

A House Divided

Call to Worship: Psalm 75

1st Scripture: Mark 3:20-27; Matthew 9:32-34

2nd Scripture: Matthew 12:22-30

Introduction

Having exposed the fallacious and unbiblical view of the religious leaders, concerning their abuse of the Sabbath Day, Matthew moves on to further expose their wicked and corrupt hearts as they move on to deny the obvious power of God upon Jesus, the Christ. To this end, his audience ought to see how hardened the Pharisees were, in that, they went so far as to blaspheme the Person and work of the Holy Spirit. Even in the face of the obvious, they rejected the evident power of Christ, as He healed a man of multiple ailments. And here, as well, we see the utter hardness of the human heart, which when so full of pride and envy, can actually contend with even undeniable and powerful evidences brought to the senses, in spite of having a superior education.

I. A Powerful Testimony to the Lord's Messianic Claims (vs. 22-23)

“Then one was brought to Him who was demon-possessed, blind and mute; and He healed him, so that the blind and mute man both spoke and saw. And all the multitudes were amazed and said, “Could this be the Son of David” (vs. 22-23)?

So, here a man has a combination of several ailments which the Lord had healed singularly in the past. This man was blind (he could not see), he was mute (he could not speak), and he was possessed by a demon. So, if there were ever a complicated healing, this would seem to be the one. And if ever the power of the Lord would be revealed at its peak, it would be upon healing such a man as this, which all the more, speaks to the utter hardness of heart and evil motivations behind the Pharisees motives, when they yet still deny Him, even to the degree of blaspheming the Person of the Holy Spirit, who worked in, by and through Jesus, in every sign and wonder that He performed.

And so, we are told here that this demon-possessed, blind and mute man was brought to Jesus, and He healed him, leading him to be able to speak and see again. Matthew limits the details here, because, while the miracle is powerful, he wants to emphasize what happened after the miracle was performed, within the context of him exposing the wicked hearts of the religious leaders. And so, this sets the context for all that follows, beginning with the fact that the multitudes were amazed, and were beginning to consider receiving Jesus as the Messiah. Notice, they say, “Could this be the Son of David?” And as we have seen in the past, the label, “Son of David,” was another way of referring to the promise that was made by God to David, affirming that the Messiah would come from his loins. And so, the multitude is saying, in essence, “Could this actually be the long-awaited Messiah?”

Deeply concerned about the multitudes receiving Jesus as the Messiah, the Pharisees go out of their way to discredit Jesus, even to the extent of attributing what He had just done, to the work of satan (“Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons”). Having our context in place then, let us move on to consider more closely this response of the Pharisees.

II. The Pharisees Attempt to Discredit the Lord (vs. 24)

“Now when the Pharisees heard it they said, “This fellow does not cast out demons except by Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons” (vs. 24).

Notice, we are told that the Pharisees gave this response when they “heard it.” Heard what? That is, when they heard the multitudes begin to say that this Jesus might be the “Son of David,” after seeing Him heal the man. And so, again, we see them doing what they can to flush out the spark of faith that is beginning to erupt in the multitudes, as they are starting to connect Jesus with the Old Testament Messiah, prophesied about by the prophets. They know very well that, if the people begin to receive Jesus as the Messiah, then they are finished. All of their religious pomp, pride and misuse of the law would be exposed and they would be brought back down to the level of the average Israelite. And so, they would either have to humble themselves and receive Jesus as their Messiah, which was not an option to them, or figure out a way to discredit Jesus, even in spite of the fact that He really did perform these signs and wonders. The healings were undeniable. And brethren, that itself is another testimony to the miraculous signs

that Jesus had performed. Even the religious leaders, who hated Him and were against Him, never denied the fact that He did perform miracles. The people reading Matthew's Gospel, at the time, would have known this, because even the religious leaders did not deny it.

And so, they look for a loophole, as it were. They look for some means of discrediting Jesus while acknowledging the fact that He did perform these miracles. And that is when they come up with the idea of going to the extent of blaspheming the Holy Spirit, in seeking to discredit Jesus, by attributing His miracles to the working of satan. And in doing this, sadly, they further dig their own graves, committing the unpardonable sin, which we will address next time, Lord willing. You see, denying Jesus, especially with ill motives, comes with a price, doesn't it? It may buy you some time in this life. It may enable you to maintain some high position, or to secure some measure of wealth in this life, but it adds a tremendous mountain of judgment to your ultimate condemnation... and eternity is a long, long time!

And so, what is their response? "This fellow (notice, intentionally contrary to the possibility of Him being the Messiah, they say 'this fellow'; this nobody, this phony imposter...) does not cast out demons except by Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons."

And so, how do they seek to discredit the Lord's Messianic authority, even in the face of Him performing such a profound sign? Recognizing that the power to perform the miracle must be real, they simply attribute that power to the working of Satan rather than God. Again, they have to acknowledge what has undeniably happened. They have to acknowledge that true power was exerted. A blind, mute, demon possessed man, now sees, speaks and is in his right mind. They have to acknowledge the supernatural here. And so, they attribute that supernatural working to the work of satan, as a means of accounting for the reality of the miracle (and the power exerted in performing it), while seeking to discredit the Lord by aligning Him with demons and evil forces.

Now, before we consider the Lord's response, for a moment, let us note that this is not the first time they had accused our Lord in this way. In one of our first Scripture readings, we saw back in Matthew 9:32-34 that after our Lord had healed a different demon-possessed and mute man, the Pharisees responded, "He casts out demons by the ruler of the demons." And so, they

had already used this accusation before, in the face of our Lord's miracles. However, here, our Lord chooses to respond to their foolish, wicked and senseless accusation.

III. The Lord's Response (vs. 25-29)

We can divide our Lord's response into three parts, before honing in on His concluding statement in this portion of the text.

1) First, to expose the utterly foolish logic of the argument of the Pharisees, we are told, "But Jesus knew their thoughts, and said to them: "Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and every city or house divided against itself will not stand. If Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then will his kingdom stand" (vs. 25-26)?

While the motivation for the accusation of the Pharisees is wicked, Jesus entertains their accusation for a moment, especially to expose how illogical and foolish it is, before the multitudes, whom the Pharisees were seeking to turn away from Jesus. And in essence, He says, "Look, you accuse me of casting out demons by satan, but why would satan seek to war against, and tear down his own kingdom? Why would he war against himself? Every kingdom that is divided against itself will always, ultimately, collapse." Imagine for a moment if an army was moving out against an enemy, and then suddenly, the army turned against itself, and soldiers from the same side began to fight against each other. That army would have no chance of advancing against the enemy, and in fact, more than likely, the enemy, if they find out about what is going on, would attack at that very moment, and utterly crush the opposition. Well, satan is a lot smarter than that. There would be no sane reason for him to start exorcising his own minions, when he is trying to contend with God. The logic itself is absolutely ludicrous, and the accusation falls in upon itself. And the same would prove true with a divided city or house... eventually they would collapse. And so, while the Lord knows that the Pharisees are just digging for some desperate explanation to explain Jesus's supernatural power, so as to discredit Him before the multitudes, He yet, entertains and exposes the foolishness of their accusation in this way.

2) Secondly, knowing that the Pharisees themselves are insincere with their ridiculous and wicked accusation, the Lord moves on to show that, nevertheless, they will be held accountable for making it.

Notice, in verse 27, He adds, “And if I cast out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they shall be your judges.” Now, what does our Lord mean by the first portion of this statement? Who is the Lord referring to, when He speaks of their “sons” here? Certainly, others were casting out demons, such as the Lord’s Apostles and the seventy that He had sent out, but this would seem to indicate that some from among the Pharisees themselves, or even perhaps their disciples, had either alleged to have had the ability to cast out demons, or were actually involved with doing so. And to this end, the Pharisees would have acknowledged these exorcisms as being real and of God. And so, by making this statement, the Lord is exposing the hypocrisy of the Pharisees, who, on the one hand, would have acknowledged the legitimacy of demons having been cast out by their own number (and that, by the hand of God), while accusing our Lord of doing the very same thing, but by satan. Their accusation was completely unwarranted, unfounded, and again, entirely illogical. And so, the Lord exposes their hypocrisy for making this kind of a judgment against Him, while validating others from among their own ilk. They were willing to allow for a blatant contradiction in their affirmations because their motives were insincere and diabolically-conceived.

And that is why He then adds the frightening, inevitable consequence of this wicked accusation (which again was really the product of wicked motives, and not a real concern), when He states, “*therefore* they (that is, your sons) will be your judges.” In other words, “by their actions, and your acceptance of their actions as valid and good, while speaking boldly against my actions (in the very opposite sense) as evil,” you will be bitten by your own hypocrisy at the final judgment. Your own sons, and your own hypocrisy, will come back to hit you, and you will have to give an account for what you are doing here, especially in attempting to lead these multitudes astray. There will be hell to pay!

3) Thirdly, the Lord then positively affirms that what He has been doing, is of God, and He follows this up with a parabolic illustration to help get His point across. “But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you. Or how can one

enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man? And then he will plunder his house" (vs. 28-29).

Having already dismantled the foolish notion that He has been casting out demons by satan, here He then adds, "And if indeed I do cast out demons by the Spirit of God; if what ought to be obvious to you and everyone else is indeed true, then know this: The Kingdom of God has come upon you. If you are willing to stop playing foolish games and to face reality, know that the evidence of the Kingdom of God having arrived, is actually affirmed by these very signs, and therefore, you are actually working against it!" This statement is actually as much of a warning to the Pharisees, as it is an exhortation to repent of what they are doing. The Lord is here telling them, in no uncertain terms, that they are at war with God and His Kingdom, if what Jesus is doing is indeed from God. And of course, it is, based on the irrefutable evidence that He has already provided. And so, our Lord here, is pulling the earth out from underneath their feet, as it were, and showing them that they are standing above the fires of hell, at this very moment! God's Kingdom, which has been proclaimed from the beginning, has arrived, and they are presently at war with it.

And then, the Lord's follow-up parable further affirms and exposes the truth of the matter, supporting the fact that the Kingdom of God has indeed arrived. You see, it's not only the case that the Lord is not casting out demons by satan, which would be self-destructive to satan's kingdom, but furthermore, the Lord's ability to cast out demons by the Holy Spirit is actually evidence of the fact that He has bound satan, so that, He could plunder all that satan has wickedly taken control of. One cannot enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man. And then, he can take whatever he wants. The fact that Jesus is casting out demons, and rescuing sinners from their condemnation and from the wicked deception of satan, evidences the fact that Jesus has bound satan, removing his authority and ability to hold people captive anymore. And on a side note, brethren, I believe that this text is very helpful when trying to understand what the Revelation says about satan being bound for a thousand years, but we will leave that for another time.

Finally then, having completely dismantled the accusation of the Pharisees, Jesus leaves them with a very stern warning.

IV. A Stern Warning (vs. 30)

“He who is not with Me is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me scatters abroad” (vs. 30).

The Kingdom of God has, indeed arrived, and the miracles of Jesus served to affirm that reality. He had bound satan, such that He could free those who were formerly held captive by their sins, and this freedom was also symbolized by the freeing of those who were demon possessed. And the reality of God’s Kingdom having arrived comes with a most sobering declaration. You either subject yourself to God’s Kingdom and His King, or you perish with everyone else. And Christ is the King, whom God has appointed over His Kingdom, and so, you either submit to Christ; you either kiss the son while there is still time, or you will perish, when His anger burns but a little. And this is what is entailed here, when the Lord, after dismantling the Pharisees’ foolish accusation, brings the arrow of warning right to their own hearts. “He who is not with Me is against Me...” There is no middle ground. The Pharisees were down another notch even, because they were blatantly and professedly against the Lord. But, here the Lord states, “Look, it is not even enough to be neutral, let alone to blatantly oppose Me. God’s kingdom has arrived, and I am the appointed Ruler of this Kingdom. And if you are not with Me; if you are not actually working for Me, then you are against Me; then you are My enemy!” “And he who does not gather with Me” (he who does not serve to help build My Kingdom, by leading people to Me, let alone leading them away from Me), “scatters abroad.” If you are not a builder in Christ’s Kingdom, then you are a scatterer and a divider... you work contrary to it. And what happens when you strive against God and His Kingdom, and His anointed King? Well, read Psalm 2, to get the end of the story. Let’s just say that it is not a pretty sight, and the consequences are unending in duration!

And friends, let me just pass this warning of our Lords, on to you, this morning, if you are not in Christ; if you have not repented of your sins, and subjected yourself to the King, whom God has placed over His Kingdom; over His Kingdom which alone will stand in the end. Consider these words again: You are either with Christ or you are against Him! You either work with and for Him; you are either redeemed unto serving Him and building His Kingdom, or you are working against Him. There is no middle ground! Are you counting the costs of your

decisions, and the independence that you are holding onto, which really is no independence, but rather, slavery to sin? The ship of this world is sinking quickly, and you are going down with it! And your sins will take you right to hell! [The Gospel!!!]

[Note the nature of pride. It leads us to willfully deny the obvious even unto our own destruction! Gauge it in yourself, friends!]

V. Concluding Thoughts

Brethren, let me just conclude with one final exhortation for us. Do you see the broader principle given in our Lord's words here, concerning the dangers of division? A Kingdom or a city or a house divided cannot stand. Ultimately, it will fall. Is it any wonder then, that there is so much of a Scriptural emphasis placed on "unity" when addressing God's deep desire for His people? Division always destroys. It doesn't happen overnight, but it does happen. It's like water that continually drips upon solid metal. The metal seems so impenetrable, but over time the water corrodes the metal and causes it to rust, until it ultimately cuts through it. That is what disunity does to a people. We see it happening in our country right now, don't we? It is one of the evidences of God's judgment upon us. Like Rome, we are imploding. Our biggest enemies, in fact, are not China or Russia or any Islamic nations. Our biggest enemy is our own disunity, which has been fostered by our utter abandonment of God and His Gospel. By the time the enemy comes against us, in any effective way, we will already be paper thin, because of the division that exists in our country. And how many homes are destroyed because of constant disunity in the home?

But brethren, worst of all, is to find disunity being fed and cultivated in Christ's church. When we begin to lose sight of that ultimate goal of loving and serving Christ; when His interests fall beneath our own; when we get so caught up in our own desires and material interests, disunity begins to take root. The self-restraint which is provided by that three-fold cord that latches onto Christ; that Christ-centered drive which enables us to bear with one another in love, such that we strive to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, begins to wear away. The gasket of love and compassion chips away within the valve, and the water begins to seep out. The corrosion increases more and more, until water is spraying all over the place,

ultimately rusting, rotting, penetrating and destroying what once seemed so indestructible. Oh brethren, may we be zealous to protect the unity of this church! May we be conscious of our own wondering hearts, ensuring that Christ is our all, and that, our hearts are constantly set toward exercising grace and compassion toward one another. May we be constantly, ever aware of God's forgiveness toward us, in Christ, such that we would be constantly prepared to forgive, love, edify and bless one another. A house divided cannot stand! Let us never do the work of satan by setting the cross hairs of division, against one another. Christ prayed that we would all be one, as He and the Father are One, so that, the world will believe that God sent His Son to redeem it! Our Gospel lamp, as a church, brethren, is only as good as our unity!

Amen!!!

Benediction: Jude 1:24-25