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Presentation Transcript
God-Proofed
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July 26, 2024

Our title today is *God-Proofed*. What's that all about? Well, let's see.

There's a remarkable event recorded in the Gospels. It's about an interaction Jesus had with a Roman centurion. Let's read it. It's in Luke 7, starting in verse 2.

Luke 7:2-10 – *Now a centurion had a servant who was sick and at the point of death, who was highly valued by him. When the centurion heard about Jesus, he sent to him elders of the Jews, asking him to come and heal his servant. And when they came to Jesus, they pleaded with him earnestly, saying, "He is worthy to have you do this for him, for he loves our nation, and he is the one who built us our synagogue." And Jesus went with them. When he was not far from the house, the centurion sent friends, saying to him, "Lord, do not trouble yourself, for I am not worthy to have you come under my roof. Therefore I did not presume to come to you. But say the word, and let my servant be healed. For I too am a man set under authority, with soldiers under me: and I say to one, 'Go,' and he goes; and to another, 'Come,' and he comes; and to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it." When Jesus heard these things, he marveled at him, and turning to the crowd that followed him, said, "I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith." And when those who had been sent returned to the house, they found the servant well.*

"Not even in Israel have I found so much faith." It was unexpected – a Gentile, not a Jew, being faithful. There were two schools of Judaism at that time. One was called Hillel and they tended to be more moderate. And the other was Shammai. The Shammai school believed that you could not enter into eternal life unless you were a Jew, but you could be a proselyte. So, a Gentile could convert to Judaism and enter eternal life – but not just any Gentile. So, here's a Gentile kind of breaking that rule. So, Christ was astounded at his faith.

Also, when Jesus started His ministry, He went to the Gentile areas first. You may remember the story of the woman at the well, where Jesus talked to a Samaritan woman and told her He was

the Messiah. He then, without any disclosure on her part, told her her marital history. At this point, she believed what He said and ran off to tell everyone in town that she'd met the Messiah. Now, notice what happens next. It's recorded in John 4:39.

John 4:39-42 – *Many Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me all that I ever did." So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them, and he stayed there two days. And many more believed because of his word. They said to the woman, "It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world."*

So, they took to Him like mice to cheese – big crowds – and notice this – even before He had done any miracles – by comparison to His own people, they seemed much more receptive, which didn't make sense to the Jews.

By comparison, consider Jesus' disciples – all Jews. If we have read through the Gospels, we see Jesus' disciples didn't understand what He was doing and why He came. Some of them, until the very end, thought He was coming to defeat Rome militarily. They saw Him as a military leader. They thought that was what the Messiah was going to do. They had His first coming and His second coming – both mentioned in prophecy – confused. He told them plainly three times He would be killed by the Jewish hierarchy and they still didn't get it. And they had the witness of John the Baptist, who said that He was the Lamb of God, who came to save His people from their sins. What did that mean to Jews? Well, lambs were used as sacrifices. But they never put all that together.

So, now I have a question for you. How is it that a Roman soldier had more faith than most Jews – maybe any Jews, including Jesus' own followers? Well, I don't want to focus today on the Roman centurion or other Gentiles. I want, instead, to focus on why the Jews had such a hard time recognizing and accepting the prophesied Messiah when He arrived.

Isn't it odd that the very people who had the true testimony and prophecy and the law and the prophets, who professed to worship the true God, who were in an Abrahamic covenant with the true God couldn't recognize their own Messiah when He arrived? And after all the preaching and miracles, the great majority of Jews still rejected Him. Did you hear that? After preaching and all the miracles, the greater majority of Jews still rejected Him. They saw right by all the healings. The priesthood and the Sanhedrin called Him a liar, a deceiver, a sorcerer, demon-possessed. And they plotted to and were successful at getting Him killed. They incited the Romans – their dreaded oppressors – to kill Him. They were in league with them.

Now, here are two more questions: How did all that happen? And why is that important for us today?

Well, I mentioned one reason it might have happened – or, that did happen. They were looking

for a military leader. They confused the prophecies of the first coming with the second, as I mentioned. But why did that happen? Well, this is important. They wanted to be delivered from Rome. It was like the church that I used to be in. Early on, everyone wanted Christ to come back so badly that we saw all the bad things happening in the world as evidence that He was going to come back sooner, rather than later. Our own desires, though sincere, blinded us to the reality of God's plan. And then, we would all talk about that together.... You know, humans, being social beings, develop a group think. They all start thinking alike in groups – not in every single instance, but you've witnessed that, I'm sure. Every church has its own set of language it uses to talk about their doctrines or their beliefs. People start dressing the same way. It's what humans do. In the same way, the Jews of Jesus' day could not see the real reason He came. They mistakenly believed He would return as a military leader to free them from Rome, due to their own desire for freedom. This blinded them to the real reason Jesus Christ came – to die for the sins of mankind and ransom them back from the devil.

And there's another reason they couldn't recognize him. They thought that being a Jew meant they were God's chosen people and, therefore, needed no saving from sin. They had a covenant with God. So, all their lives they'd been taught that they could be absolved of sin by following the written – that's the *Torah*, the instruction from God – the Bible – the Old Testament, we call it – and the oral law – those were non-biblical additions made by the leadership of Judaism.

These doctrines – the oral law contained in the *Mishnah* – oral law and traditions contained in the *Mishnah* – many of them contradicted God's word in the Old Testament and also contributed to their blindness. Every time you see Jesus taking the Pharisees to task – and the Sadducees – it was about something that was added to the law of God, not the *Torah* – not the original word of God – not the Old Testament. Jesus wrote that. Very controversial to some, in *The Chosen*, Jesus said, "I am the Law and the Prophets." Well, He was! They all came out of His mind and the Father's. So, these doctrines that the Jews held, in some cases, contradicted God's word in the Old Testament and also contributed to their blindness. They took all of their traditions as though it was gospel, if I can use that term. They believed it was very essential, in order to please God, that they follow of these traditions. And since these beliefs held the people in submission to the priesthood – without them even realizing it, they were a subjugated people, not only to Rome, but to the priesthood of their day. They were the source of their control over the people – these doctrines that they had – and so that contributed to their blindness as well.

Also – besides the fact that they couldn't recognize Him because they were looking for a military leader – He was a threat to the leadership of the time. They were afraid that He was going to draw people, and they would all leave the priesthood and Sanhedrin and start following this Jesus, who sometimes contradicted them. So, consequently, following Jesus out of those false doctrines would have obviated the need for a priesthood since He was the new High Priest. So, I think they figured that out – the leadership did. We know this to be true because, 30 some years later after Christ died, the temple was destroyed and there was no way to sacrifice or do priestly duties as specified by Moses.

So, the leadership, if they were to maintain control, Jesus had to go. They didn't want to recognize what new thing God was doing, because they would have lost control. They issued edicts that anyone who followed this man and called Him the Messiah was going to be put out of the synagogue. So, that was a very serious thing to them in those days. And they did all of this in the face of the fact that He walked on water, healed those blind from birth and raised the dead. So, there was a lot of evidence for them to look past. And yet, they still couldn't see it.

So, we know two main reasons, then. One, they wanted salvation from Rome more than from sin. They didn't see themselves as sinners. Their emphasis was on the oppression they were suffering from Rome. And following Him would have made it impossible for those in power to keep it. So, those in power resisted Him, plotted to have Him killed, and were successful. So, that's all important, but how did these two situations arise? Well, if we think about it, these two reasons were held in place by what they believed – their doctrine, in other words. Now, at this point, let's enter the devil. Let's start thinking about his place in all this.

We can understand, from the Bible, in the New Testament, the devil was working to get Jesus crucified. In Luke 22:1, it says:

Luke 22:1-3 – *Now the Feast of Unleavened Bread drew near, which is called the Passover. And the chief priests and the scribes were seeking how to put him to death, for they feared the people. They feared they would leave. Then Satan entered into Judas called Iscariot, who was of the number of the twelve.*

So, the devil is right there working his deceptions to try to get Jesus killed – to stamp out God's efforts to erase all our sins. Do you remember that he's called the accuser of the brethren? He goes to God and accuses us for our weaknesses. And once Christ came and removed all of our sins from us, that put him in a bad position. He wanted to continue to hold humanity hostage to sin.

Here's something else. There's an account in Luke that records an interaction that Jesus had with the devil. Let's read it: Luke 4:4:

Luke 4:4 – *And Jesus answered him – that is, the devil – “It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone.’” And the devil took him up and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time – sort of supernaturally – and said to him, “To you I will give all this authority and their glory, for it has been delivered to me, and I give it to whom I will.*

Luk 4:7 If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours.”

So, like the priesthood and the Sanhedrin of Jesus' day, the devil was trying to maintain his control over humanity. And he needed to thwart God's plan to forgive everyone's sins. He was proud of the fact that he had authority over the world and he wanted to keep it. So, he had to

thwart God's plan to forgive everybody's sins. This creature is a malevolent hateful being, who would love to kill every last person on earth. And the only reason he doesn't do that he's not allowed to.

Notice something Paul said in 2 Corinthians 4:3:

2 Corinthians 4:3-4 – *And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.*

So, the devil is the god of this world. He's the one people are worshipping when they think they're worshipping God. Before all this, the Jews went into captivity because they failed to trust and love God. And when they came out of a controlling spirit, gradually used their fear of a return to captivity to add to the law of God – something restricted – forbidden – by the Old Testament and the New. So, the idea was to put a fence around God's law with amplifying rules so that people could not even get close to breaking the law. An example would be...you've probably heard the term *a Sabbath day's journey*. It's used in the Bible. In the *Torah*, there is no restriction on traveling on the Sabbath like that. It was generally considered inappropriate to travel on the Sabbath because it was laborious for them in those days. They were all going to synagogue and celebrating the Sabbath. If they went on a trip, that would limit that. So, they created a rule...I think – if I remember right – a Sabbath day's journey was – I'm not sure about it – but I think it was somewhat less than half a mile. That was something that wasn't in God's law. It was in their tradition. But they condemned people for doing that. And the idea was, if you can't even walk a half-mile, for example – a Sabbath day's journey – then you're not going to be able to really break the Sabbath by taking an all-day trip, for example.

So, the laws they had were stricter than God's laws – to keep you away from ever getting close to breaking one of God's laws. And those traditions were all placed in action because of the anxiety about breaking God's laws. And they became a source of control for the priesthood. They could condemn people and throw them out of the synagogue and persecute them, if they broke these additional rules. So, the devil used God's law – amplified out of fear – to enslave and blind God's people.

If you think about it, it was an ingenious, evil, controlling approach – and subtle! He took a good thing and went too far with it. So, by controlling doctrine, he was God-proofing God's people – blinding them to the real Jesus and His real reason for coming. Jesus was not a restrictive person.

I think it's pretty clear that those are the two main rules and this is a very complicated situation. A lot of it is lost on all of us today, because we don't completely understand the workings of their society and their religion back then. But we know enough about it to know that these things that we've talked about – a desire to be saved from Rome and a lack of understanding about their need for a Savior contributed, and also all the additional laws that the Jews had to follow, which

kept them in subservience to the priesthood, which put them in power and made them jealous to keep it.

But why was Jewish non-acceptance back then important to us today? That's the second thing I said I was going to show you today. Well, in a phrase: same devil, same plan.

Let's read Matthew 24:3:

Matthew 24:3-8 – *As he sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately, saying, "Tell us, when will these things be – He told them earlier that He was going to come back again in power – and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?"* And what was the very first thing He tells them? After He heard their question, He starting talking, and this is what He said: *See that no one leads you astray. For many will come in my name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and they will lead many astray. And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. Do we hear that? We do. Okay. See that you are not alarmed, for this must take place, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are but the beginning of the birth pains.*

So, just as people didn't recognize Christ, for the reasons that we have shown, so also, when He comes back, we are all in danger of being misled by the same tactics – controlling leadership and bad doctrine. We all echo the words of John at the end of Revelation, "Come, Lord Jesus." So, like the Jews, we want Messiah to come. Same urge. But we can't let that urge – that desire – cause us to see things that are not there. We have to be based in reality and listen closely to what Jesus says about the end of the age. Otherwise, our desire to see Him return is going amplify things that we look at in society and in the world, and, because of our bias, liable to misinterpret. So, that's what Jesus warned them about.

You're going to see difficulties and problems and all kinds of trouble. I was thinking about it some time back, and it might be possible for there to be some sort of nuclear limited war and not even be covered in Bible prophecy – a hateful thing to think about. The Bible doesn't say it's not going to happen. So, what's going to happen should that occur? Well, like with Chernobyl, that affected everybody in the world at some point, because of the radiation.

So, if you read past where I just stopped reading in Matthew 24, you're going to see specific clear signs that must happen before Christ's return. And they're there so that we won't be deceived. We should not let our own desire to be free of the devil's oppression blind us to the reality of Christ. He very tricky.

So, the example of what happened before should teach about what we need to do today. Now, he also uses our fears of losing control and false teachings to blind us to what's really going on. When I say *losing control*, I'm talking about those "in charge." We see this in the bigger picture of Christianity. And we also see in our little Church of God corner of the world. We read in the

Gospels...we see Jesus enthusiastically urging people to follow Him. And we see the disciples enthusiastically, after Christ, doing the same. What we never see is Jesus trying to coerce or limit people in any way. Who they followed and what they believed was completely up to them.

Now, that was totally contrary to the environment – the spiritual environment – they lived in. They were controlled at every step by laws that were added to God’s law – not a part of the Bible. There’s a strict warning in scripture never to do that – not to add to and not to take away from! But they did. They added to. Those laws that they added to God’s law caused them break God’s law, in some cases. Jesus took them to task many times for that.

So, when Jesus came on the scene, He didn’t try to control people or guilt trip them. He trusted that God would work His plan for each person, and, by His power, lead them when and where He wanted. He came to deliver the message, not to control everybody.

In our Church of God tradition, it has not been that way so much. We have trouble trusting God’s power in us, as I’ve said in times past – trouble trusting the Holy Spirit – afraid of it – afraid of what God’s going to do next. We might lose control. The brethren might go somewhere else, so we have to control them.

I noticed in *The Chosen* recently that they’ve been teaching us that Peter became the head of the church. That cannot be proven out of the Bible. We can’t even prove that any one person was the head of the church after Christ returned to heaven. What we actually see in the book of Acts is a working together of the leadership to make wise decisions. Now, there may have been somebody at the head of the church, but you can’t prove it from the scriptures. If that was all that important, don’t you think God would have made it clear in the Bible? Who is in charge is only important to those who want to be in charge, but to God, not so much. *He’s* in charge and He knows what He’s going to do. Besides all of that, the Bible clearly reveals to us whose church it is and who is the head of it. It’s Jesus Christ. No one else.

So, regarding the other deceiving issue – doctrine – let’s listen to what Paul said in 1 Corinthians 2:1:

1 Corinthians 2:1-2 – *And I – he said – when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.* Jesus Christ and Him crucified. That’s the core of the gospel – the good news of His death and resurrection and the eternal life that He provides to us. He didn’t say, “I’m determined to know nothing among you, except which day the Passover is on and in what language we should say Jesus’ name, and where you attend services – which group you’re in.” If we would all place emphasis on essential truth, instead of trying to carve out a unique doctrinal area with which to blind ourselves, things would go much better for all of us. Even with issues about the Sabbath, after Christ returns, and everyone who has loved others is resurrected, when someone asks Christ if there is still a Sabbath, and if so, what day of the week

it is on, once He answers that question, we will all instantly and easily know what to believe and do. These are only issues for the present time, not the future.

Now, some people get worried about that – that, oh, he doesn't believe in the Sabbath anymore. Nothing could be further from the truth. The Sabbath is a part of the *Torah* – the original Bible that Jesus Christ brought to earth and He wrote for God. He *is* the Law and the Prophets. So, I'm going to do those things always. But I also understand that people take advantage of those specific things and use them to divide us all from other people. And not just that we do that, but others do it to us as well. They're not a part of us because they keep the Law of Moses.

So, if we would just stick to the simple things, the devil will *not* have opportunity to God-proof us. We might even be able to recognize Jesus when He returns. And more importantly, we might *know* that we are not Him – in our anxious desire to control.

Okay, so what did you learn today? I hope that you didn't try to write down the whole message. All you need to write down is the things that you learned – that were new to you – or the connections you made with things you already knew, or possibly questions you have for further investigation. That kind of note is going to help you so much more than having an imprecise copy on paper, when you could just download my transcript any time you want, or listen to it orally, and have it all right there for you. So, don't duplicate effort. Focus on what God is teaching you, as you listen to every sermon that you hear.

This is Bill Jacobs for LifeResource Ministries, serving children, families, and the Church of God.

We are a youth advocacy ministry. One of the reasons we made this presentation is to strengthen you in the faith – not just for yourself – but so that you can help all your congregation, including its children, who are a vital part of your spiritual family, and a vital responsibility that you have before God, as a Christian, to create a strong safe place in which our children can grow in a relationship with Jesus Christ. You should remember, and so should I, as adults – as adult members of a congregation – we are responsible to help promote peace, safety and inclusiveness among our group.