

HAUNTED HOUSE HEARTS

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Introduction: (Scripture Reading: Matthew 12:43-45)

- A. It's that time of year again... Ghouls and Goblins are everywhere you look. There's a pumpkin on nearly every porch whose smile lights up the night. The shelves of stores are stocked up on candy. Costume parties have been going on and "trick-or-treating" is right around the corner. It's time for Halloween. Another common tradition of Halloween is a trip to a haunted house.
- B. As we open our Bibles this morning, we find Jesus using a sort of "haunted house" to teach a powerful parable about our lives. His words leave us all asking, "Is my heart a haunted house?"
 - 1. If it is, the results are far more scary & messy than anything in haunted house at Halloween.
 - 2. You may be thinking, "I've seen some pretty demented and scary up stuff in haunted houses. How can this be more messed up than that?"
 - 3. That stuff is fake and we know it... The haunted house we are talking about today is very real! It may be that you're living a real haunted house... your life has become a haunted house.

HOW JESUS COMPARED MEN'S HEARTS TO HAUNTED HOUSES:

- A. Since this is one of the lesser known parables of Jesus, let's start by taking a closer examination of it:
 - 1. We can appreciate this parable more when we better understand it's backdrop. Jesus had been discussing how a people as religious as the Pharisees could be so unrighteous and devoid of spiritual understanding.
 - a. Jesus was walking with his disciples on the Sabbath. They were hungry so they grabbed some heads of grain from a field and ate them. The Pharisees said Jesus broke the Sabbath law.
 - b. Next, Jesus healed a man whose hand was withered, restoring it back to full health. Again they were angry with Jesus saying He was "working" on the Sabbath (ignoring the miracle)
 - c. Then Jesus cast a demon out of a man. This time the Pharisees, not denying the miracle, accused Jesus of casting out the demon by the power of Beelzebul, the devil.
 - d. Jesus takes the opportunity to teach about fruit. Bad fruit comes from bad trees and good fruit comes from good trees. Jesus says that the words we speak come from our hearts.
 - e. The Pharisees then demand that Jesus give them a sign to prove His identity. Remember, they've just seen two incredible miracles. Jesus uses Jonah to make an allusion to the resurrection and the proof it'd provide, but even that wouldn't be enough to bring them to faith in Him.
 - f. They were religious and looked righteous on the outside, but there was so much wrong. They had focused on making things "look right" without actually making things right. They had made sure there wasn't huge wicked acts in their life without filling their life with righteous things.
 - 2. With all of this in mind, we now find Jesus telling a very peculiar parable, but a very pointed one. He compares the hearts of men to a haunted house... a house possessed by a demon **(Matthew 12:43-45)**
 - a. There is a man who was demon possessed, but he had been healed – Demon possession wreaked havoc on people. Just look at the demon possessed man in Mark 5 for evidence. Now this man has opportunity to lead a normal and healthy life. To do good and build relationships.
 - b. His life is compared here to a house. The evil has been removed from his life. His life now looks like a house that has been swept & cleaned out **(Illustration: Empty house, move in ready)**
 - c. Once cast out, the demon wanders around. Eventually it decides to come back and finds the man's "house" (his life) cleaned out and empty... Plenty of room for the demon to move back in.

- d. He moves back in, but only this time he brings seven other demons with him. Now the man's life is more messed up than it was the first time he was demon possessed.
- e. Jesus says this parable isn't so much about any one demon possessed man, but is a description of the moral situation of that generation of people. Jesus had been around many people just like this man (not just the Pharisees) whose lives had unnecessarily become haunted houses.
- 3. There is one clear theme in this parable: When the wrong stuff gets removed from a person's life, they have to replace that wrong with good things, or else the wrong will return. But when it returns it won't just come back, but will come back in a deeper and stronger way than it was before. How could this man have prevented this? Filled his house so the demon had nowhere to live!

B. Application: Is our heart like this haunted house?

- 1. The first thing we need to understand from this parable is the certain truth that something is going to occupy the space available in our hearts, minds, and lives (**Romans 6:12-14**)
 - a. Notice how Paul describes our lives in an "either or" fashion. We will either use our lives for unrighteousness or righteousness. He reminds us of our baptism and what took place at that time. He reminds us of the change that should have taken place and should continue throughout our lives. The unrighteous should be removed & replaced with the righteous.
 - b. **Aristotle's theory:** "nature abhors a vacuum" – He said vacuums do not naturally exist on earth. If you create a vacuum, nature will work to force that space to be filled with something... even if it is just air. So except maybe in space, truly empty space doesn't naturally exist.
 - c. Spiritually speaking, the same concept can be stated of our hearts, minds, and lives.
 - d. This parable speaks to this reality – If you remove something that is holding space in what you love, what you think about, or what you do... something will fill the space. It won't sit empty!
- 2. This parable speaks of the nature of the Christian life. It's not just about abhorring sin & removing it from our lives, but filling our lives with righteousness & goodness (**Rom. 15:14; Eph 3:19; Phil 1:10-11; Col 2:10**)
 - a. Throughout the New Testament the phrase "be filled" appears repeatedly. This shows us that God isn't just interested in getting stuff out of us, but about getting stuff into us as well!
 - b. Are we like the man in the parable of the haunted house? Are we content just leading pretty good moral lives, lives free from the "big sins?" If so, this is only half of the picture.
 - c. Take for instance the works of the flesh and the fruit of the Spirit → Are we walking in the Spirit if we just abstain from the works of the flesh? No! There's positive things that we are to pursue to be walking in the Spirit... love, peace, goodness, righteousness, joy, etc.
 - d. This is what the grace of God is about. God saved us because of what we were, but God also saved us because of what we could become.
- 4. Notice how Peter breaks down the components of holy living. There is the refusal to be conformed to our worldly passions but there is also a determination to pursue holy living (**1 Peter 1:13-16**)
- 5. During those times in our lives that we are struggling with habitual sins, whether in thought or in action, this parable gives show us an important step in winning the battle (**Ephesians 4:22-24; Eph 5:18-21**)
 - a. Many times we get frustrated and discouraged with our struggle against an "ongoing" sin. We have a mindset of repentance and we want to quit, but we find ourselves going back to it. Every time we fall again, we make a renewed commitment to stop, but then we fall again.
 - b. What's the problem? Can be several things, but one common problem is that we simply decide to remove the sin... and that's it. We don't make a determination for what to do in its place.

- c. In this way we are just like the demon possessed man... We've cleaned out the mess but haven't filled its place. In time, the sin we struggled with presents itself again. It finds the place it once held open and is able to move right back in. It's like there's a vacant sign on our hearts!
 - d. The good thing or the righteous thing we fill that void with gives us something to focus on and something to do. Idle time and empty space can be our worst enemy! In those moments where we might give in and return to the old sin, we have something else to pursue.
6. Finally, we from this parable should remind us of our focus as we help others whose lives have become a haunted house. We need to help others fill the vacuum that the world once held (**Gal. 6:1-2**)
- a. Yes, no Christian is an island. This means we have responsibility and accountability to each other. We must be concerned about each other, looking out for each other, and involved in each other's lives. Sometimes this will mean working to help someone fight their struggles.
 - b. When a person decides to become a Christian, their life is going to change and sometimes in a very drastic way. They may be leaving behind activities, friends, family, and priorities that were not good to serve God. That will create a void and we have to be there to help them fill it!
 - c. This could also be a Christian who is struggling with an ongoing spiritual weakness. Those who are "stronger" have to help them by filling their time with things that will make them stronger.
 - d. **Illustration:** The alcoholic and drug addict's worst enemy is often unoccupied alone time. Those who try to help them get involved by doing things with them to fill these moments.