:1-9) Suffice it to say now that our enemy knows us well, for we defected from his camp when we came to Christ. He knows the chinks in our armor and has the dexterity to crawl through the smallest opening. Again, writing to believers, the Apostle Paul warns,

*“Be angry, and do not sin”*: do not let the sun go down on your wrath, ⁻²⁷⁻ __nor give __place to the devil (Ephesians 4:26, 27).

III. A Deadly/Partial Redemption

The exponential nature of the attack is exacerbated by the increased vulnerability of the victim. Jesus teaches of the deadly nature of a partial redemption. Jesus talks about what the unclean spirit loves to find when he returns to the house.

**And when he comes, he finds *it* empty, swept, and put in order. ⁴⁵
Then he goes and takes with him seven other spirits more wicked
than himself, and they enter and dwell there; __ and the last *state* of
that man is worse than the first. (Matthew 12:44b-45a)**

Like a fat, juicy, and low hanging peach is the house that is empty,
swept and put in order.

Empty and Swept

The house is swept and empty (_____ - *scholazo*) which means to loiter; to be free from labor; to be at leisure; to be idle; to be unoccupied, empty. We're satisfied that our unclean spirit has left, but we have not concerned ourselves with filling the vacuum. The Apostle Paul was on his knees, praying that we might

**.. .know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you
may be filled _with all the fullness of God. (Ephesians 3:19)**

We are to be

**.. .filled with the fruits of righteousness __which *are* by Jesus
Christ, __to the glory and praise of God. (Philippians 1:11)**

Christians are not to remain empty vessels, temporarily cleansed from some bad habit or unclean spirit; they are to have the Spirit of Christ (Romans 8:9). God is not to be thought of as some sort of cosmic therapist, granting us the necessary fifty-five minutes, then bidding us good day. His Spirit fills our empty hearts, revealing His glorious Fatherhood.

**-And because you are sons, God has sent forth __the Spirit of
His Son into your hearts, crying out, __“_Abba, Father!_”
⁷ Therefore you are no longer a slave but a son, __and if a
son, then an heir _of God __through Christ. (Galatians 4:6, 7)**

Put In Order

The house loved by evil is the empty house which has been put in order (_____ - *kosmeo*) which means to beautify, make attractive, and decorate. This is where we get our word, cosmetic. Cosmetics can be nice

but they can also grant false assurance. If I'm overweight and out of shape I might get my haircut and buy some new clothes. It might actually make me feel better (is it better to look good than to feel good?). But what I really need to do is eat better and exercise.

The cosmetic transformation is a facade, a veneer. It can actually do me an injustice if I believe its presentation. It is just this type of cosmetic righteousness that Jesus is continually addressing.

But they do all their deeds –to be noticed by men; for they –broaden their –phylacteries¹ and lengthen –the tassels of their garments. (Matthew 23:5, NASB)

A person who has merely overcome a weakness or sin and has not put themselves under the full-time care of Christ, the Master Physician (Matthew 9:12), might as well hang an '*open for business*' sign on his forehead. To turn away from sin and not turn to Christ is like doing half a flip. Judas and Esau both felt bad about their sins (Matthew 27:3, 4; Hebrews 12:16, 17); Judas gave the money back. Remember...

**..._godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; _but the sorrow of the world produces death.
(2 Corinthians 7:10b)**

IV. Conclusion

In conclusion, let us not content ourselves and remain idle because we perceive we have reached some level of acceptable righteousness. Let this be a warning to us all to take heed not to leave our first love (Revelation 2:4) but rather to excel still more (1 Thessalonians 4:1). Churches must be warned to avoid becoming therapy centers lest they leave their half-healed congregants worse than they were found.

Christ calls us to ever feed upon Him (1 Corinthians 11:23-26)! That when the unclean spirit returns, he finds himself yet again in confrontation with that Strong Man—Jesus Christ the righteous (Matthew 12:29; 1 John 2:1)—and be reminded of his bondage. When evil comes with his fangs of vengeance let him find us, as the Confession and Scripture many places teaches, worshipping God

¹ **phylactery**, adj. small leather case worn on forehead and forearms, containing Scripture

...everywhere (Mal. 1:11, 1 Tim. 2:8), **in spirit and truth** (John 4:23–24), **in private families** (Jer. 10:25, Deut. 6:6–7, Job 1:5, 2 Sam. 6:18,20, 1 Pet. 3:7, Acts 10:2) **daily** (Matt. 6:11), **in secret, each one by himself** (Matt. 6:6, Eph. 6:18), **and more solemnly in the public assemblies, which are not carelessly or willfully to be neglected, or forsaken, when God, by His Word or providence, calls us there.** (Isa. 56:6–7, Heb. 10:25, Prov. 1:20–21,24, Prov. 8:34, Acts 13:42, Luke 4:16, Acts 2:42) ²

Let us not sing hymns of our accomplishments, even by the power of God (which was the testimony of the Pharisee who went up the hill to pray“...Lord I thank thee that I am not like...”) but rather let us boast in what was accomplished by our Redeemer. Let our houses be full of faith—for this is our only hope against those seven, eight, yet innumerable demons. Be assured that a house inhabited by Christ will never find that Jesus has the devil as a room-mate. Nonetheless there is a warning of spiritual lethargy which cannot be ignored. Calvin weaves it well,

We must, therefore, endeavor that Christ, holding his reign within us, may block up all the entrances of his adversary. Whatever may be the fierceness or violence of Satan’s attacks, they ought not to intimidate the sons of God, whom the invincible power of the Holy Spirit preserves in safety. We know that the punishment which is here threatened is addressed to none but those who despise the grace of God, and who, by extinguishing the light of faith, and banishing the desire of godliness, _become profane. ³

Questions for Study

²*The Westminster confession of faith*. 1996 (Chapter XXI, 6). Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc. Minor adjustments.

³Calvin, J. (1998). *Calvin's Commentaries: The Harmony of the Gospels : Calvin's Commentary on Matthew, Mark, and Luke* (electronic ed.). Logos Library System; Calvin's Commentaries. Albany, OR: Ages Software.

1. What is the historical context of this passage? Do we see similarities today (Pages 2-5)?
2. What do we learn about the nature of evil in this passage (pages 5-7)?
3. What is a partial redemption and why can it be so dangerous (pages 7-9)?
4. How should we respond to this warning from Jesus (pages 9, 10)?