

The Messenger



“... How beautiful are the feet of those who bring glad tidings of good things!” Romans 10:15

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Listen to PROVE ALL THINGS on 730 AM WKRE, Sunday mornings from 8:15 to 8:30

The Danger of an Empty Heart

by Terry Slack

Luke 11:24 -26 *“When the unclean spirit goes out of a man, it passes through waterless places seeking rest, and not finding any, it says, ‘I will return to my house from which I came.’ And when it comes, it finds it swept and put in order. Then it goes and takes along seven other spirits more evil than itself, and they go in and live there; and the last state of that man becomes worse than the first.”*

There was no greater obstacle to Jesus’ message than external righteousness. Among the Jews, none were more committed to the rigid standards of religion than the Pharisees. But as they strove to adhere to a strict code of conduct, it only bred greater trust in self. By ignoring their flaws and accentuating their successes, they cemented in their minds a warped sense of their own “goodness”. Therefore, when Jesus preached to them about salvation, it was irrelevant; when He rebuked them. He was out of line; in their mind, His power had to be of Satan.

Such is the context of this short parable. Jesus had cast out a demon that had rendered its victim blind and mute (Matt. 12:22). While this demonstration amazed the crowds, the Pharisees charge that the source is none other than Satan himself (Matt. 12:24; Luke 11:15). Blinded by their own self-righteousness, they refuse to accept the irrefutable evidence presented. Speaking to the issue of their empty hearts, Jesus tells a story in which He likens *them* to a demonized man. From this short illustration we glean three valuable lessons.

The removal of some sins should not be confused with a final triumph over all sin.

Jesus doesn’t tell us the reason for the demon’s initial exit. What we do know is, at least temporarily, the man is freed from satanic control. But one victory did not equate to winning the war! As the evil spirit returns with seven of his friends, they find no barrier prohibiting their entry.

For the ancient nation of Israel, idolatry and immorality had brought their demise in the harsh punishment of Babylonian captivity. While their first century descendants may have

conquered Baal's grip, they had surrendered to other sins that were equally condemning (Matt. 23:13ff). Never was a group of men more committed to a demanding code of religious practice, yet never was there a group farther away from God.

Will we remember what the Pharisees forgot? Satan is a determined adversary whose main objective is to destroy our soul (I Pet. 5:8), therefore he cares little what means must be employed to accomplish that end. We may win over deceit, but fall to pride. We may stand firm against immorality, but be devoured by greed. We may resist the temptations of bitterness, but take the bait of self-righteousness. Jesus reminds us that spiritual success in one area does not mean we can let down our guard in other areas.

“Negative” religion alone cannot keep a man clean.

When the spirit returns he finds “his house” swept and put in order. Though some renovation had occurred and changes made, it remained unoccupied by any compelling force; though cleaned and adorned, it was still uninhabited!

Any religious system that merely tells a man what he must *not* do is doomed to fail. Though the Pharisees were very “religious,” they sought to follow a list of “rules” and thus failed to fill their hearts with good. As a result they became easy prey for any power seeking to fill the void.

Christianity certainly involves a variety of prohibitions and negative elements (Gal. 5:19-21; Col. 3:5-9), but it also includes important positive instruction (Col. 3:12-15; Phil. 4:4-8). We must hate divorce and actively promote good marriages. We must condemn deception and vigorously love integrity. We must avoid materialism and appreciate God's bountiful gifts. We must avoid division and fervently strive for unity. Our talk must not focus solely on what we're against; it must be balanced with discussions of what we are *for*.

We see a sober warning about falling into a worse state.

When the evil spirit returned, it didn't come alone. It brought seven spirits even more evil than itself. The empty hearts of the Pharisees resulted in a blinding self-righteousness that left them impervious to the saving message of the gospel. In fact, their depravity ran so deep that when the very one they claimed to serve stood among them, they not only rejected His claims, but vilified and eventually crucified Him.

As we evaluate our own house, we must remember that it is not enough for it to be clean and orderly. It must *at the same time* be occupied by a permanent and holy resident.

News and Notes:

Remember to check the prayer list for those with ongoing spiritual weaknesses and physical illnesses.

“...Pray for one another...The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.” James 5:16

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