

Missed It By That Much  
June 5, 2016

The title of today's sermon is a quote from an old TV show. It was a comedy spoof of spy movies. The lead character was a bumbling kind of guy and not really much of a hero. He would try to do something and fail miserably and then say, "I missed it by that much" (using his thumb and index finger to show about a quarter of an inch space in between), meaning just a little bit. Actually he usually missed it by a lot.

This could be applied to the Pharisees of Jesus' day. If you asked them if they were close to heaven, they would assure you they were. If they missed it, they would say, "I missed it by just a little bit." But we see in today's Bible passage that, as a group, they missed it by a lot.

**Matthew 12:22-23 (NIV)** Then they brought him a demon-possessed man who was blind and mute, and Jesus healed him, so that he could both talk and see. All the people were astonished and said, "Could this be the Son of David?"

Demon possession had definite characteristics that were identifiable. Other passages in the Bible speak of someone being demon possessed, but not blind or mute. Demon possession did not always manifest itself with these symptoms. Whatever those characteristics were, they were present here.

At the same time, this man was not born blind and mute. He had not become blind and mute through a physical accident. His family and friends knew that his blindness and muteness were a result of the demon possession.

So this is a much more powerful demon than usual. Demons were simply angels who had rebelled against God. We have reason to believe that not all angels were the same. Some were more powerful than others. We see this in the Bible. On one occasion, Jesus gave His disciples authority to call demons out of people, and they did. But there was a particular incident when they were not able to do so. When they asked Jesus why they were not able to do so, He explained that it was a particularly powerful demon that required prayer and a greater faith than they had in order to eradicate it.

The demon in Matthew 12 is a very powerful demon. Yet Jesus has easily cast it out. Thus it is obvious that the power of God is present in Jesus in great abundance. So the crowd is not just amazed by the healing, but by how little Jesus needed to do to end a very powerful demon possession. The crowd is amazed at the power of God at work in this healing.

Now, some people, today, do not believe in demon possession because they do not see it taking place today. They make the assumption that whatever is taking place today has always been the way things were. They also assume that God has not limited what Satan can do during our time in history. Yet, we see in the Bible that God does limit the power of Satan on earth at different periods of time and with different people.

For example, we read in the book of Job that Satan was limited in what he could do to Job. He had to be given permission from God to take Job's possessions.

In several different passages of the Bible Jesus foretells that a day will come when Satan will be given permission to do all kinds of miracles and lead the world's inhabitants astray, even Christians, if they had not been forewarned by Jesus.

But that is not happening today. We don't see anyone doing such miracles today in our world. Nor do we see demon possession taking place, at least not in any way that we recognize as such. No, the age we are in is one of God building His kingdom of followers. And in this age God has greatly limited what Satan can do. God is doing miracles on occasion, to show His greater power over evil in our world and lead God-seekers/truth seekers to Jesus.

But here is the point: **Spiritual conditions on earth have been different at different times in history.**

There is no reason to believe that what we see or do not see today is the way it has always been. So there is no reason to doubt that demon possession was real in the ancient world. God allowed that evil, but used it for His own good purposes, often defeating the work of Satan. In this instance, in Matthew 12, Satan had a great power over this man. But God used this possession to show His own, greater power at work in the world. He did so to draw people to the truth in Jesus.

If demon possession is taking place today, it is doubtful that a Christian can be possessed. We have the Spirit of God in us. That leaves no room for the devil.

However, Satan can be a powerful influence in the life of a Christian to the extent that that Christian is giving in to temptation. We must guard ourselves from Satan by working to become pure. We must not see how close to committing sin we can live. Instead, we must pursue purity and full obedience to Jesus, resisting temptation as much as possible.

Let us return now to the text. Again, the crowd is amazed at what Jesus has done. And they ask each other if this might be the Son of David. "Son of David" was a code name for the Messiah, the Christ. A son of David would be a descendant of King David. So the Messiah would be the rightful king of Israel.

**Matthew 12:24 (NIV)** But when the Pharisees heard this, they said, "It is only by Beelzebub, the prince of demons, that this fellow drives out demons."

They said it wasn't the power of God that healed the man. They said it wasn't the Holy Spirit that healed the man. They said it was the devil who healed the man. The Pharisees want to discredit Jesus so much that they lie about what they had just seen.

This wonderful healing, a good thing, they claim is a farce, a con, a subterfuge. The Pharisees cannot deny the healing. But they refuse to admit to themselves or anyone else that God is working through Jesus. This would call for them to change their attitudes towards Jesus. It would mean submitting to Jesus. And this they refuse to do, even if it means going against what God is obviously doing.

**The Pharisees turned their back on truth.** They did not seriously think that Satan was working through Jesus. The facts of the case were as evident to them as they were to the crowds of regular people. They turned their backs on truth and made up a lie and presented it to the people.

To think that Satan would heal this man, knowing that God is going to get glory for the healing is ridiculous. Satan wasn't getting any followers by healing the man. The crowd was praising God for the healing. Many of those in our congregation who suffer from various aches, pains, and diseases would gladly be healed by Satan if he so chose to do so. If Satan has the power to heal my arthritis or restore my hair, I say let him. And then I'll praise God. God will get the glory, not Satan. It makes no sense to think that Satan has healed the man. Jesus says the same thing with his illustrations.

**Matthew 12:25-29 (NIV)** Jesus knew their thoughts and said to them, "Every kingdom divided against itself will be ruined, and every city or household divided against itself will not stand. If Satan drives out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then can his kingdom stand? And if I drive out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your people drive them out? So then, they will be your judges. But if I drive out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. "Or again, how can anyone enter a strong man's house and carry off his possessions unless he first ties up the strong man? Then he can rob his house.

Now, in case you missed it, the strong man in Jesus' story is Satan. To think that Satan is casting out his own demons is ridiculous, Jesus says. No, in fact a greater power than Satan is at work here. God is overpowering the strong man. God is at work here, through Jesus.

Then Jesus warns them that what they have done is the most serious sin, an unforgivable sin.

**Matthew 12:30-32 (NIV)** "He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me scatters. And so I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but anyone who speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come.

This is the sin that some people fear they have committed. What is this sin? Let's look more closely at what Jesus says.

**Matthew 12:30 (NIV)** "He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me scatters.

In-other-words, if you are not a follower of Jesus, you are opposed to Jesus. Jesus was gathering together those who wanted to be right with God. The Pharisees were hindering that work.

**Matthew 12:30-31 (NIV)** "He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me scatters. And so I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven.

**What was the Spirit doing? The Spirit was authenticating Jesus as the truth of God.**

The Pharisees gave Satan credit for what the Holy Spirit was doing. I doubt any of you have done that. You have not seen evidence of the Holy, perfect, good, just, merciful God and called it bad.

The Holy Spirit is still doing miracles today. He is not doing the kind of things that Jesus did. We don't see Him healing people of blindness, deafness, or shriveled legs. But it doesn't take that kind of miracle to be enough evidence of God. Jesus tells what the Holy Spirit would do in our age.

**John 16:7-11 (NIV)** But I tell you the truth: It is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment: in regard to sin, because men do not believe in me; in regard to righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; and in regard to judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned.

The Holy Spirit is working in the world today. He is speaking to hearts to the truth of our sin and Jesus as Savior. It may not seem like as powerful a miracle as healing someone who is blind. But it is no small thing to speak into a sinful human heart. There are too, at times, other things that we call miracles. I have witnessed a few. Some people who experience such things accept the truth they point to. Other people though, call such miracles a coincidence, or credit the power of the human mind, or just walk away and ignore the truth.

**The sin Jesus is speaking of is this refusal to admit and submit to the presence of God.**

God is working today to draw you to the truth of Jesus. Right now you have opportunity to admit that truth and submit to it, submit to God, through faith in Jesus.

The sin Jesus is speaking of, the sin that cannot and will not be forgiven, is to turn your back on the truth of God that God is presenting to you.

This sin is an outright rejection of the clear presence and work of God in your life. It is NOT a slip of the tongue. You don't accidentally commit this sin. You are not tricked into this sin. No, the person who commits this sin is so far from the kingdom of God that he or she is not seeking forgiveness. Jesus said they won't be forgiven. Not that they want to. They are running from God. Maybe you are running from God today. As long as you are running you are headed for an eternal fall. Stop running from the truth. Turn into the truth. Confess your sin to God and receive Jesus as your Savior and Lord. God's mercy is great. Whosoever wishes to be saved can be. Don't use Jesus' words

as an excuse not to come to Him. Jesus says that God so loved you that He sent you a Savior. Turn now to that Savior and live.