

Jesus Cast Out Demons

DAVE BAST

Abraham Lincoln was called the Great Emancipator for his role in freeing the slaves; but Jesus Christ truly is *the* Great Emancipator. Jesus regularly released individuals from bondage to demons during the years of his ministry. His purpose in doing this was to offer us signs of the kingdom of God. God's rule has come into the world in a direct way in Jesus Christ; and wherever God's kingdom comes, evil is vanquished. We will see that in today's *Groundwork* program. Stay tuned.

SCOTT HOEZEE

From Words of Hope and ReFrame Media, this is *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Scott Hoezee.

DAVE BAST

And I am Dave Bast; and Scott, we have come now to the third of four programs in a series we are calling *Jesus' Ministry*; and it is all about the characteristic actions of Jesus during the perhaps three years of his public ministry before his crucifixion and resurrection.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And we have looked already in the first two programs at two of the key characteristics of this public ministry: Jesus as teacher; and also Jesus as preacher; and we teased out some differences between those two in those first two programs; but in this program, we want to look at something that in a sense is a subset of healing...

DAVE BAST

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

But on the other hand, it is such a striking aspect of Jesus' ministry that we wanted to devote a whole program to it: Exorcism, or the casting out of impure spirits—the casting out of demons from people who had somehow been taken hold of...had become almost inhabited by some impure spirits; and here is sort of a characteristic text from Matthew 4. We actually looked at part of this also in the preaching program, but Matthew 4:

²³Jesus went throughout Galilee teaching in their synagogues, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, healing every disease and sickness among the people. ²⁴News about him spread all over Syria, and people brought to him all who were ill with various diseases, those who suffered pain, the demon possessed, those having seizures, the paralyzed, and he healed them.

DAVE BAST

So, there is, really, you could say three characteristic actions of Jesus' ministry that we are focusing on in this series: Preaching, teaching, and healing; but part of the healing is delivering the demon possessed, and that is what we want to focus on especially today. There is a verse in 1 John...the first letter of John...that says Jesus came to destroy the works of the devil [3:8]; and nowhere is that put more clearly than in those places in the Gospel where Jesus encounters demon-possessed people and he delivers them—he drives out the demon—he commands it—the demon leaves—he sends it away; and that in a very powerful and straightforward way, is Jesus working against Satan and all his power; and perhaps at the outset we have to

say: Wow, that is a little bit different from our normal experience.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Certainly for many of us in the Western world that is the case, and we should say, too, Dave, we will take note of the fact that some things that we today would regard as a genuine mental illness might have been chalked up to the demonic in Jesus' day; but even in Jesus' day, in the passage we just read, there is a distinction between those who had seizures and paralysis who needed healing and those who genuinely had demons. So, obviously, even in Jesus' ministry there is a distinction to be seen there. I also think on thing we can note, Dave, is that today we limited human beings that we are, might not be able to tell the difference between somebody who has another problem and an actual demon. As the Son of God, we can be pretty reliable that Jesus knew what he was diagnosing when he diagnosed it. If Jesus said this person had a demon, they did, because he could see that clearly as the Son of God in a way we might struggle with a little bit more today. So yes, not every form of seizures even then, or other things we might chalk up as a mental illness...that is not all demon possession...of course not. Even Jesus made the distinction; but if Jesus said someone had a demon, they did. He knew what he was talking about.

DAVE BAST

Well, and I also think we should be leery about simply dismissing all of this, as some people do, as ancient mythology. This is just an outmoded part of their worldview; they saw demons everywhere, and now in our modern medical wonders society we can dismiss all that as mere superstition.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right, right.

DAVE BAST

But, it is clear that if you take the New Testament seriously then the demonic is real. So, there is a passage, for example, like Paul writing in Ephesians 6:

¹²For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world; and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

So, that is really what we are talking about: Spiritual forces of evil.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and by the way, notice in Ephesians 6, Paul doesn't say that all of those come in the form of demon-possessed people. He is saying the devil...well, we know from scripture, the devil is an opportunist. He will work any way he can. He will get into institutions; he will get into corporations; he will enter boardrooms...

DAVE BAST

Governments.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Governments...militaries...but the point is, this is a real dimension; the powers, the principalities, the devil...it is real. You know, we like to quote C. S. Lewis, and in *The Screwtape Letters*, Lewis says there are two equal and opposite errors that we can fall into about devils. One it to totally disbelieve their existence, the other is to believe and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them. In other words, there is no such thing as demons or demons are everywhere.

DAVE BAST

You see a demon behind every bush, right; and behind every mishap or illness or whatever. So, let's dive right in to Matthew 12. We want to take this part of scripture seriously, like all of it. That is what we do on *Groundwork*, we dig into scripture. So, here is a passage where Jesus confronts the demon possessed, and sparks a very interesting reaction, incidentally, from his enemies. So, in Matthew 12, we read that

²²They brought to him a demon-possessed man who was blind and mute, and Jesus healed him so that he could both talk and see. ²³All the people were astonished and said, "Could this be the Son of David?" (In

other words, the Messiah); ²⁴but when the Pharisees heard this, they said, “It is only by Beelzebul, the prince of demons, that this fellow drives out demons.”

And Jesus kind of punches that theory right in the nose, doesn't he?

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; Jesus goes on to say that, among other things, not only is that untrue, it is illogical. A house divided against itself cannot stand. Why would the devil fight himself?! Obviously, I am not in league with Satan because I am doing battle with Satan and with the demons. So, Jesus says that is just illogical; but again, the point is...so here is somebody who is blind and mute. Now, Jesus healed lots of blind and mute people who were not possessed by demons. This person was—this person's illness was caused by a spiritual force; and again, Jesus diagnosed it correctly because he is the Son of God, and he drives out the demon; but then, Dave, he gives us a little mini parable.

DAVE BAST

Yes, very interesting. He says, you know, okay, so it is absurd...it is illogical that I am doing this by the power of Satan, but if I am not, then the kingdom of God has come among you, and in this little parable, he says: ²⁹“Because if anyone wants to enter a strong man's house and carry off his possessions, he first ties up the strong man, and then he can plunder the house.”

Jesus is saying that is really what I am doing here.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; I [Jesus] am taking on this spiritual force that is in opposition to God, and I am tying him up—I am tying him up with ropes, because we are going to clean house.

DAVE BAST

I am going to plunder him.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; the kingdom of God is going to come and this person has to get out of the way first, or it is not going to happen. So, this is very, very real for Jesus, that he sees our battle...as Paul said in that passage from Ephesians, Dave, it is not just flesh and blood. We are up against real spiritual powers; and as we continue in this program, Jesus is going to encounter this again and again; and in just a minute, we will look at a very well-known passage from Matthew 8 about the *Gadarene demoniacs*, as it is called, and we will take that up in just a moment.

Segment 2

DAVE BAST

You are listening to *Groundwork*, where we are digging into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Dave Bast.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee; and in this third of four programs on the ministry of Jesus, we are looking at Jesus' engagement with the demonic; and Jesus as an exorcist—the one who drives away the demons that are creating mayhem in our world; and Dave, let's dig right into another passage from Matthew, this time from Chapter 8: ²⁸When Jesus came to the other side (of a lake), to the country of the Gadarenes, two demon-possessed men met him, coming out of the tombs so fierce that no one could pass that way. ²⁹And behold, they cried out, “What have you to do with us, O Son of God? Have you come here to torment us before the time?” ³⁰Now, a herd of many pigs was feeding at some distance from them, ³¹and the demons begged him, saying, “If you cast us out, send us into that herd of pigs.”

DAVE BAST

³²And he said to them, “Go.” So they came out and went into the pigs; and behold, the whole herd rushed down the steep bank, into the sea, and drowned in the waters. ³³The herdsmen fled; and going into the city, they told everything, especially what had happened to the demon-possessed men; ³⁴and behold, all the city came out to meet Jesus; and when they saw him, they begged him to leave their region.

SCOTT HOEZEE

That is a bit of a surprise ending, and we will talk about that in a minute.

DAVE BAST

A famous story; it is told in each of the first three Gospels: Matthew, Mark, and Luke; and a powerful story, and it is a little bit weird, too. So, what do we make of it?

SCOTT HOEZEE

Well again...so, this is a region just sort of on the other side of the Sea of Galilee. It was known as Gadara or the Gadarenes. The Jews of Jesus' day considered it a spiritually dangerous area—kind of a wild, harsh, untamed area...

DAVE BAST

It was gentile territory, right; which is why you have a herd of pigs grazing there.

SCOTT HOEZEE

That is right, because that would not happen in Jewish territory; but the point is...so, they regarded it that way just generally; and some of that was probably not right, but in this particular village there are these two people who are tormented by the demons. They were fierce; they threatened all who came near. It is a very horrifying and sad and frightening picture; but Dave, I think, you know, it gets at the nature of Satan. Satan stands in opposition to God; and above all, Satan stands in opposition to God's good creation. C. S. Lewis points this out, too, in *The Screwtape Letters*, the devil cannot create anything, all he can do is ruin what God made.

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

It reminds me of a scene from one of the films about Batman; and in one of the films there is this character named the Joker, who is just an agent of mayhem, and Batman is trying to figure him out: What makes him tick? Why does he do the things he does? Then his friend...his butler, Alfred, says to him: You won't figure him out; some men just like to watch the world burn. They have no larger purpose other than chaos itself; and that is the devil. He just wants to watch the world burn; and the self-destructive nature of these two men is an example.

DAVE BAST

Absolutely; it shows it more clearly. All you have to do is look at our culture—our society; and everywhere there are signs. Today there is a phrase: Depths of despair. More and more people are dying before their time, so to speak; whether of suicide or substance abuse...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, the opioid crisis.

DAVE BAST

Yes; signs of despair all over. Now, let's be clear. I am not saying that there is a specific demon that is causing some person to die; but what we see is the devastation wrought by sheer evil in the face of human

vulnerability—human weakness; that is what these two people represent. They cannot control them. They try to put chains on them to keep them from hurting themselves or others; and that is just a kind of a symbolic depiction of the devastation wrought by evil, for no other reason than it is evil.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And Jesus comes as an agent, not of chaos of course...Jesus comes as an agent of cosmos—of order—of the original creation; and he shines with that authority so much that these demons inside these men recognize him. They can feel his presence, and say: What have you to do with us? Are you going to torture us before the appointed time? That is an interesting little line...that even they have a sense that they are on a short leash. Even the demons know God is going to win this thing; and Jesus is there to begin the victory.

DAVE BAST

It is very striking. There are several striking elements to this story. First of all, in the Gospels, the demons all know who Jesus is...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

People don't. People look at him, and they are always puzzled: Could this be the son of David? We saw that line earlier. Could this be the Messiah? They are unsure, but the demons are completely sure; they have no question. It is also no equal contest. The result is not in doubt. We are not sitting here: Wow! Is Jesus going to win? Are they going to win? The Lord is stronger than the forces of darkness and the powers of...and Jesus simply speaks a word; but they ask him...and here is the curious point here, too...they ask him: Can we go into this herd of swine? Don't destroy us before the time. There is a time appointed when evil will finally and forever be destroyed. It will be cast into the abyss, literally, in the book of Revelation; but here there seems to be a kind of a preview of that with this business with the herd of pigs; and it is kind of a curious point.

SCOTT HOEZEE

It is also curious to note, Dave, that again, once the demons get into the pigs, what is the first result? Death and destruction...

DAVE BAST

Yes, absolutely.

SCOTT HOEZEE

All the pigs die...

DAVE BAST

Yes, there it is again.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Jews in Jesus' day who didn't eat pork and bacon and so forth maybe don't care much about pigs, but pigs are part of God's creation, and the point is, the demons are anti-creation; and so, of course, they bring death wherever they go; but then, we get this interesting reaction of the townspeople. So, we know that they had been living in a scary situation. You couldn't let your children go outside: Don't ever go near the cemetery. There are people there who will...what a terrible thing; and now Jesus has delivered them. You'd think they would be happy.

DAVE BAST

Yes, you would; and instead, we read: ³⁴Behold, all the city came out to meet Jesus, and when they saw him, they begged him to leave their region.

So, excuse me, Jesus; that is very impressive, what you did there, but could you please clear out?

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes.

DAVE BAST

So, what's going on there?

SCOTT HOEZEE

Did they love pigs more than people? Maybe, but...

DAVE BAST

Maybe; are they scared of him?

SCOTT HOEZEE

I think that's it. My friend Neal Plantinga had a sermon on this a while back he titled: *Afraid of the Gospel?* It is a sad fact of our world that as bad and destructive as the forces of evil are, at least it is familiar. This Jesus person is a little frightening in his power, and who knows what he'll shake up next. Boy, it was bad having these two guys out of their minds in the tombs, but maybe it was better that way than what might happen... So, they are; they are frightened by the Gospel; they are frightened by the power of the kingdom. I wonder if sometimes people in the world today still have that. Who knows what he will shake up next; maybe we are better off the way we were before...

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

It is a very, very surprise ending to this story.

DAVE BAST

It makes me think of the story in John 5 of Jesus coming to this crippled man who is lying by a pool, and he says to him: Do you want to be healed? Well, what do you think? Yes, of course...well, but do I? Do I want to be delivered? You know, maybe I am not demon possessed, but I certainly can look in my own life and see some of the works of the devil kind of hanging on, sort of dogging at me. Do I really want to be delivered? Maybe I would lose my excuse for why I haven't done this or that or the other thing. So, yes; it is a curious reaction, but it is a human one.

SCOTT HOEZEE

But as we close the program in a minute, we want to think a little bit about what this means for our lives yet today. So, stay tuned.

Segment 3

DAVE BAST

I am Dave Bast, along with Scott Hoezee, and you are listening to *Groundwork*, where today we are looking at Jesus' ministry of casting out demons...of overcoming...directly confronting the powers of darkness, of the evil one...and overcoming them; dismissing them; delivering human beings from their bondage to evil.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And we did say, Dave, at the outset of this program, that this feels a little foreign to us. Most of us have probably never actually witnessed an exorcism, except maybe in some scary movies or something. Many of us, if not most of us, are not sure we have ever actually met a demon-possessed person. We do know that in different parts of the world, though, and we talked to missionaries who work in Africa, or sometimes in the Caribbean, where there is voodoo and black magic, or African native religion...you talk to missionaries from

there, they run into this a lot in cultures that maybe haven't been quite as penetrated by the Gospel, or where people are living within a generation or less of ancestor worship and other spiritual practices. They do run into people whom they discern genuinely have a demon that has taken hold of their heart; and they do cast them out. This does happen.

DAVE BAST

Right, yes; I know people who do that; and perhaps we should also note that the Catholic Church has an office of exorcist. They have priests who are specially trained for this...

SCOTT HOEZEE

And not just in Africa and the Caribbean. Right here, in Canada and the US, yes.

DAVE BAST

So, perhaps we have been shielded from this because of our Christian heritage as a nation. Most people here probably still have been baptized. There may be some even protection from God that is being extended. It may not last, though; so, things can change and go backwards, too; but, the key thing we need to hang onto here from the Gospels is, as people, as individuals, we don't have to be afraid of this because the Lord himself is much more powerful, and is a protector for his people.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and of course, we never want to look at any given person, even somebody we really dislike, or even a hardened criminal or a murderer...you don't want to look at them and say: Well, I am sure they are demon possessed. We cannot see with the clarity Jesus could see, but what we can say, Dave, is something you mentioned in the previous part of this program, and that is that we are...as Paul wrote...we are battling spiritual forces, and whether it is the heroin and opioid addictions and the terrible overdoses that are killing tens of thousands of people a year, whether it is terrible pollution and the raping of the environment, there are things that are happening in our world that could only be of the devil, because he is, as we said, the anti-life...the anti-creation, where there is destruction of life, where people cannot enjoy life. They aren't demon possessed, but the devil is behind it. You know, the Bible tells us the devil is on a leash, but he is not quite finished yet...

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

That comes at the end.

DAVE BAST

He's like a mad dog. I think Martin Luther said he is chained, but the chain is a long one. So yes, one thing we can do is take our stand with Jesus on the strong Word of God and the promises of God; and as individuals, you know, if we are tempted to be a little bit worried or frightened, there are all kinds of places in scripture that are written for our encouragement. So, you think of a verse like 1 John 4:4, where John writes: You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world. And the one who is in us, of course, is the Holy Spirit—it is the Spirit of Jesus.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And Jesus himself said...I think it is at the end of John's Gospel: ^{16:33}I have told you these things so that [in me] you may have peace. In the world you will have trouble, but take heart; I have overcome the world. And Paul in Colossians also said: ^{2:15}Having disarmed the powers and authorities, Jesus made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.

So, we take our stand with Jesus; but Dave, you know, we aren't in the business...very, very, very, very few of us...of actually casting out demons, but we should be in the business of praying that God will battle these

powers and principalities. Be prayer warriors that God will continue to drive out this anti-creation force that is ruining peoples' lives every day.

DAVE BAST

And we can be proclaimers as well as pray-ers...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, yes.

DAVE BAST

Proclaiming the good news of the Gospel. Paul says in that wonderful passage, Jesus didn't just overcome the demons and all the forces of darkness in the cross, he made fun of them...he showed them up...he shoved their faces in it...he made a public spectacle of them, Paul says. He embarrassed them. It is like when your team wins by a hundred to nothing score. So, when we proclaim the Gospel, we are actually once more unleashing the power of God in the world to overcome evil and to triumph over it.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And that is part of what the preaching of the good news is about, that we can tell others: Take heart; Jesus has overcome the world. Come and be on his side if you aren't. It is the winning side; it is the way that will lead to life, and to all the delight, and all the flourishing in this creation that God wants and the devil doesn't, but God will win; and you did say, Dave, too, a minute ago, we don't need to be afraid of the forces of evil, that is true; but we shouldn't discount them either...

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

We shouldn't get cheeky about it. This is serious. This has to come through lifelong praying and urging and pleading with God. We don't have to be afraid, but we need to take it seriously.

DAVE BAST

I alluded earlier to the wonderful passage from Ephesians 6*, where Paul talks about these powers and principalities. In the context, that whole paragraph there is about putting on the armor of God...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

The shield of faith and the breastplate of Christ's righteousness and the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word, and prayer, as you said. So, all of that is the reason we don't need to be afraid. We triumph in the power of God. Thanks be to God.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Well, thanks for listening and digging deeply into scripture with *Groundwork*. We are your hosts, Scott Hoezee and Dave Bast. Please join us again next time when we conclude this series by studying Jesus as healer.

Connect with us at groundworkonline.com, our website. Tell us what *Groundwork* means to you. Give us some suggestions for future *Groundwork* programs.

*Correction: The audio of this program misstates the reference for this passage as Galatians 6. The correct reference is Ephesians 6.

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