ESSAY · OCTOBER 8, 2015

Jesus and Demons and You

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Growing up I believed God was real but couldn't be known. Since that was the case, I concluded nothing mattered.

Nothing Else Mattered

At age 19 I understood, for the first time, that Jesus died in my place and was raised from the dead. That realization changed my life. Suddenly, I knew God was real and could be known and concluded nothing *else* mattered.

I quickly connected with a campus ministry at the University of Texas and devoted my life to fulfilling the great commission: "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matthew 28:19-20).

I fearlessly shared my faith and started meeting with guys in "discipleship groups." It wasn't long before I was addressing groups of college students, not just in Austin, but throughout central Texas. Following graduation I attended Dallas Seminary and led a Young Life club, planted a church, and traveled the country challenging and equipping high school and college students.

Following graduation from seminary I pastored three churches over 24 years—one in Texas and two in Oregon. Throughout this time I continued meeting with men in small groups. I wrote books and contributed notes to three study bibles. For six years I wrote a daily devotional that was distributed to over 200,000 households a month and aired daily on over 200 radio stations.

How Did I Miss It?

Never once during these years of ministry did it cross my mind I had missed a major element of the "Great Commission." Looking back, I ask myself, "how did this happen?"

One day I found the answer in an unexpected place. While confronting the Pharisees about their unbelief, Jesus said, "Why is it you can't understand what I am saying? It's because you can't accept my message" (John 8:43-44).

Their view of Jesus was based on an a priori argument which concluded he could not be the Messiah. Having drawn this set-in-concrete conclusion, they refused to examine any evidence to the contrary.

An A in the Theology of Demons

While in seminary I made an A in the theology of demons. My professor taught me about the origin of demons. The leader of demons. The categories of demons. The work of demons. The future demise of demons. But not once did he, or any other professor, point out that Jesus never sent anyone out to preach the Gospel without specifically

instructing and equipping that person to take action against demons in the same way he had.

What they did teach me is that the heightened demonic activity in the Lord's ministry occurred because the enemy was mounting a concentrated attack. Since they believed this isn't the norm today, they never equipped me to deal with demons as Jesus had. They taught me to fulfill the Great Commission by leading people to Christ and teaching them the Bible.

And so I left seminary assuming I would never meet a demonized person who needed liberation from an afflicting spirit. That assumption prevented me from understanding what the Lord was saying because I couldn't accept his message. Specifically, "And he appointed twelve, so that they would be with him and that he *could* send them out to preach, and to have authority to cast out the demons" (Mark 3:15). Or this, "And these signs will accompany those who believe: In my name they will cast out demons . . . ." (Mark 16:9).

More Than I Thought

I never considered the possibility that the Great Commission included more than sharing my faith, teaching the Bible and training men and women to live out their faith. It also included liberating people from spiritual affliction.

As I continue with this series I hope you'll consider if it's possible your view of spiritual affliction is based on a faulty assumption which prevents you from understanding how Jesus empowered and commissioned his followers. Is it possible we're to do what he did and trust God for the results? Or, are we to assume there are areas of his ministry that only applied to long ago and far away? I'm inviting you to join me on a trip that could transform your life and ministry. But it may also challenge some of your set-in-concrete beliefs.

Next week I'll examine if Christians can be demon possessed.