

The Parables of Jesus #15
The Parable of the Empty House
(Mt. 12:43-45)
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INTRODUCTION

A. Jesus not only taught parables that described the kingdom of heaven, but as we have already seen, he used parables to describe the human situation

1. Earlier we saw that he compared that generation to children who could were immature and who could not be satisfied
2. To understand Christ's mission, we must understand man's problems

B. There is a significant sequence of events in Matthew 12

1. Matt 12:2 And when the Pharisees saw it, they said to Him, "'Look, Your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath!'" (NKJ)
 - a. this is an indirect question of Jesus focusing on the disciples
 - b. it questions his faithfulness to the Law of Moses
2. Matt 12:10 And behold, there was a man who had a withered hand. And they asked Him, saying, "'Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?'"-- that they might accuse Him. (NKJ)
 - a. that question is now applied to his miraculous healing
 - b. it questions whether his actions are consistent with the Law
3. Matt 12:24 Now when the Pharisees heard it they said, "'This fellow does not cast out demons except by Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons.'" (NKJ)
 - a. now it develops into a direct charge
 - b. they charge him with being in alignment with Satan
4. Matt 12:38 Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered, saying, "'Teacher, we want to see a sign from You.'" (NKJ)
 - a. the test develops further
 - b. perhaps they thought they could get him to incriminate himself and thus prove their charge against him

C. Matt 12:43-46

When an unclean spirit goes out of a man, he goes through dry places, seeking rest, and finds none. 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. 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. (NKJ)

1. This is an appropriate place for Jesus to teach a parable designed to describe these people and the terrible danger they were in
2. This is a frightening story

I. THE PARABLE

A. Again, it is important to note what is being described by the parable

1. "So shall it also be with this wicked generation."
2. The story was meant to further describe the human condition that Jesus faced

B. Story details

1. An unclean spirit at first inhabited a man
 - a. this was something that people of that day were familiar with
 - b. Mt 12:22 -- he had just cast out a demon (unclean spirit)
2. For some reason the unclean spirit went out of the man
 - a. we do not know if it was cast out or if it just left on its own
 - b. the point is, where there was once an evil, unclean spirit in the man, now it was gone
3. The spirit went through dry places but couldn't find rest
 - a. there was a common belief that demons inhabited dry places
 - b. the idea is that of a wilderness, which may have been symbolic of the condemnation of demons
 - c. the story seems to indicate that this demon exercised some degree of choice and freedom in where it went or lived
4. The spirit decided to return to its former house
 - a. house = the man in which it had once lived
 - b. the human "house" held great attraction to the demon
5. He found the "house" in a particular condition
 - a. empty -- there was nothing in it
 - b. swept -- it had been cleaned out
 - c. put in order -- it had been repaired, fixed up, arranged
6. The evil spirit then does something it had not done before
 - a. it found seven demonic roommates
 - b. they all moved into the "house" of the man who earlier had suffered possession by only one demon
7. It is easy to see why Jesus concluded that the last state was worse than the first -- he now has eight demons possessing him

C. Again -- get the point -- "so it shall be with this wicked generation"

1. Jesus is saying to these people -- you're like that man
2. The end result for you is worse than at first
3. Things are going from bad to worse for you
4. Rather than condemn Jesus, they needed to recognize the pervasive evil in their own lives

II. LESSONS TO LEARN

A. The evil spirit considered the man's body as "his house"

1. The man may never have thought that he was actually in a struggle for control over his own self
2. The evil spirit came and went at will -- he was in control
3. The man himself was an accomplice to evil
 - a. was he ignorant of the demon's activity?
 - b. was he an unwilling participant?
 - c. the point is that the evil spirit is described as in charge

B. The reality of demon possession

1. This story seems far-fetched to us because, generally, we do not accept the idea of demon possession
 - a. we may agree that it occurred during Bible times, but not now
 - b. but what Jesus seems to be describing may not be the demon possession that required miracles to cast them out
2. There is another kind of "possession" by evil
 - a. this occurs when a man leaves himself open and available to evil
 - b. it may happen with some degree of ignorance on the man's part
 - c. it may happen without his being aware of his own participation
 - d. but the result is no less of a "possession" by evil
3. 2 Cor 11:14-15 And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works. (NKJ)
4. Acts 5:3 But Peter said, ""Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and keep back part of the price of the land for yourself? (NKJ)

C. Getting rid of evil is only half the battle

1. We make a great mistake in thinking all we have to do is eliminate the evil from our lives
 - a. many people recognize the problem and determine to reform
 - b. they make great efforts to clean up their lives
 - c. they sweep out all the dirt of sin and are so pleased at how much better things are
 - d. they put their lives in order and from all appearances they have conquered the enemy

2. True success in handling evil is not over until we replace the evil with something different
 - a. if you leave the house empty, evil will eventually move back in
 - b. it is the difference between reformation and transformation
 - c. Rom 12:2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. (NKJ)
 - d. Eph 4:20-24 But you have not so learned Christ if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus: that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness. (NKJ)
3. We must learn how to replace the evil with that which is good
 - a. Eph 4:25-32
 - b. learn how to transform yourself into something different

D. Never underestimate the power of evil to overwhelm and overcome

1. If we do not replace evil with good, we leave ourselves empty, open and vulnerable
2. This is why so many people fail, who think they've made serious efforts to get their lives shaped up
3. The evil spirit in the story returned with seven evil partners
4. 2 Pet 2:20-22 For if, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the latter end is worse for them than the beginning. For it would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to them. But it has happened to them according to the true proverb: "A dog returns to his own vomit," and, "a sow, having washed, to her wallowing in the mire." (NKJ)

CONCLUSION

A. Jesus saw serious problems with the generation of his day

1. Those problems haven't changed
2. We still struggle with the issues of sin and more sin

B. The people who condemned Jesus had refused to take a good look at themselves

1. That's so often the case with people
2. Full of condemnation of others, but unwilling to see themselves
3. The story of the empty house was a serious condemnation

C. Obvious question for us -- what lives in us?

1. Are we a habitat for evil?
2. Are we aware of how dangerous the situation is?
3. Have you struggled with the evil but feel like you're losing the war?

D. The answer is Jesus who will transform your life

E. Invitation