

JESUS & DEMONS

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[0 : 0 0] Father, we especially ask today, given what your word has said, we especially ask today that you would be kind to us and merciful to us and pour out your Holy Spirit upon us so that we might hear what your Son teaches, that we might hear what he teaches, and that we might keep what he teaches.

Father, may your Holy Spirit bring the words of Scripture deeply into our lives so that we will be disciples gripped by the Gospel living for your glory.

And this we ask in Jesus' name. Amen. Please be seated. Every fourth week I speak on CFRA radio at 6.30 in the morning.

I do the taping on a Tuesday morning a couple of weeks in advance. I think I'm on next week. I can't remember when I'm on.

I sort of always lose track of when I'm on. Anyway, I'm part of a team of four different people who all take turns speaking. And a fellow who's part of the committee that runs and the team that runs the whole thing, a layperson, he very helpfully provided for the four speakers just recently a list of things, like a survey of things that 20-somethings are interested in when it comes to the Bible and it comes to religion and the Christian faith and just life in general.

[1 : 2 9] And it very helpfully provided the four speakers with a list. And I just want to let you know that what we're talking about today is not on the list. It didn't show up on the list at all.

Because I guess 20-somethings aren't really interested in talking about hardcore demonic possession, which is what we're going to talk about. So if you have your Bibles, please open them to Luke chapter 11, verses 14 and following.

And if you don't have a Bible with you, there's always some Bibles here at the front of the church, which you're welcome to use. And if you want, you can keep it afterwards. Take it home as a gift from us.

And it's Luke chapter 11, verse 14. And here's how it goes. Now, Jesus was casting out a demon that was mute.

When the demon had gone out, the mute man spoke and the people marveled. Now, just sort of pause. We're going to spend a couple of minutes on this verse. But this verse, this is just like a bit of a throwaway thing.

[2 : 3 2] Notice how it begins. It says, now. Some of you know that I often have conversations in Starbucks or other coffee places because I usually work on my sermons in Starbucks or places like that.

And so when you have an open Bible, eventually you start to have conversations with people. And a very regular conversation that I have with people is that the Bible is completely and utterly untrustworthy because it's filled with contradictions.

That it'll show things out of order. That if you read Matthew, it'll show things following in one order. And then you read the book of Luke and it shows things happening in a different order. And so you can't trust it.

And so this is just a little bit of a throwaway for you. Part of the reason that we think that is because most people are like me and don't know Greek, which is the language that the New Testament was written in.

Because I don't know Greek, part of what I do for my preparation for sermon is read things called commentaries where people know the Greek so I can find out if there's things going on in the original language which don't get brought out in English.

[3 : 41] And in the original language, there's... So look here at verse 14. It begins with now, right? Now he was casting out a demon. And in English, usually when we read now, we think, okay, first the things in verses 1 to 13 happened.

And now these things happened. But the actual word underneath that is really saying something like, now I want to talk about this. In other words, it's not making any claim that it's in any particular type of order.

The person writing the gospel basically wants to try to help us to understand who Jesus is. And so, you know, just like if you were telling somebody a story about a friend or something like that, you're trying to tell somebody about a friend, and you might tell them about this really funny incident of what happened to them.

And then that funny incident makes you aware of other types of things that are like it. And so you tell the person other things like that because it sort of gives you a bit of a picture of the person.

And then maybe you go back to your story about something that happened after the first event. And we all understand how that works. And that's basically how especially Matthew and Luke are written. So it means that you can't sort of look at Matthew and look at Luke and say, oh, you know, he has this happening after this and this happening after this, and it doesn't follow.

[5 : 02] Well, no, no, in the original language, it's as if Jesus has just taught us about prayer, and he's just taught us about the Holy Spirit. And then Luke says, you know what, now I'd like to talk about this.

And that's what happened. So look at verse 14 again. We'll actually get more of my point. Now, Jesus was casting out a demon that was mute.

When the demon had gone out, the mute man spoke, and the people marveled. Now, I'm going to try to describe the event fairly clearly.

And I'm aware of the fact that this text is actually highly problematic for social workers, psychologists, and doctors, and probably others.

It's counselors and therapists. It's a very, very difficult text. In fact, of all the verses that I read, basically, we have this very, very tiny, short description of an exorcism, and then sort of a long comment about it.

[6 : 11] And the text is very clear. Probably what happened is something like this. People believe that Jesus had the power to heal, and so they bring somebody to Jesus who has been mute.

They're not able to speak, and they haven't been able to speak for quite a while. And I guess they're expecting Jesus to heal the man. But Jesus surprises them.

He doesn't heal him. He looks at him, and he must have said something like, Demon, be gone. And because the crowd all recognizes that it's an exorcism.

And when Jesus says, Demon, be gone, the demon leaves. And maybe people looking at the man who had not thought that he was demon-possessed, maybe they saw a change in his eyes, or a relaxant of his shoulders, or some type of physical bodily type of thing.

But the most astounding thing that they saw was that all of a sudden the man was able to speak. And that's what the Bible is describing as having happened to Jesus.

[7 : 20] It's all very, very terse. Verse 14, now he was casting out a demon that was mute, and when the demon had gone out, the mute man spoke, and the people marveled. It's a public miracle he does in front of many people, and most of the people are completely and utterly astounded by what has happened.

And, well, here's the point. So here's the thing. Here's the very, very, very difficult thing about this text.

If you're a doctor and you're treating somebody who can't speak, do you suspect that there's a demon there? If you're a therapist dealing with somebody, or a social worker dealing with somebody, in Canada in the year 2014, what would happen if you went to your supervisor and said, I don't really think that this is a social problem, I think that they're possessed by a demon?

And I'm guessing that would be a very awkward conversation for a social worker with their boss, or a therapist with her boss or supervisor.

And yet, I'm going to talk a bit more about this throughout the rest of the sermon, but, I mean, this is the very, very first thing to notice about the text, that if this text is true, it's saying that some of our physical problems and symptoms can be a sign of demonic possession.

[8 : 48] So here's the first point. I'm going to talk a little bit more, but, Andrew, if you could put the first point up. I need to pray for myself and for others that we will remember God's Word written and learn how it applies to our jobs and our lives.

The grammar's not really perfect. I apologize for that. I'll try to polish it up later on. But you get the basic point. I need to pray. We need to pray. Christians need to pray.

Congregations need to become a prayerful congregation. And one of the things that we need to pray about is that each of us will hear God's Word and remember God's Word, and that God's Word will have an impact, an effect on how we understand our jobs and how we understand ourselves.

I'm sure that some of you, maybe many of you, maybe all of you, pray on a regular basis for me, and I'm very thankful for that. Please keep praying for me. I need lots of prayer. But everybody here, everybody who's a follower of Jesus needs prayer.

Like, what does a doctor do who's a believing Christian, who believes that texts like this are possible when he examines people? Should he or she be spending some time praying for spiritual discernment?

[10 : 07] How does he wisely handle something like this in the medical establishment? Should she, as the doctor, when she sees something like this, should she be coming to her church and saying, you know, I'm facing this situation, it might just be medical, but I have a feeling there's something else.

Would you pray for this person? Like, how does that work? You can see it's difficult, but it's not just difficult for doctors and social workers and stuff like that. What's it like for a person in financial services or in sales, where the boss is completely and utterly consumed with greed, and you're in financial services or sales and you're dealing with people who are consumed with greed.

And how do you sort of manage that? Like, how do you manage if you maybe have a boss that wants you to always upsell, even when it's not really good for the client, and on the other hand, maybe, you know, if you're doing stocks and bonds and you realize that what's driving this person is a really, they worship money, and how do you deal with that?

You know, like, that requires prayer and wisdom. And you could multiply examples. You know, maybe it's not specifically, maybe if you're in some type of engineering, there's not a specific technical engineering thing, but there's always people issues.

There's always control issues. There's always issues of right and wrong and conscience and limits and all that you shouldn't go beyond and dishonesty. And I'm not saying that the whole world is bleak, but it's not as if you can live years and years and years, and you never have to face this in your job or in your life.

[11 : 46] And so this text, by making some very, very shocking claim to Canadians about physical illness, might have a spiritual component.

It's really challenging all of us to do two things. The first is to actually remember God's Word and know it, because if you don't know it, you'd never even know to look or to think about it or just to ponder it.

And we desperately need to go into the type of congregation where we pray for each other. I mean, one of the very powerful things about going to a men's group or the woman's group or one of the small groups is that there's an opportunity to build relationships where some of the stresses in your life and in your jobs can be shared, and that you can have people who pray for you specifically.

It might be hard for us as a congregation to do it, but as you get to know other men or other women or youth in the youth group or in small groups, it becomes a way by which you can pray for each other with knowledge and with persistence and check up on it.

Now, some of you might be saying, okay, George, this is very, very interesting, and yeah, yeah, yeah, we're going to do this, but you're spending all this time in the sermon, and then what are you going to do? You're going to come up to yourself, oh, and my time's up. I guess I can't talk about demons.

[13 : 00] Sorry. And you sort of just bypass the whole thing. No, we're not going to do that. Let's look at verse 14 again. Now Jesus was casting out a demon that was mute. When the demon had gone out, the mute man spoke, and the people marveled.

Here's the second thing, not just about this, but about the commentary that's going to happen, because the exorcism is very brief, but the commentary is long. Here's the second thing, if you could put it up, Andrew.

The Bible teaches that demons really exist, and they will cause real harm, and they should never be trifled with. The Bible teaches, Jesus teaches, demons really exist, and they will cause real harm, and they should never be trifled with.

Now this isn't going to be a sermon on demonic harassment, and oppression, and a whole range of different things. Many of us might live our entire lives without ever having to be face-to-face, or deal with somebody who's fully demonically possessed.

That might happen here in Canada. Most of us experience demonic, it's through most of us in our experience with being influenced by demons, it has more to do with a sense of slander against us, an attack against us, a self-worth, a lack of confidence, the type of things that cause division, and that's our more common things, and that would be another sermon.

[14 : 24] That's not what the text is talking about. But even in those, in a sense, lesser cases, it's still clear that demons exist, that they cause real harm, and they're not to be trifled with.

This week, I don't know if it was in The Citizen, it was in other papers, there was a big statue of Satan, big red statue of Satan that appeared.

I was going to say Granville Road, but it's the highway in Vancouver. It doesn't matter, Grandview, I think it is, the Grandview Highway in Vancouver, that you could see it off that.

It was a large red statue of Satan. He had the horned salute, and he had a massive erection, and he was big and red, and it appeared out of nowhere, and then it got taken away.

And the newspaper article was about the fact that many people liked the statue. Some wanted it to return, some would like to find out where they could buy it, and have it in their house.

[15 : 27] Or their garden, or their front yard, or in their dining room, I don't know. But here's the thing, it was just like a curious newspaper thing, and in pluralistic Canada, some people like Satan, that's fine, some people like Gaia, that's fine, some people like Krishna, some people like Buddha, some people like Muhammad, some people like Jesus, some people like Jack Daniels, and watching NFL football on a Sunday, and they're just sort of all the same, and whatever sort of turns your crank, that's just fine.

And so in pluralistic Canada, that's just the way it is. But you see, the Bible here says, the Bible is teaching that if demons really exist, and the Bible says that they really exist, and if they cause real harm, then they should never be trifled with.

They should never be trifled with. And as we read the, I'm not going to just keep reading verse 14 over and over and over again, not that that would be bad, I'm not going to just keep reading it. We'll read more, and you get more of a picture of the type of harm that demons cause.

But that's a fundamental takeaway for us, that it's not to be trifled with. Some of you might say, George, are you just trying to kill curiosity, and create fear, and stop inquiry?

Well, no, not at all. I'm well past having really tiny young children. I have some grandchildren. I'm not going to bore you all with cute grandchildren stories.

[17 : 04] But, you know, for those of you who are parents, or those of you who observe parents, it's a very, very tricky thing with kids. On one hand, a wise parent wants to encourage curiosity in their kids.

Right? If you go and you visit somebody, and every time the kid's trying to ask a question, or try to touch something, the parents are slapping them, or verbally slapping them down, and you think to yourself, that's terrible.

You can't, you know, that parent's way, way too controlling. Like, curiosity's good in kids, and inquiry's good in kids. And so on one hand, you want to encourage that with kids. On the other hand, there's certain things that are just fundamentally dangerous, and you don't want them to do it.

So, for instance, one of my grandkids, he's figured out, he's very, you know, like this, and he's figured out how to open doors. And you don't want him opening the door and going out on the street by himself.

Right? So, I mean, that's sort of an obvious type of thing. And the Bible's trying to say that it's the same type of thing here. If you read the Bible from cover to cover, if you've listened to the sermons, it's very, very obvious that Jesus loves questions, that God is able to handle honest questions.

[18 : 15] He wants us to ask questions. In fact, I would suggest that probably when we die and we get to heaven, God will rebuke us for not asking enough questions in our lives, for being far too complacent, and not, in fact, asking more and more and more that too many of us get old.

Like, you know, somewhere about the time we turn six, or, you know, or 16, we stop asking childlike questions, and the rest of our life is like a withering, withering, withering, withering consumption with just scheming and getting, and we've stopped wondering.

And I wouldn't be surprised if God says, why did you stop wondering and being so curious? Why didn't you not just say, even if I live to be 98, I'm going to be curious.

I'm going to have inquiry. One of the things we're going to see in this text is that this text, in fact, talks a little bit about what it means to be human. But at the same time, just like with kids, you want to encourage their curiosity, their inquiry, their site of experiment.

There's just, if something's really dangerous, you also want to say, no, no. Okay, Greg, you just, you don't go, you don't open the door and go exploring out by yourself.

[19 : 29] You're too young. There's too much danger. And the Bible here is saying that demons really exist. They will cause real harm, and they should never be trifled with.

So, but here's the other thing. So, Jesus does this miracle, and you can ask yourself, well, how is it that people respond to this exorcism?

Do they show inquiry? Are they curious? Do they say, gosh, Jesus, how do you do that? Like, whoa.

Well, let's see. Some people go, whoa, and other people have one of two other responses. It's in verses 15 and following. But some of them said, so go back to the very last part of verse 14, and the people marveled.

Verse 15, but some of them said, Jesus casts out demons by Beelzebul, the prince of demons, while others, to test him, kept seeking from him a sign from heaven.

[20 : 32] Just sort of pause there. Keep your finger there. Some of these people have really come right up in Jesus' face to really insult him. Beelzebul was one of the Jewish names for the devil.

And the name, this name for the devil was created by taking an ancient pagan god, Baal, an ancient pagan god, Baal, and adding the word for poop only said far more foul, which I can't say from up front at church on a Sunday.

And they put this pagan name for God with this word for excrement and they call devil the lord of excrement. And that's why in some versions it's also understood as the lord of the flies because excrement left out attracts flies.

So in a sense it was a polite way to say lord of, and fill in how you may be on the street here, excrement referred to. And that's what they say.

Jesus is just under the power of the lord of excrement. I see it right in front of everybody to his face. And others just say, you know what, Jesus, yeah, yeah, I've seen you cast out a demon before, I got the t-shirt, got the hat, got the tattoo, come on, show us a real sign from heaven.

[21 : 53] And that we sort of going to talk about next week because Jesus sort of deals with that like later on in the text. But now he focuses on those who say that what he's doing is because he's under the power of the devil.

So verse 17, but Jesus, knowing their thoughts, said to them, every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and a divided household falls.

And if Satan also is divided against himself, how will his kingdom stand? For you say that I cast out demons by Beelzebul. And if I cast out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your sons cast them out?

Therefore they will be your judges. But if it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. Just sort of pause here.

We're going to talk about it more in a moment. What we see in Jesus' response is he says, surely, I mean, he's talking to a different cultural context than postmodern Canada, whereby many of them would accept the reality of demons and have a certain degree.

[23 : 11] Some would be fascinated and want the power that comes from connection with them, but many would be frightened of it. And Jesus is in a sense going to say, I'm dangerous too.

I'm dangerous too. I'm going to explain it in a moment, but just say, if, verse 20, but if it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.

When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own palace, his goods are safe, but when one's stronger than he attacks him and overcomes him, he takes away his armor in which he trusted and divides his spoil.

Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters. Now, just sort of pause here for a second. The finger of God is a very, we don't get it, and the early readers of Luke's gospel, who many would have been pagans who become Christians, without having become Jewish first, they might not have got it as well, but for those who were Jewish who were listening, this reference to Jesus and the finger of God would have been a very, very powerful type of a statement because two of the most famous texts in the Old Testament, there's two very, very famous texts in the Old Testament about the finger of God, and the first one is if you go back to the early books of the Bible and you look at Exodus and Deuteronomy, and as God brings the people of Israel out of Egypt and on the way to the promised land, and he's going to enter into a covenant with them where he offers, in a sense, to be their king over them, and he accepts them as his treasured possession and his people, and a key foundational part of him being their king and them being their treasured possession is that he gives them ten summary statements or laws called the Ten

Commandments, and that's a crucial part of it, and how is it written? The Bible says that Moses takes stone tablets and by the finger of God the commandments are written, so it's pointing to God's active presence in gathering of people for himself to be his treasured possession, and in a sense, the terms of what it means to belong to him are actually written by the finger of God, and towards the end of the Old Testament, there's a story in Daniel chapter 5, which also would have been a very telling illustration of this.

[25 : 44] You can go back and read it later, but basically, in summary, the people of Israel are in captivity by the Babylonians, and Belshazzar, who's the successor of Nebuchadnezzar, he decides to throw a huge party, and he asks for the temple, stuff from the temple of Israel to come out so that they could get drunk with it, and as they're doing that, and they're all having a great time partying and praising the gods of gold and of bronze and of stone, in the midst of it, it appears as if the finger of God shows up and writes on the wall, many, many, tickle, tackle, parson.

And then Daniel's brought in, and he interprets it that God has written that he has judged the Babylonians, he's judged Belshazzar, and that that night the kingdom will fall from the Babylonians and the Persians will take over the empire and Belshazzar will die.

And that's what Jesus is saying when he says about the finger of God. God, he says, okay, well, you push back, you think I'm doing this by satanic power, and he gives some reasons why that might some, you know, some from what if types of things, but he says, but if what you see is the finger of God, it means the kingdom of God has come upon you.

And then he describes himself as the strong man that's able to bind and that's able to bind. So some of you might say, okay, so George, okay, okay, okay, I knew it was going to get to this.

Okay, so George, you don't want us to buy big red statues of Satan, and you don't want us to use Ouija boards, and you don't want us to just, you know, you can say, okay, maybe you can do yoga if you're just stretching, but if you're asking you to chant, you know, Hindu gods, you shouldn't do it.

[27 : 41] And, you know, George, I knew it was just going to come to a whole pile of negatives, right, because that's what you Christian and religious types do. All you want to do is just talk about negatives. Don't do this, don't do this, don't do this, don't do this.

Is that now, George, what your application's going to be of all of this? Just it's going to be a whole lot of no's? No. Actually, what the text is showing is that, well, actually, Andrew, if you could put it up.

Only following religious and spiritual rules creates the illusion of emptiness. The kingdom of God is primarily about the saving presence of Jesus.

Only following religious and spiritual rules creates the illusion of emptiness, like a free space, a space where you can just sort of be yourself.

You learn the different no's. Okay, I can't do this, I can't do this, I can't do this, I can't do this, I can't do this. What it ends up leaving is a place where you sort of can do whatever you want. If it's Islam, you follow this rule and this rule and this rule.

[28 : 58] If it's different ways of Christianity being understood as a religion, then you don't watch pornography and you don't do this and you don't do this and you have your own thing and you learn this ritual and you learn this.

But all it is is creating all these no's and in a sense where the heart is, where you really are as yourself, it's like that's just sort of empty. You can do whatever you want. It's unchanged. And spirituality, for the spiritual, not religious, it might be that the rules are a bit more transgressive and some of them are like giving the finger to religions or some of them are just something which is highly idiosyncratic but it's still a whole pile of no's that creates what I'm going to suggest is an illusion of emptiness.

But as we're going to see, Jesus here is saying that I'm not about emptiness and I'm not about religious rules. I'm about the heart and the real true living God in a world where God, the living God really exists and the human heart, which is the center of who we are, is really there and it's how God comes into the human heart and the human heart comes into God.

It's about presence, not absence. Only following religious and spiritual rules creates the illusion of emptiness. The kingdom of God is primarily about the saving presence of Jesus.

That's what it's actually all about. See, it comes if you read verses 24 to 26.

[30 : 36] Let's read them. When the unclean spirit has gone out of a person, it passes through waterless places seeking rest. And finding none, it says, I will return to my house from which I came.

And when it comes, it finds the house swept and put in order. Then it goes and brings 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 maybe they followed rules and as a result of rules, they're empty. Maybe as a result of therapy, some of the type of harassment that a person had been experiencing that we might understand as having a connection to the demonic, that that goes away.

Maybe by doing certain rituals, there's a type of peace so that certain types of harassment all don't come. And in a sense, it describes what happens with mere religion or with therapy or mere religious principles or mere spirituality is that it can create a type of emptiness within.

But what Jesus is saying is that there's never really an emptiness. It's an illusion that there's emptiness. And it's very possible that after what you think is emptiness, that something spiritual comes right back in and something far worse.

[31 : 52] wilderness. Now, I'm not going to try to explain, I'm not going to try to explain, I'm not going to try to explain what wilderness means. That's one of those things of just, I think it means that the demons go towards barrenness.

It's all part of the thing that the demons, when they, well, how do demons harm us? They create within us a fascination of barrenness instead of a fascination with life. They create within us a fascination with death.

So the barrenness rather than fruitfulness, of death rather than life, of harm rather than of healing, of binding rather than of freeing. That that's what demons do as they come in.

Of belittling rather than building up. Of pushing down rather than lifting up. Of turning inward eyes and being self-centered rather than having eyes for others and wanting to help.

Of being completely and utterly, of not being at all interested in the needs of others rather than what Jesus does which makes us aware of the needs of others. That that's that's what the demons are doing and I think that's partly why that this image of wilderness is there.

[32 : 56] But that's one of those things that we just have to remember the scripture and meditate upon the scripture and ponder the scripture and allow that scripture to influence how we see and understand what goes on in our own experience and what goes on in our life.

But Jesus is talking here about the danger of an illusion of emptiness that can get filled by a spiritual power. So some of you might say okay George I'm a little bit confused by all of this and if religion is not just a matter about learning certain rituals, spirituality is not a matter of learning certain rituals, if it's not just a matter of learning a whole pile of no's and the really religious person knows more no's than everybody else and the spiritual person just has different no's or less no's, different and less, like what?

Here's the thing. Everything in this, remember every week I'm going to say this, but everything that happens in Luke that we're reading right now in the weeks to come is all within the context of Jesus going to Jerusalem to die.

It's all about Jesus is going to Jerusalem to die on the cross and he's going to regularly remind the disciples we're heading to Jerusalem, I'm heading to Jerusalem to die on the cross.

And you see, so what this text is inviting us to say is not to despair that all we can do is create an illusion of emptiness.

[34 : 20] It's creating a context where we ask for a saving power that only comes from God. If you could put up the next point, Andrew, the context of the book of Luke, if you read it and you see in Luke chapter nine, Jesus says to his disciples, I'm going to go to Jerusalem, I'm going to die on the cross.

And we're going to see it like every couple of chapters, he says it again, he says it again until in Luke chapter 19, he arrives in Jerusalem. It's going to be a regular feature of his teaching. Everything that we read is to be understood as something Jesus teaches as he goes to Jerusalem to die.

And the deep mystery of what is it all about is that Jesus is the strong one who dies at the hands of the weak to save the weak.

We're going to look again in a moment at verses 21 and 22, but that's one of the, see, that's the positive thing that Jesus is saying. He's saying, listen, the devil's a strong man, but he's not strong compared to me.

I'm vastly stronger. The devil is a strong man compared to you. He's stronger than you, but I'm vastly stronger than you and I'm vastly stronger than Beelzebub.

[35 : 30] I'm incomparably stronger. Incomparably stronger. And yet the profound mystery, which is a deep offense to those of us who worship power, even if we don't realize it, is that Jesus is saying this as he's on his way to die.

Jesus is the strong one who willingly dies at the hands of the weak to save the weak. You know, you'll hear me pray over and over and over again that what I'm hoping, what I want for myself is I want to be a disciple of Jesus gripped by the gospel, living for God's glory.

What do I want to do? I want to be used by God to make disciples gripped by the gospel, living for his glory. And as we're gripped by the gospel, we're gripped by the story of the strong one who willingly went to Jerusalem to die at the hands of the weak, to save the weak.

And the Bible describes that this is the power of God for salvation, that God provides a power.

I can only stand naked as a weak person, as a beggar. And God provides a power for salvation that comes in the strong one, willingly out of love for you and me, submitting to weak ones.

[37 : 00] And by his death, the weak are saved. That in him submitting to weak ones to kill him, God is providing a power that saves if we receive.

And so Jesus tells this story, and he tries to reveal that if it's just about rules, and it's just about therapy, and it's just about principles, and it's just about religion, and it's just about spirituality, and it's just about all of these types of things, it's just about no's, it creates an illusion of emptiness.

But what's actually needed is the presence of a power for salvation that all we can do is receive, that he desires to give. And there's sort of another image within this that helps to put it into its context.

Look up again at verse 21. I'm just going to draw this to a close. It says something very significant about human beings. When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own palace, his goods are safe.

But when one stronger than he attacks him and overcomes him, he takes away his armor in which he trusted and divides his spoil. Look at that. Verse 21. When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own palace. Look down again to verse 24.

[38 : 14] When the unclean spirit has gone out of a person that passes through waterless places, seeking rest and finding none, it says, I will return to my house from which I came. What is the house or the palace of the devil?

In this particular case, it was the man who was deaf. It wasn't that there's a hell down there and that there's demons sitting on thrones.

It's describing the man who had the demon cast out of him, that that man understood the man to be his palace, his home. And the demon sat on the throne in the man's life.

See, here's the thing which the Bible is opening up to us. If you could put it up, Andrew. The Bible teaches that every human being has a throne at the center of who they are.

The great question is, who or what is on the throne? Every human being has a throne at the center of who they are. The great question is, who or what is on the throne?

[39 : 22] See, what the Bible teaches is that human beings, each human being was ultimately, well, human as a race, but each of us are created by God and that God made all things good. And God made human beings, even though there's an integrity to us and a certain type of a self-possession of each of us, God made human beings so that the very center of who we are, which the Bible uses the word heart, but the very center of who we are, God placed a throne.

And in the center of whom we are, God sat on the throne. And what happens in Genesis 3 is that, you know, our, in a sense, our primal ancestors, Adam and Eve, when they reject God and desire to be like gods themselves, it's as if they try to say, I'm going to sit on that throne at the very, very center of who.

But the throne is made for God. It's not made for George. George doesn't have a throne in the center of who he is that he's to sit on. George has a throne in the center of who he is that was made for God.

It's God's throne in the very center of who I am that he is to sit on. And when he sits on that throne, when the kingdom of God, in a sense, is present in George, that's when George knows not barrenness, but fruitfulness, not death, but life, not pain, but joy, not ugliness, but beauty, not being bound, but being free.

That's what happens when God is sitting on the throne, which he built into every single human being. Every single one of you who are here has a throne at the center of whom you are that was made for God that only God should sit in.

[40 : 59] And part of what religion and spirituality and therapy and moral principles is all about is that since we have vacated that, we've pushed God out of that throne.

We've, in a sense, kicked him out. And we can't even really sit on the throne very long. And so what happens is that throne is filled with idols. And so, in a sense, the throne in the center of my life is a very crowded throne.

Because maybe I'm trying to sit on that throne, but I also have an idol of money. Or I also have an idol of power. Or I also have an idol of prestige. Or I also maybe have an idol of my grandkids. Or I have an idol of my job.

Or I have an idol of my political beliefs. Or I have a whole pile of idols. And all of these idols are sitting on the throne of my life. And a lot of times, all that therapy and religion and spirituality does is it kicks out the idol of Jack Daniels and puts a Pharisaic idol in its place.

Sometimes what appears to be conversion is just a changing of idols. An unruly idol is replaced with a very well-ordered idol.

[42 : 09] The unruly idol of just being completely crazy is replaced by the soccer mom idol. And so, what Jesus is saying here is that if there's a throne at the center of every human heart, then he is the strong one on the way to Jerusalem to die at the hands of weak ones for the weak.

That there is a power from God for salvation that comes. And we're invited to say to God, God, I have tried to kick you out of the, it's an illusion that there's this empty throne.

It's, in fact, I can never sit on this throne. And I acknowledge I have a constant parade of idols that I try to put on the throne at the center of who I am. And I'm actually helpless to try to deal with this.

I thank you, Jesus, for dying upon the cross for me. I thank you for being the strong one who dies at the hands of the weak one for the weak. I am weak. May you come and take your rightful place with saving power and healing authority on the throne of my life.

And that's when the Christian life begins. And the Christian life is lived not by seeking to know more religious rules and more rituals, although there's things obviously to know, but being so gripped by the gospel that we understand that Jesus, the one who sits at the throne at the center of our lives, is a strong one who died for us, who became weak to die for us.

[43 : 46] That by nothing that I have done or could do, that Jesus is a power of God for salvation to be at the very center of who we are. And that Jesus, when we ask him, will come and live in who we are.

He'll make his home in us, in the throne that is properly his. Please stand. Thank you. I'm just going to invite you, all of us.

You know, even, you see, one of the things that's about being a Christian is that we ask Jesus to be on the throne of our lives. And part of what happens to us is, before we know it, we want Jesus to have a seat up there, but we also would like him to sit beside money and power and looks.

And so partly what it means to be a Christian is to be gripped by the gospel and say, once again, Jesus, I'm slipping into illusion. I'm slipping into having idols be at the center of who I am.

And Jesus, I want them all out. I only want you to be at the center of who I am. And I understand that when you are at the center of who I am, there is freedom. There is life. There is fruitfulness. There is fullness.

[44 : 59] Even if external things in my life don't, that that's what you do as you truly reign with saving power and healing authority at the center of who I am. That there is fruitfulness in life and reconciliation to you with my creator.

And Jesus, once again, kick out the idols. I really want to have you enthroned at the center of my life and you alone. And for others, the Christian life begins by saying, I didn't realize that, Jesus.

This makes sense. Please come in and sit in the throne of my life as my savior and as my Lord. And I'm not going to lead you in a prayer. I'm just going to say the Holy Spirit is convicting some of you to pray words in your own words.

And all you have to say is, Jesus, there's a throne. You need to be on it. Please come in and live in it. But I'll just say a prayer in closing. Challenge you, though, to invite Jesus to be on the throne of your life.

Let's pray. Father, you know the different idols. Maybe even for some demonic presence that has a presence on the throne of our lives.

[46 : 01] You know what's going on in the lives and hearts of every single person who is here. And we ask that, Father, in your kindness, that your Holy Spirit would fall with might and power and deep conviction upon each of us to turn us to Jesus.

Father, deliver us, Father, from illusions of emptiness and illusions of religion and illusions of spirituality. And, Father, grip us with the gospel.

Grip us with the gospel so that we call out, Father, upon Jesus to sit on the throne of our lives to be the savior and the Lord of who we are. Father, please do this.

Please rule. May there be nothing in our lives that is not under your healing authority and saving power. And we ask this in the name of Jesus, your Son and our Savior. Amen.