

Battling Beelzebub

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Date: 18 September 2016

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[0 : 00] Casting out demons in the first century Israel was commonplace. There was nothing special about that. We would look on it as being quite strange and probably say it as something psychological.

But that's how it was then. Actually, I think that it's still the same today. It's just we don't see that very often in this country.

I was only once in a place where someone was possessed and that demon was expelled. It's a few years ago now. I was in Summer Mission. It was a great place, Summer Mission. It's where I proposed to everyone. It was a great place to learn about the Christian faith because it was like a battlefield.

We were in a camp where people came from Glasgow and from Edinburgh. Every fortnight, there was a new group of people there. And then there was the locals who wanted to fight with them all. So it was an exciting place.

[0 : 57] And you really were on the forefront of the battle. We lived in this campsite. I loved it so much that when I started teaching, I went there for the whole of the summer holidays.

This time, a young lad who would be about 17, who had become a Christian the year before with his friend and had started going to church, was in trouble.

And it was his friend who came to us and said, there's something wrong with him. If I bring him to you, would you pray with him? And so he brought the lad and our Summer Mission leader, who was a Church Scotland minister and very experienced, started talking to him and then said, I'd like to take you into the study and talk further.

He did that and he turned around to the rest of us and said, start praying, which we did. From the study, we heard, we could hear Willie praying, but we also heard another voice, a deep and aggressive voice saying things like, you're not getting me.

You can't have me. And then it became a very high, shrill voice and still seeing the same things and shouting. And Willie told us afterwards what was happening, that the boy just seemed to become another person and he was fighting and struggling and squirming in the floor.

[2 : 27] And Willie was really getting worried about this. He didn't quite know what to do, except the only thing that he could do, which was to keep praying. And he kept praying and all of a sudden, the boy was calm.

We kept in touch with the lad and he was healed. The demon, whatever it was that had a grip of him, was gone.

So that's my only experience in all my years as a Christian. The fact that demons obeyed Jesus was the problem.

Because that gave proof of his identity. A lot of people would try to cast out demons and they would say, well, that's you fine now. Go and pay some money to the synagogue.

You'll be okay. But nothing had happened. When Jesus prayed, things happened. The demons knew that he was in charge. And that's what was worrying the lawyers and the religious leaders.

[3 : 30] Their accusation, however, when they tried to accuse Jesus of something, of being in league with Beelzebub, was just plain stupid. It might have sounded all right when they were pontificating to their friends in Jerusalem.

Well, this Jesus man, he'll be in league with Beelzebub. You know, don't worry about him. But when they come up and actually see it, Jesus dismisses it simply by pointing out, how could the devil cast out the devil?

It's just nonsense. And there's no more argument. There's no contest. No one makes any attempt to reply. But Jesus uses this charge, he uses this situation, to make another claim.

If I, by the finger of God, in Matthew's Gospel, it says, if I, by the Spirit of God, same thing. If I, by the finger of God, drive out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. Now, the kingdom of God, these are messianic words. If the kingdom of God had come upon them, then the Messiah was here. And this whole new world that they were waiting for was happening. [4 : 48] Jesus' claim to be the Messiah was being underlined by his words. To the crowd, he was saying, look at me.

You've seen what I have done to this man. You've seen the miracles. You've seen the crowds. So now, you've got to choose. Are you going along with these Pharisees and other people who are accusing me?

Or, do you think I'm real? You've got to make up your mind. And that's no different for us today. That has continued right down the centuries.

Jesus has been accused of being false, of being a madman. His disciples are being deluded. Can that be the case?

Could Jesus be insane? Could his disciples be deluded? Could all the people down through the centuries who have followed this man from Galilee, could they all be fooled?

[5 : 51] Could they all be wrong? Or is Jesus the one who brings God's kingdom and offers us a way of life that's different and challenging and all-fulfilling?

Could he be the saviour of mankind? We have a choice. I fail to understand some of the conversations that I get into down through the years when people have criticized by Christianity and railed on about it.

And, you know, I try to stop them and say, look at it this way. If everybody in this world followed Jesus' teaching about love and about grace and about forgiveness and about compassion, this would be the most amazing world.

And nobody's ever been able to say anything against that because it's true, isn't it? If every single person in the world today gave up whatever other belief they had and said, I will follow this man of peace, this world would change radically overnight.

I don't understand that there are still plenty of detractors today, plenty of people who still say, well, can you prove it? Like the crowd who wanted a sign.

[7 : 22] Still people who want to slander Jesus and his way of life. Why the critics?

Why is that still happening 2,000 years later? Why do people still treat me as if, you know, something not quite right with me?

I play golf with an old teaching colleague and I know fine and well that he thinks I went off the rails when I left teaching to go into the ministry. Why if someone says that they've become a Christian, do their friends look at them as if they've gone a bit loopy?

Because this is a battle. It's an age-old battle between good and evil and to admit that Jesus is right, that he is the son of God, if we're going to say that's right, then we have a decision about our lives that we have to make.

The crowd doubted. They wanted a sign. Jesus pointed to the mute man. What more do you want? He's cured. He's delivered. If it was Satan who cast out Satan, then his kingdom would be divided.

[8 : 46] And this is another point that Jesus makes here. It's very important. a kingdom divided against itself can only collapse.

And maybe he was looking back to the history of Israel when the nation of Israel was split right down the middle. If I have done this by the spirit of God, he says, it only means one thing that God's kingdom is here.

The kingdom you've been waiting for. It's your choice. Are you in or are you out? But this kingdom, this kingdom cannot be divided. If a house is divided against itself, Jesus says, it will fall.

And history has proved it again and again. Whenever there's internal strife, whether it's in politics or anything else, if there's no internal unity, it will eventually collapse.

And it's so applicable to the world that we live in today. Rich and poor, divided, East and West, divided.

[10 : 00] Religions, divided. Families, the family unit, divided. We live in a world of divisions. Every kingdom divided against itself will be ruined, Jesus warns.

And the Bible stresses time and again this word unity. There's an old saying that if you want to win, divide and conquer.

If you can divide, then you will win. Unity came up again this morning when Martin was talking in Ephesians 1, talks about the unity of all things in Christ.

In our growth group last Tuesday in Ephesians 4, talks about these great people, apostles, prophets, teachers, evangelists, pastors, who have a purpose and the purpose is to build up the body of Christ so that it reaches what?

Unity. Unity. It's so important because we are in the kingdom of God, we are living in the kingdom of God and if that kingdom is split, if we are divided, if we are divided, then it struggles.

[11:20] Jesus' prayer for his disciples, John chapter 17, was that they would be brought to complete unity as a witness that Jesus had sent them.

How well have we been doing over 2,000 years of the church? And not too well, I think. We've got Catholic, Protestant, Anglican, Presbyterian, and in my denomination, the Church of Scotland and Scotland's history, we've got the seceders, the Relief Church, the Free Church, the United Free, the Baptists, the Free Baptists, the Church of Scotland, the Brethren, the Closed Brethren.

That's just Scotland. Talk about unity. I don't think we're doing too well so maybe we have to take it more seriously. My first charge as a minister was in May Bowl.

Lovely. Place down the coast, the Ayrshire coast. I didn't know its history when I went there but I quickly discovered it was a divided town.

If you walked around it, you would find a street called Lady Mary's Walk and if you went another 50 yards, you would come to John Knox Street. There was a division and had been for a long time between Catholic and Protestant.

[12:46] The more I learned, the more I discovered how serious this was, the chapel was about 70, 80 years old.

Something like that. Not all that old. It was a new building and when they were building it, when the builders were building the chapel in May Bowl, the Protestants came and knocked it down and it took a long while and a lot of people guarding it before it could ever be built.

All in the name of Jesus Christ who looked for unity. However, there's hope.

There are five churches there and we got together on the week of prayer for Christian unity and we started to think of what we could do together instead of doing everything separately.

and that led to us beginning to understand each other and to walk with each other. Walking with each other was exactly what Father Archie of the chapel and I did one time.

[13:56] I was asked to take a funeral of a man who was a nominal member of my church. I'd never met him but he was on the roll and his wife was Roman Catholic so she asked me to take his funeral but she said I would really like the priest to be involved but I know that's not possible and I said oh no no let me phone Archie with whom I was now a close friend.

So I phoned Archie and I said do you think you could take part in this funeral? And he did. In Mayville they had walking funerals maybe you've never heard of such a thing you have the funeral in the house and then you walk to the graveside it was about a mile and a half and thankfully a nice day because usually it rained Archie and I led the walk with about a hundred people behind us and we were just chatting we weren't really thinking that this was breaking the mold of history in this town chatting away to each other word of that went right round Mayville people were saying isn't it amazing the minister of the old kirk and the priest were walking together you know a lot of things changed in my life as I got older I used to argue about doctrine and tell the board people stuff Archie said something to his people in a service a united service he said like a good catholic I used to believe that there was only one church and that unity could only come when everybody rejoined the catholic church I don't believe that any longer he said and he said that the other churches were a genuine expression of the christian faith I used to argue about a word called transubstantiation it's far too long a word I don't know why I bothered and I'm not going to say what it means it's what roman catholics believed do you know I don't care any longer what I care about is unity and I care passionately that we would be united I cared passionately that Archie and I could walk together for a mile and a half that doesn't mean that I give up my beliefs unity is not uniformity unity is being able to disagree and still being supportive of each other because it's the kingdom that's important it's not my personal opinion and this is what Jesus followers should seek in every congregation here in

St Silas that we are one in Christ that we are united that we go over any differences that we might have because unity is not a vague idea you know oh yes of course we're united because we're all Christians it's a reality because the same Holy Spirit that's in you is in me and in each person here

who's a Christian and that's our unity and this is what we are called to because the crucial central part of the kingdom message is this that we can say to the world look at us look at us look at the love that draws us together look at how we care for each other look at how we put each other's interests before our own then like that town in

Mabel people will say wow these people are amazing like that crowd that listened to Jesus all these years ago we're called to take sides in a battle there's no escape there's no sitting the fence there's no attempt to be neutral we can't be like Switzerland the choice has to be made and you can't stay silent forever because the battle between good and evil that Jesus is involved in in this story goes on all the time forcing you to choose Jesus or his enemies as he in red if you're not for me you're against me it's that simple Jesus then goes on to explain the parable in Luke's gospel explain the battle in two short parables in the first one he says a strong man guards his house and his possessions are safe but if a stronger man comes and breaks in and overpowers him then he'll take that away the Pharisees ruled the house but Jesus is stronger whatever rules our house ourselves our desires

[19:11] Jesus is stronger and when Jesus comes these other things pass away we're in a battle for our house for our souls and becoming a Christian is how to win the battle it doesn't remove the battle Jesus said to his disciples that they would have trouble John chapter 16 and that would be persecuted in Matthew's gospel and that opposition that trouble can come from all directions from the family the workplace the atheist but behind it is the one who battled with Jesus and that's not really the Pharisees or the lawyers or the crowd they were just the mouthpiece that's Satan Beelzebub the devil call him what you will the liar the deceiver the tempter this is our enemy and he will lie to you and he will tempt you and the biggest temptation the biggest lie will centre around yourself that's how it's been since Adam and Eve when the devil tempted them and that's what Jesus meant in his second parable the devil will say put yourself first you're what matters you're what's important your opinion your thoughts your life your right to do whatever you want in the second parable the house is emptied but it's not refilled and that's fatal because the demon that left is going to gather his mates and he's come back and the last condition will be worse than the first if we leave the house empty we're in trouble if we only win one round against the enemy he'll come back in force so we need a knockout we need to fill the empty house with the presence of God if we don't ask Jesus to be at the centre of our lives every day from now on then the final situation will be worse than where we started let me give you a simple example there are many one of the common problems for people nowadays is pornography if you try to overcome pornography maybe you're a Christian you seek

Jesus' help you pray about it and you say that's great and I feel I've got the strength to do this the house is empty but you haven't refilled it and you have to do that because when you slip back into the habit it will be worse than where you started you see the Bible says that two deaths are necessary the death of Jesus and the cross so that my sins are forgiven it's a central message of the Bible it's everything that the Old Testament leads up to it's everything that follows on from there Jesus' death on the cross is necessary for my sin to be forgiven but there's another death another death that is also vital and that is my death not to sin because

Jesus has already dealt with that but my death to self Jesus said do you want to follow me then die to self die to self take up your cross and follow me that's the knockout blow that's what the devil can't cope with because once we've died to our selfish desires we're then free to respond to God's spirit we're free to live in truth and love and grace and vulnerability because we don't have to defend ourselves any longer we've died to self so we can live for Christ as I was preparing this I came across a lovely story about King Hussein of Jordan it was discovered that rebels in his army leaders were plotting against him and when he was told this people said what do you want us to do we're going to surround the place where they're meeting and execute them all and he thought for a moment and then he said no get me a helicopter he got him a helicopter and King Hussein went to the hut they were meeting in the helicopter landed on the roof and he walked into the room and he said to the men I know what you've been doing I know that you've been plotting to overthrow me if you do that there will be bloodshed right throughout her land and many people will die well here I am if you kill me now we'll avoid all of that and the response was that the men fell at his feet and kissed his ring and vowed their allegiance to him King Hussein stopped evil but Jesus went further with total humility vulnerable naked Jesus went to the cross to defeat evil now he says to us will you join me will you die to your selfish ambition and give your all

to him the choice is yours and yours alone no one can force you no one can make you do it from that story on that crowd listening to

Jesus to this day the choice is ours let's pray there are no half measures when we follow Jesus it's all or nothing maybe you've made a decision before and you know you've not been following through well be careful please if you've left that house empty it will be filled with wrong things it's time to make that decision again maybe you've tried to sit on the fence you want to take time to make up your mind you want to maybe hang on to some of the selfish things be careful time is always short and and his glory amen