

Getting Your House In Order

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[0 : 0 0] Coming to Christmas, I got a little Christmas card for you by which if I draw it then it'll be my card to all of you. That'll be done, you see. You know that the usual one that goes like this, they, and up here is, I don't know how you do this, but there's the star shining and it's all down here, peace on earth. Got the picture? Happy Christmas to you all. But what I really mean is this.

This is what we send around. The passage that Tom dealt with last week, if you in fact put, I don't know how this is going to look, but you put a machine gun emplacement up here, you would find that for practical purposes the machine gun does more to affect peace than stars in the sky. In other words, if you want to maintain peace you put up a machine gun and that maintains the peace on a, generally a better level. And a more practical level that is because of the nature of the problem down here on earth.

Peace doesn't come by osmosis from the stars. It generally comes from pointing a machine gun at people and saying, be quiet and sit down and shut up. So that that's really the picture of the passage that precedes this in which it says, a strong man, fully armed, keeps his home in peace and you know, he's, he's got it because he's got the machine gun in place. He's in authority. And that's a very powerful picture that I want to come back to later today. The other, the other picture that I'd like you to have is, uh, is this one, which is, uh, if you want this fellow here and, uh, uh, this is the unclean spirit up here. You might know to look at it, but that's how they look. And, uh, and, uh, he, uh, he comes into this man. That's where the passage today begins that was just read for you. An unclean spirit was in this man. The other picture over here is this man here. And this man here now, you see, was, uh, he's way better off because he now isn't, uh, a thin, insignificant little person with a mere unclean spirit to deal with. He now has reformed himself and he's so bloated with self-sufficiency, with pride, with satisfaction. He's jogged so many miles, said so many prayers, gone to so many churches, done so many good things, filled out checks to so many worthy causes that he's bloated beyond all belief. And the, uh, unclean spirit says, ah, there's room for me. And seven of my companions. And, uh, so you get the picture of what happens if you deal with the problem of, of your life by a process of self-reform. The thing that I would like us to get hold of today is the recognition that the reform has to be of a far more radical nature than anything you can achieve by yourself. Just to help you understand that, I'd, uh, I'd like you to, if you think through what we've done in Luke chapter 11, because all these passages come from Luke chapter 11, there's a number of references to the fact of evil. Uh, it begins when Jesus is teaching them to pray and he says, thy kingdom come. And he says that because there's already a kingdom in place. And that kingdom is, is the machine gun kind of control kingdom. It's the power of evil. He goes on to say, Lord, lead us not into temptation. Now, temptation is described in the new Testament as being when you are lured and enticed by your own desire, that desire, when it is conceived, gives birth to sin and sin, when it is full grown, brings forth death. And so Jesus says, we don't want to get into the place of temptation, which comes from desire, which leads to sin, which leads to death. We don't want to initiate that process in our lives, which often we do. Then again, in the same passage, he talks about for in the Lord's prayer, he talks about, forgive us our sins. The front page of the Globe and Mail this morning tells the story of Leona Helmsley, who I gather is a charming lady of enormous wealth. And, uh, she says, she's quoted as saying, I am more humiliated and ashamed than anyone can imagine.

I'm guilty of serious crime. I feel like I'm in the middle of a nightmare. Well, the courts have no apparatus for dealing with that. Uh, she may feel what she likes, but they can't do anything about it except to show a little care and compassion so that instead of sentencing her to 127 years, they reduced it to four years and \$7.1 million. But that's not exactly forgiveness, is it? I mean, it's, uh, there's, uh, there's a recognition there that courts can't forgive. We can't forgive.

[6 : 13] There's got to be some radical apparatus of forgiveness in our world and the courts can't dispense it. And in fact, none of us can really, unless there's some other source.

The same chapter 11 talks about, uh, if you then who are evil know how to do good. And that's when he's talking about giving gifts to your children. And he says, you give good gifts gifts to your children. Uh, we never lose the capacity to go, to do good, but we lack the consistent motive to do it. In other words, anybody can do good and everybody feels better at Christmas time if they do a little good somewhere. But in terms of being consistently motivated to do good, we don't get along very well. It's not beyond our capacity, but it's, we're not motivated to do it very strongly. Then the same chapter goes on to talk about a demon that was dumb.

Uh, an example of, uh, the life of a human being that was seriously constricted by the, by, uh, a demon that was in that person and didn't allow them to speak. Now you can't hold that person responsible for being in that condition, but you can, I think, hold them responsible for not accepting help in dealing with that condition. Well, then they go on to this discussion of Beelzebub, the prince of demons. And Jesus, when he's had that accusation, he explains to them that though they may like this word Beelzebub, you're really just dealing with the personification of evil, which is Satan. And the work of Satan is that he creates chaos. He tempts, you know, when, when he, his temptation is to make you believe that God is other than God is. I mean, that's his, uh, that's, that's the way Satan works is to, is to make you believe that God is other than God is. You know, that's what he did for Eve. Uh, Eve said, God says, and the serpent says, God didn't really say that, did he? Wouldn't you rather think that if you were God, that this is the way you'd be? And that's basically how, how Satan works. Uh, he is the devil in that he is the father of lies. And, uh, and you, you well know that if you deal with the public on any level that they would rather hear a lie than the truth. Uh, they respond more quickly. They respond more generously. A lie is so much more convenient most of the time. And, uh, so we learn that that's the way our world works. And, uh, that's the way Satan makes it work. And then there is the accuser. That's one of the functions. And that is, uh, guilt feelings are very largely from, uh, from, uh, Satan and they make you, uh, become self destructive rather than, uh, than understanding that, uh, that the God who has given us his son, Jesus Christ has dealt with the accuser. Well, what it all amounts to really is that in our world, we are engaged in a battle with evil. And, uh, it's not, you see, it's not just, and a lot of people believe this, but the fact is that it's not just a matter of taking, uh, a genetically, uh, uh, well-balanced person, uh, feeding them well, educating them well, and putting them in a good environment, and they will blossom. Something in the process goes radically wrong. And, uh, evil becomes something that you've got to deal with it, and you've got to deal with it in, in personal terms. Uh, I don't know why this is, I don't know whether this is sort of corporate introspection, but, uh, Murray Pesum got written up in the Vancouver magazine, and, uh, and it says that, uh, lithium carbonate, carbonate has become Pesum's real salvation.

Well, we all need real salvation. Now, whether it can come out of a pill, I don't know, but that's how it's described in, in the magazine. His, uh, they talk about his monstrous swings between ecstasy and despondency coincide with market conditions. Uh, you may have the same disease, for all I know, uh, that, uh, were caught in that, uh, in that kind of situation. It's, uh, there is something, there's something, uh, somebody helped me a lot by saying people in Vancouver need a Murray Pesum, because he lives it all out in the open, while most of us live with our private, secret fantasy world. He, he does his fantasies on the front page of the sun most of the time. Well, uh, we have more private fantasies that we mostly live with, but, uh, the, the difficulty is that, uh, that he, he, in a sense, helps us to see that the thing that we, I think, recognize when we read the story, I mean, I, I, for the first time felt, I, I've always felt profoundly envious of Murray Pesum, because that's the kind of thing I'd like to do with my life, you know. But, but, uh, so I've always been envious, but, but this story, I become profoundly, uh, yeah, I know what that problem is. You know, I mean, he describes the agony when he wished he were dead that he's been through. And, and that's a dimension, I think, of most people's lives at some point or other, where there is that, and, and this terrible story this morning of the, of the Japanese cook who went home on the weekend and apparently committed suicide, murdered his wife and two kids here in the West End. Or the ex-stockbroker who took a machine gun or a shotgun and, uh, tried to, you know, that what somebody said about him, that he tried to have a kind of headline death, you know, by calling the police and the reporters and getting everybody there and then running out of the house with a shotgun. Uh, and just the, the, the terrible sort of black side of his life. Now, the reason there is that black side to our life, I

suppose, is because, is because there is such a thing as evil. And evil is a very profound reality. It's a derived reality. You know, I don't think it's a profound reality in itself. I think it's like matter and anti-matter. Evil is a kind of, of reality that derives from something else. So that when you look at the, at the passage that you have today of the unclean spirit who comes out of a man and, uh, wanders about and finds it, uh, finds it dry and no place to rest.

[14:17] And, uh, he, he needs some kind of host. He doesn't, he cannot exist by himself. Evil doesn't exist by itself. Evil exists in the hearts of people. We provide hospitality to entertain it. So that, uh, evil has that kind of presence among us. And when it becomes a profound personal and individual thing, it becomes very difficult to deal with. Uh, we, uh, and, and, uh, one of the ways we try and deal with it is, is, is by this process of, uh, of self-reformation, which is spoken of here. You know, when it says the, the unclean spirit gives this guy a rest. So while the unclean spirit gives him a rest, he, he cleans up his house. And as I say, he goes to church, reads his Bible, says his prayers, gives to the missionaries.

He jogs, he diets, he goes for his walk with his wife and spends time with his kids. And by that time, he is such a bloated, inflated focus of self-satisfaction that he is profoundly evil, uh, that he's, he can accommodate seven worse devils than himself. And that's, that really is, I think what, where, where Christians are in a trap in, in our kind of world. Because most people that you meet on the street and talk about Christianity, they say Christianity is a form, is, is a matter of moral reform. And I'm not ready for it, nor do I find it particularly necessary. Therefore, I'm not going to get involved. Uh, and, uh, so it's, that's, this isn't it, Jesus says. You know, all this is, is an invitation to disaster. The last state of that man is worse than his first. Here he was just a garden variety sinner. Now he's a religious sinner, which is even worse. And you get, uh, and that's, that's the picture that, that, uh, that Jesus draws. Now you see, the reason that, that you have all this, I think, is this. What Jesus is talking about is what is involved in real conversion, you know.

Uh, and what he says is, uh, that real conversion is that this castle of our self-sufficiency in which we have compromised with evil and found a measure of peace, this castle is the place we live. And we are able to hold it together. We can handle a certain amount of greed. We can handle a certain amount of lust. We can, uh, we can have a little bit of carefully disguised dishonesty, some modest philandering that is trifling with sex, but always, uh, you are in control.

This is the castle. This is the castle. And you are able to maintain it. And that's, uh, that's the condition that we're in. But the reason that we have achieved it is because we have given in to evil. You know, and, and evil is very powerful in our world. And therefore, by compromising with it, we are able to maintain the appearance of, uh, a measure of, uh, a measure of, of achievement.

[18:08] And, uh, the respect of people around us, we're able to do it. But always we are having to tend the fire of, uh, our lust or our greed or something. And, and, uh, that's why in that story about the glamorous lady in the globe this morning, and the judge says, this is naked greed. You know, greed got out of control. She maintained this for a long time, but there came a point in which she couldn't maintain it any longer. And of course, this is the danger of this position. And that is that Satan plays with us. And, uh, we don't really deal with the problem. We work out some kind of compromise with the power of evil so that we appear to be in charge all the time, but we're not really.

And we know that the day is going to come and, uh, and the deception will be over and we'll no longer be in control. And not only will we know we're no longer in control, but everybody around us will know we're no longer in control either. Because what happens in conversion, you see, is that Jesus Christ himself comes along and faces the strong man who is evil, who maintains this appearance.

And Jesus is the stronger man and he smashes this whole thing, this whole structure in which we learn to depend. You know, the, the, the, uh, our, this is the way we live our life. This is the compromise we have effected. In an evil world, we have maintained this. And Jesus comes along and smashes it. And all that we had trusted in, he destroys. And the weapons by which we thought to live our lives, he has taken away from. And we're left. We're left dependent upon him.

Now this, despite the tragic appearance of it, is the greatest possible thing that could happen to us. Uh, and I could call on some of you to come up here and say this, I'm sure. Because you know what I mean from personal experience. When Christ comes along and challenged this, this whole charade, and blows it out of the water, then for the first time, you understand that you are not meant to live your life by your own devices, to be at the center of your own existence. You are somebody

who is in a situation, whereas the alcoholics are wise enough to say, I can't win this battle. I am powerless to help myself. I need someone else to help me. And it's at that point, perhaps for the first time in our lives, when we take Jesus Christ seriously, and recognize that when he came and taught, he said, well, that's what

I'm here for. Because I have fought the battle that you can't fight. And I have overcome the power of evil, so that it's no longer to dominate you. You are no longer to be subject to the process of desire, temptation, sin, death, which is the process which we know so well. No longer are you to be subject to that. You are to recognize the authority of Jesus Christ in your life and in your circumstance.

[21 : 48] Well, that's how it's meant to work. And you see, what we do then is, I don't become less lustful, or less greedy, or less prone to dishonesty, or less prone to manipulating people, or less prone to any of those things. I am still me, and I still have the capacity. But what Christ does is to help you to see that those things don't lead anywhere. That they are part of Satan's deception by which you have been deceived. I have been deceived. Those things make promises they can't keep.

You know, that's why sex is such a big issue for all of us, is that it makes a whole lot of promises that it can't keep. And we keep going and going and going, and it leads you on and on and on. Or greed does the same thing. It leads you on and on and on, making promises that ultimately it can't keep. And so we're caught in that situation. And you have to recognize that the only way you can live your life from this point on is in relationship to the stronger man. And living your life in that relationship means that the gift of repentance is a gift that you seek daily. And the practice of confession is a practice that you indulge in daily. And the taking hold of the promises of God, which are the promises he's made to us in Christ, are the promises on which your life is based. And you haven't got anything else.

And so you live in that kind of continuing relationship. The same thing works in marriage, of course, because if you happen to be the perfect husband or the perfect wife, it probably means you're not speaking to your partner because she doesn't agree with you or he doesn't agree with you.

The only basis of the relationship is repentance, confession, forgiveness, renewal. And that's the business that Jesus is in on a continuing day-by-day basis. It's not the guy who takes his house and cleans it up in the absence of the unclean spirit, only making himself more susceptible than he was before to the power of evil by his self-reform. See, the only person that can go along and tell somebody, I'd like you to become a Christian, is not a good person speaking to you as a bad person.

[24 : 53] It may only be a person who knows they're bad speaking to a person who doesn't. And that's why you have to talk about Jesus Christ. I want to just finish with this.

And it's actually from the Anglican prayer book. And it's the prayer that is used. It's the prayers that are used when a person comes to be baptized.

To move from self-reform, you know, with jogging and diet and getting up early and not watching television.

All those things by which we often, all those things that are good in themselves, but by which we often deceive ourselves into thinking more highly of ourselves than we ought to think.

These are the prayers. And baptism is the sacrament of entry into this relationship with Christ. Now listen to these prayers.

[25 : 57] This is what's said. Lord of hosts, before the might of whose presence the armies of evil are put to flight, deliver thy servant from the power of Satan.

Cast out of their hearts, his heart, her heart, every evil imagination, deception, everything which exalts itself against the knowledge of thee, and bring every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ.

And grant that this person may have power and strength to have victory and to triumph against the devil, the world, and the flesh.

Well, those are the prayers, you see. And that's the point of conversion. The outward sign of which may be baptism. But that's the point of conversion, you see.

When Satan comes along, or Christ comes along and smashes this thing in which you trust him, and says, I want you to trust me alone, and to live in relationship to me.

[27 : 24] And that's what this story is about. And it's a terribly powerful story, to my mind, that leaves us very little ground.

And you see, that's why, when you go back to here, if you're not going to deal with the problem of evil in men's hearts, the only way to rule is by a machine gun.

The only way we can rule ourselves is by that kind of self-administered violence. And if men's hearts are changed, then the rule comes from their relationship to God in Christ.

It doesn't come from the imposition of external force. And that's what this story is about in Luke 11.

Let me say a prayer. Our God and Father, help us to understand in our minds what it is that you have done for us in Jesus Christ.

The battle that has been fought and has been won. And save us from the ignorance and arrogance of supposing that we could fight such a battle by ourselves.

[28 : 55] and give us the grace to know that unable to help ourselves, we are able to put our whole trust in you.

We ask this in Christ's name. Amen.