

Scripture Reading:

Luke 11:14 “And [Jesus] was casting out a demon, and it was mute. So it was, when the demon had gone out, that the mute spoke; and the multitudes marveled. **15** But some of them said, "He casts out demons by Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons."

16 Others, testing Him, sought from Him a sign from heaven. **17** But He, knowing their thoughts, said to them: "Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and a house divided against a house falls.

18 If Satan also is divided against himself, how will his kingdom stand? Because you say I cast out demons by Beelzebub. **19** And if I cast out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they will be your judges. **20** But if I cast out demons with the finger of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you.

21 When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own palace, his goods are in peace.

22 But when a stronger than he comes upon him and overcomes him, he takes from him all his armor in which he trusted, and divides his spoils.

23 He who is not with Me is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me scatters.

24 "When an unclean spirit goes out of a man, he goes through dry places, seeking rest; and finding none, he says, 'I will return to my house from which I came.' **25** And when he comes, he finds it swept and put in order. **26** Then he goes and takes with him seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter and dwell there; and the last state of that man is worse than the first."

27 And it happened, as He spoke these things, that a certain woman from the crowd raised her voice and said to Him, "Blessed is the womb that bore You, and the breasts which nursed You!" **28** But He said, "More than that, blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it!" ”

"Binding the Strong Man"

This morning we celebrate Ascension Sunday coming again to three important Sundays in the church calendar which brings to our remembrance each year the gracious salvation we have received from God

- Christ's bodily ascension to God's right hand
- The out-pouring of the Holy Spirit to the Church at Pentecost
- And then Trinity Sunday where we celebrate the covenant wonders of our gracious Triune God

We then begin the season of ordinary or normal time in the church calendar which reminds us each year that we are to hear & DO the Words of Christ, as we see Jesus teaching His disciples again this morning!

Last year I had my able assistants bring messages on these three Sundays, but this year our passages from the Gospel of Luke fit nicely with all three Sundays so we will continue to work our way through the Gospel of Luke and then on to the Books of Acts. Since we are coming up on our fourth annual feast day at the Fisher property, it has reminded me that it might be time to take a Sunday off, so you will be hearing from Mike and Theron in June!

This morning we see Jesus teaching that the strong man will be bound!

- **We will see this accomplished by the Ascension of Christ**
- **Today, just as here with Jesus we will find skeptics who do not believe that Jesus is Lord!**

Paul reminds us of this in his second epistle to the Church at Thessalonica: 3:1 “Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may run swiftly and be glorified, just as it is with you, 2 and that we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men; for not all have faith.”

- **From our human standpoint, these skeptics, the ‘unreasonable and wicked men’ can never be satisfied...**

We have often told a psychiatric joke to illustrate this:

The man who comes to his appointment and announces that he has died: He is a dead man! All the usual treatments fail. He then tries the special plan, but it fails when even though he causes the man to bleed then declares: “Dead men DO bleed!”

- **This is what we have from the religious leaders of that day...**

A stunning miracle performed by the Son of God, their Messiah, before their very eyes and they immediately say it must be Satan casting out Satan... It is like the confused patient saying, “LOOK dead men do bleed!”

- **BUT Jesus is not dissuaded from His task of teaching His disciples and us about the defeat of Satan and the coming of His Kingdom.**

Luke’s orderly account is moving us toward what we celebrate on Ascension Sunday and teaching us all that it means...

- **We saw the demons forced to obey the 70 that were sent out**
- **Here Jesus casts out one demon and uses it to teach how the strongman will be bound**
- **Jesus is on His way to Jerusalem for His appointed time, where He will declare from the Cross “It is finished” Sins have been forgiven, the strong man has been bound and overcome:
Jesus will now rule on high!**

Luke will begin the Book of Acts with Christ's Ascension from the earthly perspective and then in Revelation John is taken up into heaven so we can see it from that perspective as well. Luke begins Acts where his Gospel left off with the Resurrected Jesus appearing to His disciples... Acts 1:6 "Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him, saying, "Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" *[End-times madness is nothing new: We always seem to have the wrong priorities and the wrong time!]*

7 And [Jesus] said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority. 8 But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." 9 Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight."

Two angels explain that Jesus will one day return in like manner. We then see the same event from a heavenly perspective in Revelation chapter five which we read together this morning: John weeps because there is no one in heaven that can open the scroll with the seven seals and then Jesus appears as the lamb that was slain and all of heaven rejoices and worships Him

Your homework can be Revelation chapter 12 where we see another perspective on the Son being enthroned and Satan defeated

As we reflect on this we should remember the encouragement that Jesus gave to the returning seventy: "23 Then He turned to His disciples and said privately, "Blessed are the eyes which see the things you see; 24 for I tell you that many prophets and kings have desired to see what you see, and have not seen it, and to hear what you hear, and have not heard it."

➤ **The Ascension of Christ is the defeat of Satan... The overcoming of the strong man! We see this clearly... or at least we should!**

The Old Testament Saints desired to see it more clearly, but it was there: The promise of Genesis 3:15 where the seed of the serpent would bruise Messiah's heel, but the Seed of the Woman, Christ would crush his head. This should jump out at us every time we see an account in the Old Testament where a woman crushes a man's head!

There are specific references to Jesus ascending to God's Right hand:

Psalm 110: "Jehovah said to my Lord, "Sit at My right hand, Till I make Your enemies Your footstool." 2 Jehovah shall send the rod of Your strength out of Zion. Rule in the midst of Your enemies!

[this is NOT something that we just watch from the sidelines...]

3 “Your people shall be volunteers In the day of Your power; In the beauties of holiness, from the womb of the morning, You have the dew of Your youth. 4 Jehovah has sworn And will not relent, "You are a priest forever According to the order of Melchizedek." 5 Jehovah is at Your right hand; He shall execute kings in the day of His wrath. 6 He shall judge among the nations, He shall fill the places with dead bodies, He shall execute the heads of many countries.”

- **We must understand that this is the Old Testament picture of the Great Commission – *Like Ps. 83!***
- **Christ having ALL authority and power sitting at God’s right hand judging the nations with His Gospel, putting the sheep on His right hand the and goats on His left**

7 He shall drink of the brook by the wayside; Therefore He shall lift up the head.
[We should remember the Lord’s Table as a time of refreshment]

- **ALL of this should be reflected upon as Jesus confronts a demon and drives him from this man in Luke’s account:**

BUT as we said there are skeptics who simply will not believe... The demon is cast out and their response is that Satan is attacking Satan... Right up there with “dead men do bleed!” There are many modern critics who want to deny all of these miracles in the Scriptures and we rightly battle with them over the truth of the Scriptures. However, we must always remember that we could convince them that the miracle happened, that a REAL demon was cast out of a REAL man and it would still not bring the gift of faith if God has not graciously granted it: These religious leaders were there as eyewitnesses and remained hardened in their unbelief.

Our battles over evolution are similar today: Battles we must fight but ones we must remember to fight properly -- Mention Dawkins & aliens -- Mention weakness of I.D.

- **So as we have tried to focus on application this year, what does all of this mean for us today?**
- **Jesus presents two pretty sobering pictures: And we need to learn from both of them!**

In verse 23 Jesus summarizes the battle: “He who is not with Me is against Me and he who does not gather with Me scatters.”

- **There is no neutrality in the Christian life: You are either for Christ or against Christ you either gather the harvest or scatter the harvest.**

Now this can quickly turn into ugly theological battles, taking up sides or teams like the Saints at Corinth.

- **The question WE want to ask is are you with US or against US when it comes to our local ministry or doctrinal distinctives**

- **The PROPER focus is being with Jesus or against Jesus... Helping Jesus to gather or working against Jesus by scattering**

How do we know which camp we are in? The answer comes as a woman in the crowd proclaims how blessed Mary's womb and breasts are because they ministered life to Jesus. Jesus does not dispute this, but quickly adds the bottom line of our lesson this morning: "More than that, blessed are those who hear the word of God & keep it!"

Do you love Jesus? Then you will keep His commandments!

So think about that the other way... Are you keeping the commands of Jesus?

- **Do you set aside one day in six for the Lord's Day and give God His tithe from your first fruits?**
- **Do you faithfully attend worship and study God's Word and approach His throne of grace in prayer on a regular basis?**

Do you begin to see how all of these lessons tie together in Luke's orderly account?

Being baptized puts someone in the covenant BUT that does not mean that they are "for Jesus" or can't be "against Jesus." Judas was circumcised, sat under the teaching of Jesus for over three years, performed miracles under His command and partook of the Passover meals...

- **Was Judas helping Jesus to gather or was he scattering things all over the place?**

As I said, there can be NO neutrality in the Christian life... And we should see it is VERY practical: If you love Jesus keep His commands:

- **Husbands love your wives... But you don't know what my wife is like!**
- **Wives submit to you husbands in the Lord... But my husband is not serious about following Jesus!**
- **Children obey your parents... But I want to be my own man or woman someday and REALLY follow Jesus!**

I could go on with examples from commerce or politics or education but I think you get the picture.

- **Jesus goes on to present a very sobering warning to remind us about the nature of the battle that is raging and it will be easy for us to think it does not apply to us.**

As we listen again to the warning please remember that Jesus is here addressing those who DO think there can be middle ground, neutrality or some sort of "nice" Christianity!

- **Those who tell themselves they are doing OK based on looking at the lives of others, you should beware.**
- **You children if you think all of this is what your parents believe and that when you grow up you will decide for yourselves what side you are on, you should beware.**
- **Those who do not believe that Jesus came to bring conflict and that some folks are going to be upset when we share the truth, you should beware!**

Jesus has just cast a demon out of a man who was mute who then immediately spoke. Think about this man as someone who just settles back into life and thinks all is well now that the demon is gone and he can speak again. He thinks it is no big deal whether he chooses sides in the battle he was right in the middle of...

- **This is what Jesus wants us to have in mind as He explains more about the battle that is raging...**

Remember, this comes RIGHT after Jesus says those who are not with Him are against Him: 24 "When an unclean spirit goes out of a man, he goes through dry places, seeking rest; and finding none, he says, 'I will return to my house from which I came.' 25 And when he comes, he finds it swept and put in order. 26 Then he goes and takes with him seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter and dwell there; and the last state of that man is worse than the first."

- **You see what this man does now that Jesus has cast out the demon is very important!**

This applies to individuals, it applies to families, it applies to churches and it can even apply to nations:

In fact, when Matthew shares this account he adds another statement by Jesus that clearly shows that He was pointedly instructing those religious leaders who accused Him of using Satan's power to cast out demons...

- **Jesus went on to say, "So shall it also be with this wicked generation."**

That was not addressed to Caesar or the Greek philosophers. It was not addressed to pagan temple prostitutes or wicked business men...

- **It was addressed to God's chosen people who had forgotten whose side they were on and the nature of the battle that was being waged!**

Jesus has come in power: He is going to save His people from their sins, establish His Church and fill the earth with His Kingdom!

We are either with Him or against Him and this allegiance shows up in the little things...

IF God's priorities are not your priorities then don't tell me you are on His side.

IF you tell me that you have no problems because you are not going out and doing anything “wrong” then you are a perfect candidate for some of those demons wandering in dry places!

The Christian faith is NOT a ‘nice’ affair: It is a battle and we are to be soldiers in this battle:

- **Christ has ascended in power and He rules in power: He has bound the strong man and expects us to help gather up His spoils!**

We are going to sing Psalm 83 as our hymn of response this morning.

- **It is one of those imprecatory Psalms that the modern church is not sure what to do with, but it is surely a battle song!**

It will remind us that we are in a battle and that we need to be on the right side... Someone who chooses to have “tea” in that nice flat spot in the middle of the battle field is going to get it from both sides!

BUT we must also remember that this is also a Gospel Psalm...

- **God is going to destroy ALL of His enemies, bringing them to humiliation: Some He brings to life others He sends to hell**

This contrast was seen clearly with the two thieves crucified on either side of Jesus, AND we should see this in Psalm 83...

Some He humbles at the foot of the cross where we see our fallen helpless estate and the awful price that had to be paid for our sins... As it says in verse 16: “Fill their faces with shame, That they may seek Your name O Jehovah”

Others he will humble with His wrath sending them to the Lake of Fire for all eternity: Which is the contrast in verse 17: “Let them be confounded and dismayed forever; Yes, let them be put to shame and perish”

Paul rightly says that ALL are under the curse of sin, so the preaching of the Gospel puts us ALL to shame...

- **God’s sheep respond with repentance and obedience**
- **Goats are hardened in their sin**
- **There is no third way!**

No matter how smart that confused patient might have thought that he was, in our psychiatric parable, the truth ALWAYS remains what it is and thus “dead men do not bleed!”

Communion Meditation:

Hebrews 12:1 "Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, 2 looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.."