

Title: Seeing is not always believing
Text: Matthew 12.43-45
Theme: The urgency of belief in Christ
Series: Matthew #70
Prop Stmt: Experiencing God's power without whole-hearted belief is a set-up for destruction.

Yesterday in the Tigers' game, there was a critical play that took place in the 6th inning that changed the entire game and may change the playoff picture. Going through Matthew 12, is a little like a video replay of a critical moment in a game that determined the final result. When we get to the end, we will look back at this chapter as the turning point. The chapter began with the disciples of Jesus picking some grain from a standing grain field and eating it on a Sabbath. The Pharisees pounce on Jesus, accusing him of breaking the Sabbath. They were so worked up about it, it was obvious that they burnt more calories in their indignation than the disciples did in their snacking. Then came a set-up. A man with a withered hand was in a Synagogue that Jesus attended on the Sabbath. The Pharisees ask him if it is lawful to heal on the Sabbath? What kind of a question is that? Is it okay with God if you demonstrate compassionate care for someone on the Sabbath? Jesus not only said it was, but much to their dismay, he healed the man. Then, a demon-possessed man is brought to Jesus. The man was also blind and mute. Jesus casts out the demon, and the man is not only freed from the demonic spirit, but the man's sight and speech are restored. At this point, the Pharisees announce that the only way Jesus could do something like that was through Satanic power. Jesus now warns them in the most serious manner, that they have crossed a line. He is about to conclude his warning, when he returns to talking about this demon possessed man.

Read Text:

I find it both amazing and disturbing that Jesus is hated so much that he is lied about, conspired against, arrested, tried, convicted and publicly executed in one of the most inhumane forms of death imaginable. How does that happen? This is obviously not the result of a mob that had a little bit too much to drink and things got out of control one night. The rejection and subsequent execution of Christ was the result of a deliberate, willful, and calculated plan. And this plan was not that much of a secret. So, have you ever asked the question, why?

Have you ever tried to put yourself in the place of his mother Mary, or in the place of his brothers? What is it about my son, what is it about my brother that he is hated so deeply? What has he done that has evoked such an intense, personal, and violent reaction? The animosity against Christ is so deep-seated, that it does not matter what good things he does. Why? What has he done? What does he say? What does Christ do that is the occasion for him to be treated this way?

British tabloids are famous for building people up to the status of a god or goddess, only to turn around and destroy those same people piece by piece. Paparazzi will tell the world what the person is wearing, where the person is shopping, dining, vacationing, working

out, or dating. Then, when the tabloid chooses, when they think it is time to crush that person, they will pounce on a perceived flaw, or create one and will systematically attempt to destroy that life. The public, it seems, has a voracious appetite for fallen heroes. We want to know the juicy details of brokenness, estrangement, rejection and addiction. We love; it seems, to indulge ourselves in these accounts so as to assure ourselves, that our faults are not as bad. The failings of others provide a distraction from the misery and insecurities within. But, what do you do when there is a true hero? What do you do when you are confronted with someone whose life is so pure, so true, so perfect, so relentlessly perfect that by comparison, you look terrible?

It is simplistic to think of the books of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John as these feel good accounts of this wonderful man named Jesus who did so many wonderful things and then for some inexplicable reason was killed. The gospel accounts are, for the most part, tragedies. In fact, they are tragedies of epic proportions. Last week, I reminded you a bit of the history of Israel. Less than forty years after the life of Christ on this earth, the nation was wiped out by the Romans. The last vestige of Jews to surrender retreated to the mountain top fortress of Masada, where they chose suicide over slavery. I told you that Israel did not have to experience this. It was unnecessary. But, when she rejected her true King and Savior, she rejected her only hope for peace and protection. My point is this: there is so much at stake regarding Jesus. And that is what Jesus is pressing upon us.

Jesus makes it clear that freedom from demonic possession is not the end of the story, nor is it the goal. This man may be free for the moment, but unless he actually becomes a follower of Christ, he will not be free for long. It is not enough for him to be dispossessed by the evil spirit; he must become possessed by the Holy Spirit. There is no middle ground.

Once again, Jesus talks openly about the issue of demons. This is a little unsettling for us. Most of us have been born and raised in Western culture, where we prize materialism over spiritism. We tend to think of unseen forces as being speculative, imaginary and assumptions of the ignorant who have never been taught how things really work. If you can't see it, research it, and duplicate it, then it is not scientific, and therefore, it is not real. Science has been helpful in many ways, but there is an entire arena science is woefully ignorant of. There is a world within our world that is unseen but is every bit as real as what you can see. Jesus talks freely about it because he is very aware of it.

Demons are real. They are part of a rebellion that is hell-bent on dethroning God and destroying his children. Demons are devoted to expanding the influence of evil. But, while they are real, and should be understood and reckoned with, genuine followers of Christ do not have to live in fear of them. But, for unbelievers and those who are "cultural Christians" but not genuine followers of Christ, they have no defense. The big idea of what Jesus is saying here is not primarily about demonology as much as it is a warning about incomplete belief. If you are exposed to Jesus and even benefit from him and his teaching but you fail to really believe on him, then you are setting yourself up for serious consequences. Here is the sermon in a sentence: Incomplete belief opens the door to a danger that is beyond remedy. The man, possibly still standing before them, is an illustration of the danger that all of them, and some of us are in.

I. Incomplete Belief (43-44)

If you are alive, you have problems. You have problems because we live in a world that is cursed by sin and our bodies live the results of that. Sin affects our communication, our attitudes, our desires, our responses and of course, all of our relationships. The weight of the affects of sin, along with the weight of sin itself is heavy. We groan. We sigh. We are concerned. We grieve. We feel the burden of it all. Often times, we try to escape from the burden or dull the pain through medication, alcohol, drugs, entertainment, food, video games, shopping, etc. But those things are temporary at best and only add to the weight. The consequences of sin are designed to drive us to Christ.

Go back to verse 22. This man was under the influence of a demon and was obviously unable to free himself. He needed help. He needed Christ. Christ was his only hope. Matthew does not tell us how this man got himself into this situation because that was not his point, but this man got himself into a mess that he could not solve. And obviously, Jesus addresses immediate problem. Jesus helps him, but addressing the immediate problem does not address the ultimate problem. At this point, this man apparently has an incomplete belief. Here are some...

A. Examples of incomplete belief

- 1) Witness/Experience the power of God without trusting the Person of God.

These people had seen the power of God at work. What were they going to do with it? Let me give you another example of this. Turn to John 5. (read verses 1-10) Here we go again, right?! A man who has been an invalid for 38 years has been healed and instead of being excited about the fact that he was healed, the Jews are all fired up because he is carrying his bedroll on the Sabbath. So, they challenge him about it and he says that the man who healed him told him to carry it. They want to know who healed him, but he doesn't know. Later on, Jesus finds him in the Temple area and warns him to sin no more, since it sounds like his condition was the result of a specific sin. In other words, that fact that you have experienced healing does not mean that everything is fine. Jesus says, "Sin no more, that nothing worse may happen to you." So, how does this man respond? He goes off and tells the Jews that it was Jesus who healed him. He was "ratting on him". Here was a man who had experienced the power of God, but did not trust Christ.

You can be that close to Jesus and yet completely miss the gospel.

- 2) Tasting the benefits of grace without drinking from the fountain of grace.

If I am distraught because my life is a train-wreck and I have hurt people and have created all sorts of problems, it would be really easy to try to medicate my problems with alcohol. What happens to people who worship alcohol? They become controlled by it

which creates an entire host of problems on its own. Let's say this person gets a DUI and the court says that you have to get help. So, the person goes to a recovery group at church in order to get off of alcohol. But, once he starts attending the church he meets some nice people who care about him. They give him rides. They do things with him. They care about him and call. They invite him to do things with them, and over time he begins to make some good friends. He starts coming to the worship service and even helps out once in a while with some projects. His friends, the support, the encouragement, the uplift from the worship service and the teaching all bring some benefits to him, but tasting those benefits and enjoying them is not the same as actually trusting Christ and surrendering your life to him. You can hang out with some good people and reform some of your habits, but in the end morality without the gospel is just trading one form of bondage for another.

I have witnessed this too many times. The person who is under the threat of the court starts coming out of fear of the consequences that they might experience because of their sin. They start going to counseling and doing some of these other things, and go back before the judge. They even have a letter from the church. Many attorneys will tell you that judges really like letters from churches. Let's say that at this point the judge reviews your case and rolls back all of the conditions he/she has put on you because you are "doing so well." This is the point at which it will be revealed whether you really believe this or, if you were only using the church and Jesus to get you what you want. You can taste the benefits of grace, without actually drinking at the fountain and jumping in.

3) Learning the truths about God without leaning whole-heartedly upon God.

The distance between heaven and hell is how wide the difference is between knowing about God and actually knowing God. You cannot be a follower of Christ without knowing the gospel, but just because you know the gospel intellectually does not mean that you actually know God. It is not enough to know the facts of the gospel, you must actually trust in Christ. It is very, very important to me that you fully understand what the gospel is. I want you to wrestle with deep thoughts of God and heavier matters of doctrine. But, I do not do that so you are well informed. I want you to have deep thoughts about God so that you will have great love for God. It is not enough for your thoughts and intellect to be excited, your will, your affections, your heart must be captured. In a word, you must be possessed by God. You must trust in Christ.

B. Evidences of incomplete belief

1) Loving the gifts but not the Giver

Consider these two questions: 1) Who is God? 2) Who is God to you? How do you actually think about and relate to God? Is he your spiritual lottery ticket that you hope will get you what you want, or is he, your soul's delight? Do you love him for who he is, or does your affection for him run hot and cold depending on your circumstances? If I

claim to love God so that he will fix my kids, or my marriage, or my job, or my body, I am not loving God, I am loving myself.

2) Thinking of Christianity as “what’s in it for me?”

I know that American Christianity has not been helpful on this. In our quest to “make the Bible relevant” we have treated people as if they are the center of the universe. And we have unwittingly done people a disservice. I preach a sermon and perhaps you want to know, what’s in here for me? Tell me what I am supposed to do with this. How does this apply to my life? How does **this** text apply to **my** life? When we ask questions like that, it may be because this is how we are thinking. That is not how it is. You and I are not at the center of life.

Alright, I will tell you what you are supposed to do with this. Are you ready? Instead of asking how does this text apply to my life, start asking how does my life apply to this text?) Do you see what I mean? The Bible is first and foremost about God. The Bible was written for us, but it is not primarily about us. It is about God. The Bible tells us what the plan of God is, so that we know how we can get on board with it. But, that is not the message of Christianity, American style. We want a God whose sole purpose is to make us happy, no matter what. So, if you are unhappy with your spouse, get a divorce because God does not want you to be unhappy. Isn’t that what we hear? God wants me to be happy is used as an excuse for all sorts of ungodly things. So, if you are unhappy with your kids, sell ‘em, because God does not want you to be unhappy, right? If you are unhappy with your car, drive it into a pond, claim it was an accident so the insurance company will pay you for a new one, after all, God loves you too much for you to drive a car that you don’t like, right? Why would it be wrong to sell your kids and why would it be wrong to defraud the insurance company but okay to sell out your marriage?

An incomplete belief stops short of surrendering your life. This is what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ. We write out a blank check to God, from the account of our life. We sign it and give it to him to fill it in, however he chooses.

The man was dispossessed of the demon, but had not yet become possessed by Christ. Jesus says that incomplete belief...

II. Opens the door to a danger (44)

A. Looking good is no substitute for knowing God.

The evil spirit leaves and wonders around and is unable to find a place to inhabit. Apparently, in order to carry out its mission of evil, the evil spirit needs to be able inhabit someone. Not finding another suitable place he returns to find the house (body) he left all neat and in order. That is a very fitting description isn’t it? Homes (lives) are naturally not clean and orderly, are they? Someone had to clean things up and put them in place. People, whose lives are in bondage to evil and particularly to demons, are not neat and orderly. They are destructive, chaotic, violent, disruptive and often uncontrollable.

Family members do not know what to do. Everyone is at their wits end. The person is not safe to be around. This person is danger to himself and everyone else. So, what do you think the reaction is when the demon leaves? Relief, right?! Everyone is relieved.

The guy is not threatening. He can keep a job. He can take on some responsibility. He can come over for Christmas and birthday parties. Everything is great because he has cleaned up his act. But, there is another problem.

B. Is Empty

No one is guarding the house. Why is no one guarding the house? The owner has a false sense of assurance and security. Things are so much better than what they were, that he thinks that he can relax and drop his guard. But, you know what happens to homes that are left empty and unguarded. Squatters move in. That is the point. Everyone is a slave to someone. Your life will be ruled by someone. Everyone serves someone. You will either serve someone who lived for you, or you will serve someone who will waste yours. Squatters are living in what does not rightfully belong to them and they do not care about it. They do not care what they do to it. If things fall apart, they just move on. If your life is not intentionally given over to Christ, then you will be ruled by someone else who won't die for you, but will gladly take your life.

Incomplete belief opens the door to a danger...

III. That is beyond remedy. (45)

When the demon finds the home empty, he goes and gets others to join him. Presumably these are other demons that are also wandering and looking for a place to inhabit and destroy. And they come. It is possible that when Jesus uses the number seven, he is using it in the sense of completion, since seven was used in that sense. We talk about things being on a scale of 1-10. In that culture, things would be on a scale of 1-7. So, when Jesus says that he brings seven others, he could be saying that literally, there are seven others, or that his life is completely overrun to the point where he is rendered completely powerless to do anything about it at all. Being overtaken by one demon was bad enough, but it was not as bad as eight. The relief from the one was temporary because the opportunity for faith that the relief brought was ignored.

Earlier I gave you the example of a person who needed God and the church to get out of a crisis, but did not really believe the gospel at a heart level. Did you know that what is true of a person can be true of a people? That is how this section ends.

We know that our nation has serious problems that are not being addressed, but instead are only getting worse. We know it. We grieve over the scourge of abortion, the pornography, the corruption in all levels of government, the racism, the violence, the economic mess, the poverty, the drug and alcohol abuse, the divorce rate and the number of children born to single moms. We know that we cannot sustain this course without a complete implosion. We know this. We pray about this because we feel the urgency of

this need. But, what if our country experienced a political, moral and economic reformation? What if we elected into the White House and into both sides of Congress a president and senators and representatives who were honest, fair, hard-working, responsible and moral? What if the Supreme Court overturned Roe v. Wade? What if tax policies were changed that actually energized the private sector and jobs became so plentiful and prosperous that we virtually had no unemployment? What if personal responsibility became a nation-wide passion? What if we became concerned about our health and on our own started to watch TV less and exercise more? What if we balanced the budget, paid off our debt, and built a strong national defense? What if our streets became safe, our parks clean, and blight was removed? What if every single person could have a home, work 40 hours a week, plus have 2 cars, a boat, a cabin up north, health insurance, life insurance, dental insurance and kids who can go to any school they want for free? What if marriages did not end in divorce, if marriage was defined as only being between one man and one woman and if schools were permitted and even encouraged to teach Intelligent Design and Creationism?

What if you had all of that, but did not have the gospel? Do you realize that we would be infinitely worse off than we are now? Right now, we know that we need God. We know that we cannot fix this mess on our own. But if we experienced a moral reformation but did not become consumed with Christ, we would be worse off.

Don't miss Jesus.