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DELIVERANCE AND FORGIVENESS

Historians will likely look back on our time as the Age of Specialization. It seems we have specialists for almost everything. We see this in the financial world (investment specialists: bonds, mutual funds, annuities, equities, etc.), in car repair (body, transmissions, engines, brakes, windows, interiors, etc.), in medicine (heart, neurological, allergy, respiratory, urology, etc.), and even in religious ministry areas (pastors, divorce recovery counselors, family counselors, financial counselors, senior adult and children's counselors). We have to focus on a narrow window of information to know enough to help someone or to solve problems. In spite of all the specialization we still have trouble finding the root cause of problems we encounter. Many things we use are complicated devices.

Even more complicated is the human being. We are complex beyond our comprehension. We have three basic parts to ourselves: body, soul, and spirit. Each part is amazingly complex and little understood. Even less understood is the interaction of these three with each other. If our emotions are messed up, then we might become physically ill. If there are spiritual problems in our lives, then everything about us can become dysfunctional. Medical science has learned a lot about the physical part of us, but really knows only a small fraction of the total. The more they learn, the more they realize they don't know. Understanding of the mind, emotion and will of people is a less precise and less developed body of knowledge. The spiritual part of us is still pretty much a mystery.

There has been a movement in the past several decades toward trying to understand the interactions and interdependence of all our parts. *Holistic health* is the term given to this field of study. The Christian community has avoided association with this subject and, consequently, it has been largely the domain of people caught up in Eastern Mysticism. We really do need a Christian perspective on holistic health and the interdependence of body, soul, and spirit. Although Eastern Mystics have introduced error into the subject, the reality of needs of people in all these areas is very true.

Jesus recognized the needs of people in all areas of life. He dealt with physical needs as he healed the sick, lame, and blind. He addressed needs of the soul as he taught compassion for each other and comforted those in distress. He recognized and dealt with spiritual problems of demonic activity in people often. Matthew recorded notable miracles and teachings of Jesus in Chapters 8 and 9 that clearly show the span of his concern and compassion. We find Jesus healing leprosy, paralysis, fever, demon possession, sickness, hemorrhaging, and blindness. He addressed man's will or priorities, the problem of unbelief, forgiveness and brought dead people back to life.

MATTHEW 8:28-34 Jesus had been teaching and healing in the region of Capernium on the west side of the Sea of Galilee. People were crowding around to have their needs met. On one occasion he and his disciple went to the east side of the sea. That area was mainly a Gentile area. On the way over to the other side, a violent storm came up and this was the time he rebuked the wind and the storm ceased.

They went from a storm of nature into a spiritual storm. Two demon-possessed men roamed about the area where they landed. We have so little understanding of this subject and almost no teaching in the churches on this subject. In fact, most seminary-trained preachers dismiss the subject as no more than ignorance and superstition. It is said to be "mental illness." In this particular case the "mental illness" spoke to Jesus and recognized Him as the Son of God. This "mental illness" also realized that there was an appointed time of judgement coming in which "it" or "they" would be thrown into the lake of fire that burns for ever. Luke tells us that one of the men had many "mental illnesses" in him. So many, their names were Legion.

We can learn that the demons that possessed these men knew that Jesus had authority over

them. Just as Jesus had authority over sickness, blindness, and even the forces of nature, He had authority over the spirit world. We can also see these demons wanted to inhabit a physical body so their evil could find expression. They preferred to be in a herd of pigs rather than roam free.

Jesus granted their wish to go into the pigs and just as the devil desires to do to each of us, the "hosts" for the evil spirits were destroyed. Jesus warned us the devil came to kill, steal and to destroy. The demons were slowly destroying the lives of the men they possessed and they quickly destroyed the lives of the pigs.

News spread rapidly to the town about the demon-possessed men. The townsmen came out and pleaded with Jesus to leave. Why would they want Him leave? They were afraid of the power of the spiritual and did not want to openly confront the evil forces around them. They failed to realize that One was there among them Who had the power and the authority to deal with evil. Their lack of trust caused them to reject Jesus. This is exactly our situation today. There are all kinds of evil that possess people and destroy their lives. We are both ignorant of and afraid of the reality of the situation. We do not want to address the problems of evil spirits and demons because we fear what others will think of us (not sophisticated) and we fear the unknown and power of the spirit world. We do not believe that He Who is in us is greater than he who is in the world. Jesus is great than the devil. He demonstrated His power over the demons several times.

MATTHEW 9:1-8 When Jesus returned to the Capernium area people again came to Him in large numbers. Matthew's account of the healing of the paralytic doesn't mention the large crowd nor the faith demonstrated by four men who lowered his bed through the roof into the house where Jesus was teaching.

Not only were there people in need of healing and deliverance, but there were the critics and the skeptics. These had come to find fault in what He said or what He did. When Jesus saw the man on the bed that had been lowered into the room, He did not even address the obvious physical condition of the man. He looked past that to the need of each of us for forgiveness. Just as everyone who has ever lived needs forgiveness, this man did also. It may have been the man had such guilt over the wrong he had done it had caused paralysis. There are situations in which stress can be so great that people do experience severe debilitating physical problems. We do not know this was the case, but Jesus chose to first address the issue of forgiveness of sins.

This act produced a lot of criticism among the critics. They knew that only God could forgive sins. What they did not know was that God was there in their midst. Notice that Jesus did not question the assumption that only God can forgive sins. He did not deny that He had the authority to say what He said. If the critics had been "listening" they would have heard Jesus telling them "I am God."

Jesus addressed the issue of which is easier to say: "Your sins are forgiven" or "Get up and walk." There was no way for the crowd to know if the man's sins were forgiven, but they could instantly tell if he had been healed and could walk. To display His power and authority over both areas, Jesus told the man to "take up your mat and go home." He did it! The crowd was filled with awe and praised God.

We are to do the works that Jesus did. The healing power and the power over the spiritual world have been neglected so long that people have little faith to believe what God can do. Let us not be among the nonbelievers.