

INTRODUCE

Well, good morning church! If I haven't met you yet, my name is Chris Martin, and I'm the Lead Pastor here.

If you've got your Bibles, and I hope you do, please open them up to Matthew chapter 12. Matthew 12. That's where we're going to be.

We want every person to have a hand on their Bible. You can open your phone or tablet to Matthew 12. If you open one of the hard-backed black bibles under your seat, Matthew 12 will be on page **817**.

INTRODUCTION

Well, we are about three months into our Matthew series, and man, the response I've gotten from so many of you has been so encouraging.

- When we talk about suffering
 - just at the moment
 - when you need your suffering acknowledged
 - and your heart encouraged.
- When we talk about doubt,
 - and you're in a season
 - of uncertainty about who God even is,
 - and he meets you in a text.
- When we talk about Satan and demons,
 - and fireworks go off right in the middle of the sermon,
 - and the microphone starts to act up.
 - If you missed last week,
 - the sermon podcast is really interesting...

But I really believe that God is up to something in our midst, and as we are walking through Matthew, he just makes that clearer and clearer to me.

Today's sermon title is **SLIDE POSSESSION IS 9/10^{THS} OF THE LAW.**

- Possession is 9/10^{ths} of the law
- is an expression meaning
- that ownership is easier to maintain
- if one has possession of something,
- or difficult to enforce if one does not.

And today, I want to apply that as we dig a little deeper into possession.

- Because last week we talked about demon possession...
- but today in our text we go a bit deeper into this idea.

And man, this was a difficult text for me this week, and I'll nod my hat to Tim Keller's interpretation of this passage, because it helped me a ton!

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EXPLAIN: MULTI-DIMENSIONAL

Now, in the ancient world, a lot more issues were associated with the demonic than today. With the Scientific Revolution and the Enlightenment, we attribute most problems to other places than demons.

But even so, consider depression. Why do people get depressed?

- Well, the biologist says it's chemistry needing to be balanced.
- The moralist says it's sin needing to be repented of.
- The psychologist says it's failure to cope and needing therapy.
- The superstitious say it's a demon needing to be cast out.

So, we said last week, that to try to suppress the idea that there is something supernatural and spiritual at work in these things is to be naïve.

- If things like depression were just biological or psychological...
- then why haven't those things fixed us all by now?

No, God has made us multi-dimensional. We are holistic beings.

- So that means we are physical
- and we are social
- and we are psychological,
- BUT we are spiritual as well.

So, we said this last week...Satan and demons are real, and therefore, must be considered when it comes to our problems.

TRANSITION

But, there was something strange in our text last week that I want to come back to today. I don't know if you caught it, or if it bothered you, but look back at Matthew 12:27

MATTHEW 12:27

[27] And if I cast out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your sons cast them out?

What Jesus is pointing out is that the Pharisees, too, DID cast out demons.

- They did exorcisms!
- We know this from ancient writings like Josephus.
- And exorcism in the first century was a thriving business,

We also saw this same thing in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 7.

SLIDE MATTHEW 7:22

[22] On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?'

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POINT 1

Now is that strange to anyone else?

- Jesus is saying that the Pharisees cast out demons.
- But Jesus is also saying that non-legitimate Christ followers
 - can cast out demons.

So, what does this mean?

Well, Jesus is doing something here that is very interesting and nuanced.

- He's saying: **there are many ways to deliver people.**
- Back then they attributed everything to demons...
- today we attribute nothing to demons...
- and Jesus is showing us that it's both!

They are casting out demons without God's power.

- So, there are many ways to deliver people from their problems.
- There are many sources of power...
 - and because of that,
- people will be able to be helped in many different ways.

And that's my first point this morning. **SLIDE MANY THINGS HELP**

How could the Pharisees exorcise demons without God's power?
Well, the answer is, there are all sorts of ways to help people with their problems.

- Even other religions,
- other philosophies,
- other theories...
- can produce men and women...
- who say that their lives have changed...
- who say they have overcome bad habits...
- who say they've found peace in their lives.

Jesus is pointing out that Christians don't own the corner on helping people out with their problems. Why?

Because we aren't ONLY spiritual.

- We're social,
- and physical,
- and emotional,
- AND spiritual.

So, there are lots of ways of getting deliverance...of getting help...

- And some of those things are good and right to pursue!
- At least temporarily...
- and Jesus openly acknowledges that.

But...don't assume that just because something helps, that makes it true.

Many things that are not true...still help. At least temporarily.

You see, Jesus is not naïve:

- You don't have to be a Christian to overcome alcoholism.
- You don't have to be a Christian to have a good marriage.
- You don't have to be a Christian to get emotional self-control...
- Or to get your career on track.
- Or to find stable community relationships.

You see, **Christianity is not simply one self-help method of many!**

- It is not simply about overcoming of one's problems,
- because there are many ways to get that kind of deliverance.

TRANSITION

But our text today also ushers a warning.

- Now, let's look at the second part of our text first,
- and then we'll circle back to the first part.

In verse 43 we find this little illustration, which was read over us...

- about an unclean spirit
- and waterless places
- and returning with seven others.

And it only makes sense

- if you see that Jesus has already acknowledged
- that the Pharisees can cast out demons as well.

MANY THINGS HELP...But look what happens...Matthew 12:43

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MATTHEW 12:43-45

[43] “When the unclean spirit has gone out of a person, it passes through waterless places seeking rest, but finds none. [44] Then it says, ‘I will return to my house from which I came.’ And when it comes, it finds the house empty, swept, and put in order. [45] Then it goes and brings with it seven other spirits more evil than itself, and they enter and dwell there, and the last state of that person is worse than the first. So also will it be with this evil generation.”

EXPLAIN: PARABLE

Jesus starts this parable by saying that the unclean spirit has left a person.

- It has been cast-out.
- And this was not done by Jesus...
- it was cast out by someone else....
- Jesus is likely referring to the Pharisees...
- Based on the context of this chapter.

And it passes through waterless places...

- deserts...barren lands...
- You see, demons are only comfortable and “at rest”
- in places of complete and absolute devastation.
- But that comes in the form, not of a place, but a person.

So, then the demon returns to the house from it came from,

- and finds the house swept and put in order.
- Which sounds good, right?
- Clean & orderly.

POINT 2

But as we've already said...

- there are many different ways to sweep your life clean...
- to exorcise your demons...
- to put your house in order.

MANY THINGS HELP.

BUT...the person, while clean and orderly...is empty.

And it's my second point:

SLIDE MANY THINGS HELP...BUT THEY CANNOT HEAL

You see,

- that spirit comes back
- with seven other spirits
- and make them worse off than before.

Now, don't freak out by the number of demons here.

- Seven is a number of completion in the Bible.
- And so, Jesus isn't saying
- that now there are a literal seven demons in this person.

No, Jesus is saying is that this person is now perfectly...

- completely possessed by these demons.
- Before they were just afflicted by one thing...
- now they are in complete and utter bondage.

Remember, POSSESSION IS 9/10THS OF THE LAW.

- You see, the only way to get the power to get healing...
- is by giving yourself over to something...
- something possesses you, as it were.

And Jesus is illustrating that unless it's him, you will find yourself worse off than before.

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EXAMPLE: LOOKING WEAK

Here are some examples:

Guys, when you were a kid, growing up,

- and you got hurt or something,
- and you were crying and losing it,
- Did you ever have a coach or a parent or someone say:
 - *"Don't cry.*
 - *Be a man!*
 - *Men don't cry."*

Now, can a little boy use that motivation...

- to gain emotional self-control...
- and stop crying...
- and toughen up...
- and, essentially, put his house in order?

You bet he can.

- He casts out that emotion.
- He casts them out with self-control.
- He casts those tears...
- But they can be replaced with something...
 - A fear of looking weak.

But is it possible that the fear of looking weak is seven times worse than his lack of emotional self-control?

- It will be very difficult for him to have a very good marriage,
 - if he is unable to admit and show weakness.
- It will make it very difficult for him to father his children,
 - when all he wants to show is strength...
 - and he'll likely exacerbate the situation
 - by laying the very same issue on his children.

EXAMPLE: PEOPLE PLEASING

Or maybe it looks like this:

- when you were in school your parents...
- lovingly pushed you to do your best.
- To succeed.
- To excel at sports, or school, or activities.

And so, you worked your tail off in whatever arena...to master it.

- You became disciplined and driven to succeed, and never fail.
- But by what power did you do this?
- By what power did you get your house in order?

Well, it was in order to please your parents.

- And you gave yourself over to a fear of letting people down.

Now, is it possible that a fear of letting others down is seven times worse?

- You can be bound by your success.
- You can be completely possessed by your drive.

EXAMPLES

- You see, you are a physical being...
 - so, you can start a diet program to watch what you eat,
 - and you can start working out.
 - But you can be possessed by that.
- And you are a social being...
 - so, you can find people or groups
 - who share affinities or experiences with you.
 - But you can be possessed there, too.
- And you are an emotional being...
 - so, you can begin to see a counselor or therapist
 - to talk about your family or origin,
 - and past hurts,
 - and methods for coping.

And, you see, you can do all those things to get your house in order...

- and yes, they will help!
- And many of those things are good things!
- But you must not let them possess you!

You see, the lie that the Bible says is at the root of all our problems is this:

- we think we're in charge...
- we can manage...
- we don't really need God.

Heck! We can sweep our lives into order by many different ways...

- but it only sets us up for a much greater fall down the line.

MANY THINGS HELP...BUT THEY CANNOT HEAL.

ILLUSTRATION: PAIN MANAGEMENT

Doctors will say that one trouble with patients is that they only want you to treat the symptoms. They'll say,

- *"Patients are in pain.*
- *And one rule in practicing medicine*
- *is that you never eliminate the pain*
- *before you find the root cause of the pain.*
- *Because until you know why a person hurts,*
- *you better not get rid of the pain."*

The problem is that the patient puts pressure on the doctor to cure the symptoms.

- They just want to feel better.
- They don't really care what was causing the pain,
- as long as it goes away.

TRANSITION

There are many sources of power to superficially treat yourself.

MANY THINGS HELP...

- But when it comes back,
- And it finds the house empty, swept, and put in order.
- It will bring seven other spirits more evil than itself.
- And the last state of that person is worse than the first.

MANY THINGS HELP...BUT THEY CANNOT HEAL.

So, what to do? What to do? Well, this is where I want to swing back around to verse 38.

MATTHEW 12:38

[38] Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered him, saying, "Teacher, we wish to see a sign from you."

EXPLAIN

So, remember, this whole chapter is about the conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees,

- and thus far,
- Jesus has healed a man with a withered hand
- and cast out a demon possessed man who was blind and mute.

But that's not enough for the Pharisees, so they say,

- *"We want to see a sign from you."*
- We want proof!

Now, it's not as if Pharisees aren't confused and wondering if Jesus really is who he says he is.

- These are people who are inventing reasons
- why NOT to believe.

And Jesus recognizes that their hearts are stubborn and hard.

- It's not that there are not good reasons to believe...
- it's that they don't want to believe.

And until your heart is open to believe, your mind will never be convinced to believe.

- Again, they've found help somewhere else...
- they've found power somewhere else...
- they've cast out demons already.

They have rejected the validity of Jesus' miracles and so demand a "sign", a special divine proof.

Their insolence is obvious. Verse 39.

MATTHEW 12:39-42

[39] But he answered them, "An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah.

[40] For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. [41] The men of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold, something greater than Jonah is here. [42] The queen of the South will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and behold, something greater than Solomon is here.

EXPLAIN

Jesus, of course, will never produce a wondrous event just to draw attention to himself, especially when the demand comes from a position of rejection.

So, Jesus gives a typological response,

- with Jonah in the fish as a type...
- of Christ's burial and resurrection.
- He's saying: The resurrection is God's great sign to Israel.

In Jonah,

- the people of Nineveh repented
- after Jonah preached judgment to them.
- And because the Pharisees will not believe in Jesus,
- they will be judged.

Then he mentions the queen of the South.

- This is a reference to 1 Kings 10:1-13,
- when the Queen of Sheba
- came to test Solomon with hard questions,
 - much like the Jewish leaders have been doing.
- The difference is that she sought truth
- and was willing to accept Solomon's wisdom.

And then he tells the parable of the demon leaving and coming back...

so, what does this all mean?

Well, here you have a person who has cleaned and swept their house all clean...

- probably implying that they had done so
- by the power of the Pharisees.
- But they had never let Jesus in.
- They had not believed in the one greater than Jonah,
 - than Solomon.

And as a result

- they are empty,
- and anything can get in there.

POINT 3

What that means is that Jesus is saying:

- It's not good enough to be good people.
- It's not good enough to clean up your life.
- It's not good enough to pursue emotional health.
- It's not good enough to believe in the Bible's moral teachings.
- It's not good enough to be a good church person.
- It's not good enough to even try to emulate Christ.

And it's my final point.

- Because MANY THINGS HELP...
- BUT THEY CANNOT HEAL.

That means **SLIDE YOU NEED TO BE POSSESSED BY CHRIST**

- What it means to be a Christian...
- what it means to have power...
- is to let him possess you.
- It's to believe the sign of the resurrection.
- You need to be possessed by Jesus.

If you aren't possessed by him, you will be possessed by something else.

- You're going to be possessed by something.
- Be possessed by Jesus.

APPLICATION

This is why,

- if you are looking at Jesus as some sort of
- self-help solution to your problems,
- and you have no real desire to fill your life with him...
- well, he won't work.

Christian principles and morals might make some difference:

- It might help your marriage.
- It might help you parent.
- It might help you with your addictions or at work.

BUT if you do not fill that empty space in your heart with him...

- if you are not possessed with him...
- you are left susceptible to a whole host of other things.

I often think this is why many people “walk away” from Christianity.

- It's because they've used the Bible and Jesus
- as just a source of power to exorcize their demons...
- rather than being fully possessed by Christ.

They want what Jesus can do for them...not to be possessed by him!

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ILLUSTRATION: FRESHMAN DANCE

When I was a freshman in high school, we were getting close to the homecoming dance.

Now, this was the first big dance of my high school career, so I wanted it to be good. I mean, this could be the gauge for how the rest of high school would go for me.

So, I had a plan to ask a girl, and I was ready to act. When suddenly something happened that I wasn't expecting.

- One of my best friends, Adam,
- he had a terrible pain in his stomach.
- He left school early,
- and I got a call later on that day to find out
- he had an emergency appendectomy.
- He couldn't walk...
- let alone go to the homecoming dance.

So, I went to see him a couple of days later, and he asked me to do something, which I wasn't prepared to do.

He said to me,

- *"Chris, would you please take my girlfriend Michelle to the homecoming dance for me?"*
- *"She doesn't want to miss out on her first Homecoming!"*

Now, I didn't have anything against Michelle,

- but we weren't what you would call "friends."
- But, because Adam was my best friend I said, "Yes."

So, I put my plans for my first homecoming dance aside, and made preparations to go with Michelle.

- We got dressed up,
- I bought her a corsage that matched her dress color.
- We made plans to go to dinner at the Macaroni Grill.
 - Real nice!
- All the arrangements were made.

So,

- I picked her up the night of the dance...
- And our parents took pictures...
- And I slid the corsage on her wrist...
- And we went to dinner with some of our friends...

But when we got to the dance something unbelievable happened to me.

- We walked into the dance,
- and as soon as we were in the school gym
- Michelle was gone!
 - She ran off to hang out with her friends
 - and left me all alone...
 - and not just for a song or two...no!
 - For the whole dance!
- She ditched me! I was a real-life Napoleon Dynamite.
- I just hung out by myself at the snack table, like eating pretzels.

It was seriously the worst dance of my life...

- and I didn't even want to go with her!
- I was just being a good friend to Adam!

So, I dropped her off at the curb...I didn't even walk her to the door!

No...that's not true...but I wish I had!

You see, Michelle had no interest in me.

- She had no romantic feelings about me...
- She didn't want to make memories with me...
- She didn't want to dance with me!

She didn't want me at all!

- She just wanted the flower...
- and the dinner...
- and the dance...

APPLICATION

Church, are you in this Jesus thing for what he can give you?

- Do you want Jesus because you want a better marriage?
- Do you want Jesus because you want to manage your debt?
- Do you want Jesus because you're addicted to something?
- Do you want Jesus because your kids are crazy,
and you don't want them to do drugs...
or to kill you in your sleep?

Like these are all good things, right?

- Like, Jesus can help your marriage,
- and your finances,
- and your ethics,
- and your parenting.

But if you are in this thing for what Jesus can do for you...and not for him...you'll be sorely disappointed. You'll miss out on Jesus.

YOU NEED TO BE POSSESSED BY CHRIST!

ENDING

You see, when all you're after is power to exercise some demon in your life, you will only see Jesus as **SLIDE PRACTICAL**. He will forever be practical to you, and you'll miss him!

But, if you surrender.

- If you give up on the pursuit
- of mere help,
- and surrender to the healing only Jesus can give,
- then you won't think of him as simply PRACTICAL...
- but rather, he will be **SLIDE BEAUTIFUL** to you.

And guys in here, if you feel uncomfortable by that language,

- I don't mean beautiful
- like how you see your wife as beautiful.
- I mean beautiful like,
- if you were on top of a mountain and you look out,
- and that sight just makes you go,
- *"Woah...!"*
- That's how God will be to you.

Is that how you see God? As beautiful? That's being possessed by him...

And POSSESSION IS 9/10^{THS} OF THE LAW.

Let's pray. **LYRICS SLIDE W/PADS**

RESPONSES:

Well, every week at Fathom we respond in 4 ways:

- COMMUNION – THE LORD’S SUPPER
- GIVING TITHES & OFFERINGS – fathomchurch.org/give
- PRAYER - fathomchurch.org/prayer
- SINGING

So, I’m going to read the Words of Institution from the Apostle Paul, we’ll take communion, and then we’ll sing:

1 CORINTHIANS 11:23–26 – WORDS OF INSTITUTION

[23] For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, [24] and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, “This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” **TAKE**

[25] In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.” **TAKE**

[26] For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.

Love you church, let’s stand and sing together.

RESOURCES USED:

- Carson, D.A. Matthew: The Expositor's Bible Commentary.
- Greear, J.D. *Something Greater than Jonah.*
- Keller, Tim. *Power to Change.*
- Osborne, Grant R. Matthew: Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament.