

Text: Matthew 12:43-45

Title: The Empty House: A Bible Study Practice

Truth: The nation of Israel was taking itself into a worse spiritual condition than they were in before.

Date/Location: Saturday December 4, 2021 at FBC

Introduction

I thought about entitling the message “The Wandering Spirit” or “The Devil Moves Back In.” Clever as those thoughts may be, the focus is not really on the person who was freed from the evil spirit and then overcome once again by it. Rather, the focus is on the spiritual state of the nation.

I. Observations and Questions

I am starting this message prep not by preparing the message, but by preparing to help you to work through this passage.

Give me 10 or so observations or questions about this passage. Then look at the list I drafted:

1. What genre or form is this text? A parable, illustration, narration?
2. An unclean spirit is the same as an evil spirit.
3. Unclean spirits can live in people.
4. Dry places are contrasted with what kind of place? This observation is possible without concluding exactly what a dry place is.
5. The house is a figure of speech for the person’s life or body.

6. Empty, swept, and put in order indicate a tidy situation in the life of the target person (*swept* and *put in order*), which we may think of as a “clean” house as opposed to the uncleanness that was there before. But something is not quite right because it is *empty*. What should be there instead of *empty*?
7. What is the summary of the immediately preceding context?
8. Is there some special significance to the specific number of 7 other spirits joining him, for a total of 8? Hint: would the point of the illustration/parable change if the number were 5, 6, or 10?
9. There are unclean spirits that the Lord considers more wicked than other unclean spirits.
10. The spirits dwell there in the “house” where the first spirit had left but has now returned. What does “dwelling” mean?
11. What is the connection between the man with the unclean spirit(s) and the wicked generation at the end of v. 45?

II. Guides for Interpretation

- A. What are the dry places? They are unfriendly, uninhabitable places for the demon. He prefers to live inside of a welcoming host person.
- B. What does it mean that a person’s life is empty, swept, and put in order? Use some theology to express what has or has not happened in the person’s life.
- C. What is the problem with that empty yet orderly state, if there is a problem? How can you know if your “house” is

empty and inviting to an unclean spirit? Exorcism leaves a soul empty, which is better than having a demon; but a worse state could come about later. Note Mark 9:25 where the Lord commanded a demon not to re-enter the person again.

- D. How can the state of a person be worse than before? Is there a “worseness” in terms of evil dwelling within, in terms of moral output of their life, in terms of eternal punishment?
- E. What is the meaning of the likeness that the Lord makes to the wicked generation that He is interacting with (“this” wicked generation)?
- F. What is the significance of this passage where it is located, after the conflict with the Pharisees has come to a climax in the earlier verses of the chapter? Is the Lord talking about an unclean spirit in the nation as a whole?
- G. Do demons like living in clean rooms? It appears that the original demon had help to make this place unclean = better living quarters for them.
- H. How would you express the truth of this passage in a single sentence? Is it only about demon exorcism, or is it about something else primarily or as well?
- I. The person or nation who is like this swept-clean house is the one described in 12:30, one who is against Jesus and one who is scattering, not gathering.
- J. The history of the nation shows it to be idolatrous, then removed from that idolatry, but now in rejecting Christ it would be worse than ever.

Conclusion

Observe that we can have a very active study of the Scriptures within the confines of a very short passage. It is profitable to meditate carefully on the words of Jesus.

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