

# OpenTheo

## Matthew 12:43 - 12:45



### Gospel of Matthew - Steve Gregg

In this discussion, Steve Gregg delves into Matthew 12:43-45 and sheds light on the subject of demons. While acknowledging that the passage may not yield much information about demons, Steve emphasizes that Jesus' main point is not to be missed. The passage uses imagery of a person's body and home to illustrate how demons can inhabit people, causing their lives to be in disarray. Steve concludes by likening the release from demon possession to the removal of blinders and the reception of freedom and light.

### Transcript

Today, we're beginning our study in the life of Christ at a passage in Matthew chapter 12 in verse 43. I'm reading verses 43-45 of Matthew 12. Jesus said, Now, through the entire paragraph, Jesus seems to be telling us something about demonic spirits.

Although, when he really gets to the end, he lets us know that really this is just an illustration. This is just an analogy of something that has to do with his generation. He's really making a point about the people who were living in his time in his vicinity.

The Jewish people who heard Jesus preach and saw his miracles, but who typically did not believe in him. So really, this paragraph is not so much a teaching about demons as it is a teaching about that generation. However, that does not mean that it does not yield information on the subject of demons as well.

You know, the subject of demons fascinates some, and with others, I'm certainly not fascinated with the subject of demons, but I'm curious about them in some ways. There are many things that the Bible does not say about demons. Now, if the Bible never said anything about demons, I would have no curiosity.

If I never was told in the Bible that there's such a thing as demons, I wouldn't have any questions about them. But we find in the Bible evil spirits occasionally in the Old Testament. Usually, they're sent from God as a judgment against somebody.

But in the New Testament, they're very frequently encountered, both in the Gospels and

the book of Acts. And they're spoken about from time to time in the epistles and depicted also in the book of Revelation. So the New Testament has a great deal of reference to the demons.

However, most of what we learn about the demons is simply that there are people who are possessed by demons, and Jesus and the apostles cast them out. Now, that's the major information we have about demons. More than any other thing, we find examples in the Bible of people possessed by demons and then having the demons cast out of them.

We do not have very much in the way of teaching in the Scripture about demons. And thus, because we are informed of the existence of demons, our minds naturally race to certain questions. Where do these demons come from? What are they all about? Why do they possess people? How do they get into people? If they can possess some people, why don't they possess all people? What's different about the people who are possessed and are vulnerable to being possessed from those who apparently don't get possessed? And how do we know if someone's possessed or not? And how do you get them out if they're there? And how do you know if they've come out? And how do you explain places where they don't seem to come out? Are not these questions that Christians often wonder about? I certainly do.

And I would say that from my study of the Scripture and also of Christian and missionary experience, I have reached conclusions about some of those issues, but I'm not going to talk about them today. What I'm saying is, the Bible doesn't really answer those questions in a direct way. As a matter of fact, we get very little in the Bible in the way of direct teaching on the subject of demons.

And in that respect, this passage is quite an exception. Because Jesus is telling us something very specific about demons. Again, I say his main purpose is other than to teach us about demons, but to say something about his generation.

But at the same time, in the course of doing so, he tells us some things about demons. This is the closest thing I find in all the teaching of Jesus to a focus, or I shouldn't say a focus, but I should say a disclosure of some facts about the demonic realm. Now, I don't want to miss Jesus' main point, and I will get back to it before we're done here.

But I would like to milk out of this passage, if possible, whatever useful information there may be on the subject of the demonic. Because I do believe that Christians encounter demons. I believe there is such a thing as demon possession.

And I think that Christians are in a position to help those who are demon possessed, if Christians recognize it for what it is, and know what to do about it. And so, whenever I find something in the Bible that actually teaches me some information about demons, I'm always curious to know, what can I learn from it? Now, what Jesus actually said about

this, he referred to a demon as an unclean spirit. He says, when an unclean spirit goes out of a man, obviously he's referring to a case where a demon is cast out of someone.

In fact, in the earlier verses of this chapter, we found Jesus, you know, this whole section began with Jesus casting a demon out of someone. Now, Jesus was not necessarily speaking about the issue of that particular man and that particular demon, but he is describing what happens after a demon is, in fact, cast out of somebody. When an unclean spirit goes out of a man, Jesus said, he goes through dry places, seeking rest, and finds none.

Now, that's a fascinating thing. I don't want to become too fascinated, because I don't want to become fascinated with the demonic. But I still must confess, that tweaks my curiosity a little bit.

Why does a demon go through dry places? I think the King James Version says, waterless places. Why? Does a demon have an aversion to water or something? That doesn't seem to be the answer, because on some occasions, we read in the Bible, people who are demon possessed, the demons try to cast their victim into water or into fire, alternately, to try to kill them. It's really hard to know.

I mean, Jesus gives us no more than this, and I don't want our curiosity to get the better of us. But it is questionable. Why would a demon specifically look for a new home in dry places? Now, it's possible that waterless or dry places is used figuratively.

That he may be speaking of spiritually dry places. That somebody who is a well-watered garden, as for example, the Psalms talk about a person who meditates day and night on the Word of God. They're like a tree planted by rivers of water, whose fruit doesn't fail to produce, and their leaf doesn't wither.

Possibly a spiritual wilderness. You know, every man is like either a tree planted by rivers of water, or like a barren wilderness. Maybe, this is what Jesus is saying, that the demons go looking for another spiritually dry person.

A spiritually dying person, dying for lack of God in their life. I don't know. But in any case, he says, he goes through dry places seeking rest and finds none.

Now, that doesn't mean they would always find none, because there are cases in Scripture of demons going out of one person, and then finding another home. But Jesus is describing a situation where sometimes a demon may go out of a man, and not immediately find another home. Find another host, we might say.

A demon being likened to a parasite of some kind that seeks a host. Now, why would this be? It seems interesting to me. That a demon can enter some people, but obviously can't enter everybody, or else you wouldn't have this phenomenon of a demon seeking a home and not finding one.

There's plenty of people around, why doesn't it just go into one of them? It seems clear from this that demons can't just at will go into anyone they want to, or else you'd never have this situation arise where a demon is looking for a home and can't find one. There's plenty of hosts around, potentially. It seems clear that some persons are more vulnerable than others to demon possession, and demons can't just go into everyone they want to.

Even every unbeliever. Now, I've heard the teaching that Christians can't be possessed by demons. I've heard it from Christian teachers, though I haven't found it in Scripture.

But even if we allow that Christians can't be possessed by demons, what about non-Christians? Aren't there a lot of non-Christians around for this demon to go into? We're not told, but I think we can deduce from this that demons can't just go into any person at will. There must be some special circumstance that makes that person vulnerable. And here is a case of a demon going out of one man and looking for another host, another home, and not finding one.

Here Jesus uses the imagery of a person's body being like a home. Because he says, in verse 44, the demon says, I will return to my house from which I came. Now, of course, he refers to the man from whom the demon had been expelled as his house.

It's important for us to realize that the physical part of us has spiritual significance. What I mean by that is that even though there is a distinction between the body and the soul, I believe, and what happens to the soul ultimately is more important than what happens to the body. That is to say, Paul said, for example, though our outward man is perishing, our inward man is renewed day by day.

It's not so great a tragedy if my body dies or deteriorates so long as my soul is doing well, so long as I'm doing well with God in my spirit. And therefore, even though there is a dichotomy between the body and the spirit, yet the body is not without spiritual significance. Jesus referred to his body as the temple when he said, destroy this temple, and in three days I'll raise it up again.

He saw his body as a dwelling place, a house where God lived. And, of course, Paul, more particularly, taught us to view our bodies that way as temples and vessels. We have this treasure in earthen vessels, Paul said in 2 Corinthians 4, and he told us a number of times in 1 Corinthians that our bodies, we are the temples of the Holy Spirit.

We therefore see that our physical bodies don't exist as an end in themselves, but as a place to be inhabited. God wants to inhabit us through his Holy Spirit, and that, of course, is the condition of Christians. But, apparently, there are demons that want to inhabit people, too.

And a person's body can be a house of God or a house of a demon. Either one is

possible, and here we have a demon saying, I will return to my house from which I came, referring to the man in whom he had lived before being his house. Now, I will point this out in passing in case you missed it.

Jesus refers to the demon throughout this story as he. When a demon comes out of man, he goes through dry places. He says, I will return to my house.

What I want to point out about this is it certainly removes any impression that Jesus did not personalize demons in his conception of them. There are many who feel that demons and the devil himself in Scripture are simply an imagery, sort of a figure of speech that really refers to the evil in every man. This is the way some people talk about it.

When the Bible talks about the devil, it's not talking about a personal being. It's simply talking about evil in every man who has been personified for the sake of discussion. But demons certainly are treated as something other than people.

He can't refer to this demon as the evil in a man because the demon goes out of him. And still is looking for another host. We could speak figuratively of a man's evil going out of him if somehow he was reformed or delivered from his bad behavior.

But that evil would no longer exist because it was part of him. But here we have a separate personality. A demonic spirit that was in a man and now is out of the man but still is personal.

Still has hopes of finding a home. And he does not find a home. And so he thinks of his old house, the guy he came out of.

I will return to my house from which I came. And Jesus said when he comes he finds it empty, swept and put in order. Now this is of course a figure of speech.

People don't really take a broom and sweep the insides of their bodies as they would sweep a house. But the idea here is the person from whom the demons came is now reformed. His life was a real mess when the demons were there.

But the demon is gone and that person now has a respectable orderly life. That person is no longer acting bizarrely. That person is no longer tormented.

He is no longer a mental patient. He is more normal. It is like the man of the tombs when Jesus cast the legion out of him.

It says the townspeople saw the man dressed. He was formerly naked but he put on clothes. And he was in his right mind.

So you've got a man who has had demons cast out of him and his life is orderly now. He is in his right mind. He is sane.

He is wearing clothes again, you know. And so here we have the figure of a man whose life is reformed and put in order. And he has maybe got some discipline or some self-control in his life, some character maybe.

But he is also empty. It says he is empty and swept and put in order. It is possible for a person to be delivered from demons and not become a Christian.

And if that person does not become a Christian, he is an empty house. He is uninhabited. You see, if a person is delivered from demons and then becomes a Christian, then the Holy Spirit comes to live in him.

But if the Holy Spirit does not come to live in you and the demon isn't there, then you've got a vacancy sign out there. And so that's the way it is. This house is empty.

It is swept and put in order. That is, the man's life is reformed. But the spiritual replacement for what has gone out has not come in.

The man has not become a Christian. The man is not walking in the Spirit. He is maybe civilized, but he is not sanctified.

And so the demon comes back. And Jesus said, And then he goes, that is, the demon goes and takes with him seven other spirits, more wicked than himself. And they enter and dwell there.

And the last state of that man is worse than the first. Now, when Jesus says seven other spirits worse than himself, he's using, of course, the number seven the way it's often used in Scripture. Not as a mathematical unit, but as a number with spiritual significance.

Throughout the Bible, in the Old and the New Testament, the number seven plays a role more important than its statistical value. Sometimes, of course, it refers to an actual number. But it also has a spiritual meaning of perfection and completeness.

You find this thoroughly in the Old Testament brought up. The Bible talks about the righteous man falls down seven times, but he gets up again. You know, if your brother comes to you seven times in one day and says, I repent, you shall forgive him seven times.

The use of the number seven just means whatever amount it is, the total number. If a man falls down seven times, it means no matter how many times he falls down, he always gets up again. If Jesus says, if your brother sins against you seven times and repents, you shall forgive him.

He means no matter how many times he does. It means the total number. The number seven in Jewish numerology just meant completeness or totality or perfection.

So, when Jesus says this demon comes back and brings seven more, it needn't be literally seven. It can just mean, you know, the man becomes totally possessed. The man becomes totally in bad shape and his latter state is worse than the first.

And that last statement, the last state of that man is worse than the beginning or the first state, seems to indicate, it either means that the second time that he's possessed is worse than the first time he was possessed, or it could even mean that his final state of possession is worse than when he first started out, at the beginning, before he was ever possessed in the first place. It's hard to say. But the point here is, his condition has deteriorated.

He's in far worse condition than he was before because he's totally now under the control of demons. This suggests the possibility that he was possessed before but not totally under the control of demons. Some people think that demon possession means that a person is totally under their control, but that's not necessarily true.

As we read in the scripture of demon-possessed people, there were areas of their lives that were affected, but that doesn't necessarily mean that they had no part of their life under their control. The man who had a demon that made him blind and dumb, he was possessed, and it affected his vision and his speech. But that doesn't mean every part of his life was under demonic control.

But once seven worse demons come in, the imagery from the Hebrew numerology, I think, would suggest the man is totally under the control of demonic powers now. Now, Jesus kind of throws us for a loop by his final concluding statement. He's told us this about demons, but then he says, So shall it also be with this wicked generation.

Now, he's talking about his own generation. It's not the first time he's spoken to them in this passage. He said back in verse 39, An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, referring to them.

In verse 41, he said, The men of Nineveh will rise up in judgment with this generation and condemn them. In verse 42, he said, The queen of the south will rise up in judgment with this generation and condemn it. He's been speaking about his generation, that is the generation that heard him preach.

Like the generation that heard Jonah preach repented, but the generation that heard Jesus preach didn't repent. That's what he's saying. And so he's speaking about the Jewish people, his contemporaries, his countrymen, who had been exposed to his mystery, but had not really benefited long term because they didn't receive it deeply.

Some of them received healings. Some of them, you know, were fascinated by him and followed him for a while. But many did not really become permanent followers of his.

Now, his generation, then, he likens to a man who was demon possessed, but was

delivered from demons. But then got possessed all over again and was fully and totally under the control of demons in the latter state. He said that man is a picture of his own generation.

How does he mean that? Well, I understand it this way. Before Jesus came, that generation of Jews was in darkness. They were at the mercy of the devil because they didn't know the truth and the light had not shined to them yet.

Many of them actually had demons. So many of them were demon possessed. But even the ones that were not were nonetheless under Satan's control, at least partially.

They may have had some areas where they, you know, had some motions of their heart toward God, but they were largely slaves in bondage to sin and the devil. Jesus came and he brought light. And that light improved their spiritual state, at least temporarily.

It's like when a demon was cast out of man, the generation had the blinders removed. The light was given to them. They had opportunity to walk in a new freedom from the devil and from sin.

But many of them didn't. And then the generation remained, as it were, empty. Even though Jesus had brought a measure of light and deliverance and freedom and salvation, yet there were, for the most part, the generation did not benefit long term from it.

They didn't become permanent disciples. And therefore Jesus is predicting that a time will come for his generation where they will be totally under demonic oppression and power. His generation.

Now this was fulfilled in his generation within 40 years, because if you would read the story of the fall of Jerusalem in 70 A.D., as recorded in Josephus, you'll find that before Jerusalem fell, it was under siege for several months. And during that time, the Jews in the city ran out of food. And there were wars between the Jews inside the city, even as the Roman armies besieged it from outside.

As you read Josephus' accounts, and he was a witness, he was there, you cannot help but get the impression these people were out of their minds. I mean, they did things that were not in their self-interest. They should have been fighting off the common enemy outside the walls, but instead they were fighting each other.

They were burning up food supplies inside the city, which was already impoverished. And they were doing that to spite other groups inside the city that possessed the food supplies. They were eating their children.

They were killing each other at random. They were doing the craziest things. I mean, when you read the story of what happened to that generation of Jews later on in 70 A.D., you can hardly avoid the conclusion these people were totally under the power of



demonic delusion.

And I believe that's what Jesus was predicting would indeed be the case. They had received light. They'd received a measure of freedom and light and liberty in the ministry of Jesus.

It's as if a demon had left them. But then when he was gone, they went back to their old ways. As a nation, as a generation, they didn't turn to Christ, and the demons came back in multitudes.

And I believe, personally, that the whole nation essentially came under total demonic control in that period of time when they were being judged by the wrath of God poured out on them in 70 A.D., of which Jesus spoke a great deal, by the way, in other places as well. And he always said it would happen in that generation. Well, we're going to have to continue our discussion next time because we've run out of time.

Tune in next time, and we'll look further at the life of Christ.