

Jesus, the Exorcist

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Date: 04 October 2009

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- [0 : 0 0] Good evening, everyone. Now, I remember reading an article in The Age. The title was Positive Illusion.
- Now, all you budding psychologists will know what I'm talking about. Basically, it's where we have a higher opinion of ourselves than what really is the reality. So, in other words, we think we're good.
- Apparently, it's healthy for us, though. So, check this out. In a survey taken, 60% of people think that they're better looking than the average person. So, more than half of us think, if you looked at the person next to you, yeah, I'm better looking than that guy.
- So, obviously, though, 50% is average. So, at least 10% of us are fooling ourselves. Now, 70% of people think that they're smarter than that other guy, though.
- So, you can call me ugly, but you can't call me stupid. Now, here's the best one, though. 90% of people, 90% think that they're better drivers than that person next to them.
- [1 : 0 9] So, I might be ugly. I might be stupid. But did you see that guy cut in front of me? Didn't even indicate. And there's a person in the right lane over there. They're just going so slowly. I mean, the speed limit here is 70.
- You've got to at least hit 72. Fools everywhere on the road. It's just crazy out there. Positive illusion. Or positive delusion.
- Whatever you want to call it. It's actually something that we all do. And that might not be our looks or our style or intelligence. But, you know, in one way or another.
- Or maybe three or four. Maybe even more. We'd like to think of ourselves that we're doing the right thing. Of course we're right. Even though that might not be the reality.
- Something to think about anyway. So, let's pray and we'll get into God's word. Dear Lord, as the song said, Lord. And as you said, let us not have hardened hearts, Lord.
- [2 : 1 3] But let us open our eyes to you. Let us test these words, Lord. And understand them deeply, Lord. And let them change us from the inside, Lord. Let them speak to our hearts.
- So, put those things in your hands. Amen. Now, Bertrand Russell. He's a famous philosopher. He's an Englishman. Still a good guy, though. Here's a quote from him.
- One of the symptoms of a nervous breakdown is the belief that one is terribly important. I'll read that again. One of the symptoms of a nervous breakdown is the belief that one is terribly important.
- Now, I knew a guy once. It's a true story. I got to know him pretty well. And he'd just become a Christian. And he really had this great desire to serve. Which was good. So, he started out doing the dishes, cleaning things.
- But before you knew it, he was praying and playing on the worship team. And before, even after that, he was leading Bible studies. Now, he was part of a small church.
- [3 : 1 9] The congregation was probably even less than what we have here this evening. So, you know, there were lots of chances to serve. And lots of roles to fill as well. So, over those years, he gained more and more experience.

And soon, he was leading the leaders. And writing the studies. Calling the shots. Even maybe trying a sermon or two. Now, somewhere over those years, though, I think a bit of positive illusion crept in.

Now, it just seemed like he thought that what he said was terribly important. What he said just counted for a little bit more than what somebody else thought.

I mean, maybe not everyone. But at least most people. Now, of course, sometimes people didn't listen. Or they didn't go along with what he said. And so, you could see, though, he'd just get a little bit annoyed when that happened.

Or maybe even angry. Now, maybe I'm being judgmental. But I think he started to put faith in his own gifts. In his own wisdom and experience.

[4 : 22] Like he thought it was all up to him to make those right decisions. And do the right things. Get people motivated. Get people inspired. To keep people on track. It was all up to him.

But that pressure was just a little bit too much. And there were other circumstances, of course. But eventually, like so many others, he actually left his church. Now, in Matt 17, I wonder what the disciples thought to themselves.

I mean, after all, Jesus was all the way up there on that mountainside. And at the foot of that mountain, there was a crowd gathering. Maybe they had a bit of a moment of positive illusion as well and thought, maybe we should keep the crowd entertained and do a miracle or two.

Let's look at the passage. Let's set that scene first. So, Jesus, Peter, and James, and his brother John, they've just gone up the mountain. And basically, as Doug told us last week, they've caught a glimpse.

Just a glimpse of the Son of God like they've never seen him before. At the top of that mountain, they saw the Son of God in his full glory. Now, that must have been something.

[5 : 32] Seeing Jesus for all that he is, even if it was just for that moment. Now, when they came down from the mountain, though, as we look at our passage, Jesus was greeted with chaos.

It's not unlike that moment in the Ten Commandments where Moses comes down from the mountain, or Moses, a.k.a. Charlton Heston, and he sees that the camp is just filled with revelry over that golden idol.

Now, here, though, there's a man whose son is an epileptic. And we know from verse 18 that a demon is responsible for this because he often is thrown into the fire or the water.

On a side note, though, I know I'm not probably telling most people anything new here, but every time we see a miracle, it's telling us something about God's kingdom. So we remember Matt 14, when it's talking about the feeding of the 4,000-plus, that's actually saying that Jesus is the provider for the Jews in God's kingdom.

Or Matt 15, when Jesus feeds the 4,000-plus Gentiles, he's telling us that God's kingdom is not only for the Jews, but for us Gentiles as well. So when Jesus casts out demons, it makes perfect sense.

[6 : 44] Jesus is God's kingdom come. So demons can't be where Jesus is. That's God's house. So they're kicked out. So this miracle confirms what we learned last week.

Jesus is God's son. But we have a problem here, don't we? Look at verse 16. So the father says, Why though?

I mean, Jesus gave them authority back in Matthew 10 over unclean spirits to cast them out and to cure every disease and every sickness. They had Jesus' blessings.

They had that authority. They had the power in the palm of their hands. Yet something was missing. Now, in response, Jesus says in verse 17 and 18, seems pretty straightforward.

He tells them they didn't have faith, and then he shows them how it's done. Demon gone. End of story. Now, but the disciples, they still come up to him afterwards, and they ask him, What did we do wrong?

[7 : 55] Why couldn't we cast out this demon? You've given us the authority. Why are we missing that magic touch? And when we first look at the passage, it's not exactly clear what they did wrong, is it?

I mean, it doesn't say that they didn't quite place their hands right, or maybe they quoted the wrong Bible verse. It doesn't say that this was a level five demon, and it just needed a drop of holy water, maybe a crucifix for good measure.

Now, it doesn't really say any of those things, and it doesn't tell us either whether they were just trying to show off to the crowd. It doesn't say that they were trying to do a cool miracle. Maybe they did have the best of intentions.

Yet from that allusion to Moses and the golden calf, we're supposed to think that there is something very wrong happening here. Now, Matthew doesn't tell us what they said or did or didn't do, because really, it doesn't matter.

Those things don't matter. What matters is what they are missing. So, verse 20. Jesus repeats to them again. Just in case there was any doubt, he says, you, not the Pharisees, not the Canaanites, certainly not this boy's father, you, the people that have been following me and devoted your lives to me, you have little faith.

[9 : 18] And if you just had faith the size of something this big, you could say to that mountain that we just came down from, move. And it will. That can't be right, though, can it?

I mean, most people would say, if I could just see Jesus, just for, just once, just for a second, I'd believe in him. So how can Jesus' own disciples, men who have been following him day and night, listening to him, learning from him, living with him, for over two years, how could these men not have faith?

Now, you remember the guy I told you about at the beginning? Some of you may have already figured out. I knew him well, because that person was me.

Now, I'm not telling you that out of some sense of self-glorified martyrdom, or I think I'm humble. I don't. For those that know me, you know that I really hate being wrong. Now, I'm putting myself down, because when I repeat Jesus' words to his very own disciples, it's the same words that Moses gave to the Israelites, and it's just as condemning for us, as it is for me, as it is for all of us here today.

You faithless and perverse generation, how long must I be with you? How long must I put up with you?

[10 : 50] Now, if those of us who want to follow Jesus want to be like the Pharisees, who were leading godly lives, or so they thought, you know, relying on their knowledge, their studies, synagogues, churches, creating rules, and taking their own expectations, and traditions, standards, as the right way to worship, running events on a calendar, whatever, that's not faith.

Now, if all Jesus' disciples wished was to perform miracles, drawing huge crowds every week, making them ooh and ah, or be part of a new and exciting group or ministry, joining missions or causes that just sound so awesome to be a part of, preaching sermons, leading people, if those who follow Jesus want to be involved in doing great things, those can be part of God's kingdom, but that's not faith.

And I hope you will all agree with me when I say that those things are so easy to look at as acts of faith. And if we just had the right training, if we just had the right chance, if we just had enough faith, then maybe those things would happen.

But that's not faith. Faith is so simple. It's accessible. It's for everyone. The faith is believing that Jesus is who he says he is.

The Son of Man, the Messiah, the Savior, God's chosen one, who in verse 22, 23, is going to be betrayed into human hands who will be killed but raised on the third day.

[12 : 28] And we've seen what this faith looks like throughout this series. If we have just a little faith, like that Canaanite woman that Jono preached about, rather than saying we have a right to do anything or say this or be that or do that or have that, we would be on our knees knowing that we deserve nothing.

Yet we still ask Jesus as she did because she knew that Jesus and only Jesus has those answers. Now when we have just a little faith, like Martin preached about Peter when he recognized that it was Jesus on the water coming towards him, we will step outside of our comfortable lives and say, Jesus, if it is your will, then I will come to you.

And Peter depended on Jesus because he knew that if Jesus said so, it would be done. Now when we have faith, when we catch that glimpse of the glory of Jesus Christ, ruler of this world, when we believe even this much, then mountains will move.

Now I know it's so tempting to think when we look at that second half of verse 20 and nothing will be impossible for you. It's so tempting to think that means if I just had faith, anything will be possible for me.

I'll be able to do all that awesome ministry stuff that legends are made of. You know, save hundreds, maybe even thousands of lives. Start a revival. Or maybe even just save one life.

[14 : 08] And it's not that those things don't sound like what God wants. But that's exactly why Jesus says you faithless and perverse generation. Because it's so easy for us to delude ourselves into thinking that we know what God wants.

And that's what I thought. Surely God would be glorified if that thing that I'm working on would just go well. Surely things would run better in church if we weren't held back so much. Surely God would listen to me and change things if I just have faith.

And I can dress that up any way I like, but that's not faith. That's just my wish list. And what's harder to move? A mountain or that chip that rests squarely on a man's shoulder?

A mountain can be moved rock by rock. Eventually. It'll take time, but it will eventually be moved. But a man, a man's heart can't be moved if he doesn't want it to be.

Now thankfully for all of us, it's not about how much faith we have at all. and all it takes is the size of a mustard seed. Faith this size to truly serve God.

[15 : 29] As Jesus says in Matthew 13, 32, it is the smallest of all seeds, but when it is grown, it is the greatest of all shrubs and becomes a tree. Now when our faith is firmly placed knowing exactly who Jesus is, then little by little our faith grows.

It's one of those things that Gen Y like myself or other generations as well sometimes were just really terrible at. Waiting, growing, toiling, laboring through things, working through something hard and learning from that, being patient, disciplined.

Now once our mind is focused on that cross, we cannot help but slowly surrender our hopes, desires, and plans. and slowly they are replaced with God's wisdom, God's knowledge, and understanding what God's plans are.

Once we have those things firmly in mind, and when sufferings and trials and pain, when hard times come, and I'm sure we don't have to look too far back in our lives to think of when hard times are or have been, we may not have a clue what to do, but God's will be done.

We may not feel that we can do anything at all, yet God will use us. And we may feel down and beaten and kicked and discouraged, but God will carry us through.

[17 : 01] And there will be peace deep in our hearts, despite all the things that are happening around us. But the starting point of all that is faith in Jesus, that he died and rose again.

And if we believe those things truly, deeply, just for that moment, that's the sort of faith that can move mountains and change lives. Paul himself says in 1 Corinthians 2.2, I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.

it's a faith of humility and dependence and complete submission to Jesus' words. So, faith in Jesus, not ourselves.

We knew that already, right? And I thought that to myself in my youth and perhaps some of the areas in my life were right before God. But so much of what I was doing sounded right up here.

but that's not what everyone else could see was happening in here. And over time, as things became busier, more commitments, more ministries, more stuff.

[18 : 15] That's the thing about positive illusions, though. They are an illusion. We are blinded by what we want to see. And it's impossible for a blind man to see what's right in front of him.

That no matter how much faith we put in anything else at all. Our gifts will always fall short. Leaders come and go. Teams will always disagree. People will never be fulfilled.

Church on this earth is always going to pale in comparison to that new heaven and the new earth. Now, friends, once our eyes are open to see who Jesus really is, fully, we know that we can have faith in nothing else.

So let us never grow tired of hearing of Christ's death. Let us never stop rejoicing that he was resurrected in all his glory and wonder.

Because if we ever stop seeking to understand the depth of that message, then surely we've fallen asleep. and that's when that door is left open to despair because as the disciples were in verse 23, when ministries go wrong, when we're discouraged because life isn't turning out the way that we thought, when disaster strikes, anger, jealousy, confusion, those emotions rise up and they will suck the life out of us.

[19 : 43] I know that feeling well. And that's when we burn out, that's when we lose it, that's when we give up. Now before it comes to that, perhaps in every area of our lives, it's not a bad idea to start a sentence with, because Jesus died and rose again, I.

Because Jesus died and rose again, I will stop. because Jesus died and rose again, I will keep on. Because Jesus died and rose again, at church, at work, at home, I will.

Because Jesus died and rose again, I will surrender. And that's how our faith will keep growing into maturity, whether we follow Christ for 30 days or for 30 years.

And I know it feels like it's so hard sometimes. And we try and we fail, and we try and we fail again. But that's the beauty of it. Our faith is not in our own abilities or our own efforts.