

Matthew 12:22-32

I. Verse 22 – Then a demon-oppressed man who was blind and mute was brought to him, and he healed him, so that the man spoke and saw.

There is no drama or fanfare here! We're not told who brought the man to Jesus. We're not told what they said or how they asked for healing. We're not told what Jesus said or did in order to heal the man. We're not told how the man responded. All we are told is that Jesus healed the blind and mute man so that he spoke and saw. And, of course, this means that Jesus *cast out the demon* which was causing the blindness and muteness. You get the feeling that freeing demon oppressed people was a very *normal* part of Jesus' ministry. Already in Matthew, we have seen this to be true.

- ✓ Matthew 4:24 – His fame spread throughout all Syria, and they brought him all... those oppressed by demons... and he healed them.
- ✓ Matthew 8:16 – That evening they brought to him many who were oppressed by demons, and he cast out the spirits with a word.
- ✓ Matthew 8:30-32 – And the demons begged him, saying, "If you cast us out, send us away into the herd of pigs." And he said to them, "Go." So they came out and went into the pigs.
- ✓ Matthew 9:32-33 – As they were going away, behold, a demon-oppressed man who was mute was brought to him. And when the demon had been cast out, the mute man spoke.
- ✓ Matthew 10:1 – And he called to him his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out.

And now, once again, we see Jesus delivering a demon-oppressed man.

II. Verse 23 – And all the people were amazed, and said, "Can this be the Son of David?"

The people are amazed, but still very skeptical. We might also translate their words like this: "This couldn't be the Son of David, could it?" (cf. Carson) The crowds couldn't deny the miracles, but in many other ways, Jesus didn't fit the popular expectations of what the Messiah would look like (a political and military deliverer). So the crowds are just barely entertaining the thought that Jesus could be the Messiah, and yet it's enough to drive the jealous Pharisees to insanity.

III. Verse 24 – But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, "It is only by Beelzebul, the prince of demons, that this man casts out demons."

Even the Pharisees cannot deny that Jesus is casting out demons. And yet to cast out demons *requires* a power beyond that of any mere man. So then, by *what* power is Jesus casting out demons? Well, the answer is simple. The Pharisees have *already* decided that Jesus cannot possibly be the Messiah – He *cannot* truly be of God. Therefore, by a simple process of elimination they are left with only one option: Jesus must cast out demons by Beelzebul, the prince, or leader of the demons. This is not just a really horrible insult. The Pharisees are accusing Jesus of sorcery, which deserved the death penalty according to God's law. And the majority of the people of Israel had at the very least a form of godliness that would shudder at

the idea of being in league with Satan. In their attempt to discredit Jesus and turn the crowds away from him, the Pharisees are pulling out all the stops. Yes, Jesus casts out demons, but He does so by the power of Satan. And so in their zeal, the Pharisees have become completely and totally irrational.

IV. Verses 25-26 – Knowing their thoughts, he said to them, “Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and no city or house divided against itself will stand. And if Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then will his kingdom stand?”

“Knowing their thoughts” is the same thing as saying: “knowing their hearts and motives.” “*Knowing their thoughts...*” Let us remember that Jesus is as intimately familiar with our hearts, and our motives, and our thoughts as He is with our most public actions and deeds. With Jesus, there is no such thing as a private life and a public life.

✓ Hebrews 4:13 – And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

May this thought cause us to be truly humbled! The basis for our pride is always our public image, and never our secret thoughts. If our heart and motives were visible to all those around us, perhaps we would not think so highly of ourselves. And yet it is our heart and motives that Jesus *always* sees.

Of course, the Pharisees’ argument made no sense at all. If Satan is supplying the power to cast out his own demons, then he is undoing, and fighting against, his own purposes! And if Satan is fighting against himself, then he is doomed to self-destruct. Someone could conceivably say that Satan allowed a demon to be expelled for some diabolical purpose of his own (cf. Morris), but remember that we’re not talking about just *one* isolated exorcism. Notice the Pharisees said: “It is only by Beelzebul, the prince of demons, that this man *casts out demons*.” So the Pharisees are trying to say that Jesus *regularly and routinely* casts out demons by the power of the prince of the demons. But Satan is certainly not this stupid. And indeed, in all that Jesus has said and done, He has demonstrated that He has absolutely nothing in common with the father of lies and the destroyer of men’s souls. Lenski writes: “Opposition to Jesus upsets men’s logic. They may put forth as being convincingly sound what is absurdly unsound.” I’m reminded of how the Pharisees rejected John because he was so austere, and then they rejected Jesus because He freely enjoyed the gifts of God (11:16-19). The reality is that *every* argument and reasoning against the claims of Jesus is always absurdly unsound and can be motivated only by unbelief. Jesus has left not only the people of His generation, but the people of every generation without any rational excuse for rejecting Him. So as we share the truth with others, we need to be alert to the contradictions in the reasonings of men. Indeed, we must come to see the contradictions and irrationality in our *own* doubting and unbelief. We must not be ashamed of the Gospel, for it is clearly and incontrovertibly the *power of God* for salvation to everyone who *believes*.

V. Verse 27 – And if I cast out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they will be your judges.

“Sons of the Pharisees” probably refers to the Pharisees’ followers or disciples. Jesus has just argued that Satan would never cast out his own demons. Therefore, either the followers of the Pharisees were, in fact, empowered by God, or they were not actually casting out demons, but practicing some form of magic and trickery (cf. Acts 19:13-16; Mat. 7:22-23). But we don’t have to decide anything on this in order to understand Jesus’ argument. The logic runs like this: “If you accuse me of casting out demons by Beelzebul, then why don’t you accuse your own followers of doing the same thing? But they would obviously deny any such charge as completely ludicrous and insane! Therefore, the testimony of your own disciples will condemn you in the Day of Judgment.”

Now then, *if* Jesus is regularly and routinely casting out demons (and no one denies that He is), and if Jesus is *not* casting out demons by Beelzebul (and to say otherwise would be insane), then what other explanation are we left with?

VI. Verse 28 – But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.

Jesus assumes that the only other alternative to casting out demons by Beelzebul is casting out demons by the Spirit of God. But Jesus has another, even more important point to make. “*If it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.*” We remember Matthew 12:18 – “Behold, my servant whom I have chosen, my beloved with whom my soul is well pleased. *I will put my Spirit upon him...*” But what was different about Jesus from any of the other exorcists of His day? Well, when Jesus cast out demons, He cast them out not by a complicated ritual or formula, and not in the name of any other... when Jesus cast out demons, he cast them out merely “with a *word*” (Mat. 8:16). Jesus said to the demons possessing two men on the other side of the Sea of Galilee, “Go”, and they went (Mat. 8:30-32). The authority that Jesus’ disciples had over unclean spirits, to cast them out, was given to them by Jesus (Mat. 10:1). There were even others *outside* of the disciples who were successfully casting out demons *in the name of Jesus* (Mk. 9:38-39)! Therefore, when *Jesus* regularly and routinely casts out demons, He proves that He is the Son of *David*, and that the promised *kingdom of God* has arrived. The omnipotent rule and reign of God has come upon the Pharisees in the person of the Messiah, Jesus Christ.

Notice that Jesus says that the kingdom has come *upon* the Pharisees. The idea is that the kingdom has already “happened” to the Pharisees. It has overtaken them, and established itself already in their very midst whether they wanted it to or not, and without their even realizing it (cf. France). On the one hand, this seems shocking and astonishing. On the other hand, perhaps we can identify. In our sinfulness, it is easier for us to see the visible over the invisible. It is easier for us to see the physical over the spiritual. May we not be so blinded to the true realities of the Messiah’s kingdom! We need God to open our eyes, and give us spiritual sensitivity to the reality of His rule and His reign through Jesus Christ, the Messiah. We need God to give us spiritual sensitivity to the spiritual *realities* of living our lives within the kingdom of God as those who are now seated with Christ in the heavenly places (Eph. 2:4-6). This means setting our mind “on the things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For [we] have died, and [our] life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is [our] life appears, then [we] also will appear with him in glory.” (Col. 3:2-4)

So the kingdom of God has come upon the Pharisees in the person of the Messiah, the Son of David, and we can know this because by the Spirit of God, Jesus regularly and routinely *casts out demons* with a word of command. After all, there are really only two kingdoms, the kingdom of *God* and the kingdom of *Satan*. Now of course, the kingdom of God has always been, and always will be supreme. We're not talking about dualism here – two equal and eternal principles/powers of good and evil. Satan is not God, and his power can ultimately only serve the sovereign purposes of God. But it is still true that these two kingdoms stand in absolute and uncompromising opposition to each other. The great *enemy* of God is Satan. And the great *enemy* of God's kingdom is Satan's kingdom. Satan is called the god and ruler of this world (2 Cor. 4:4; Jn. 14:30) – “this world” referring to fallen humanity in opposition to and rebellion against God. So when Jesus, by the Spirit of God, is regularly and routinely casting out demons with a word, this can only mean that the promised rule and reign of God has *arrived*. God has *always* been ruling and reigning. But *now* His rule and reign have come in the promised Messiah. *This* is something new! Indeed, Jesus continues with these awesome words in verse 29:

VII. Verse 29 – Or how can someone enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man? Then indeed he may plunder his house.

Now it doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure out what Jesus is saying here! Jesus has tied up the strong man (who is Satan) and is now carrying off his possessions at will (cf. Carson and Lenski)! The authority and power of Jesus is greater than Satan's, and so Satan can only helplessly watch as Jesus plunders His house and rescues those who were subject to his rule. What we have here is the reversal of what happened in the Garden, when the Serpent had his way with Adam and Eve. Satan tempted Adam and Eve, and by their own disobedience, Adam and Eve sold themselves into Satan's service to do Satan's will. You see, men are subject to Satan's rule not because he has forced them, or coerced them, or overpowered them, but because they have sinfully chosen to believe his lies. There has never once been a helpless victim of Satan – only guilty victims in need of repentance (2 Tim. 2:24-26). But when Satan tempted Jesus with lies and deceit, Jesus resisted with the truth of God's Word and then actually ordered Satan to depart from Him (Mat. 4:1-11). We could say that it was with this defeat of Satan in the desert that Jesus began the binding of Satan. If Jesus is already plundering Satan's house by reclaiming those who had been oppressed by demons, then obviously there must be some sense in which the strong man of the house has already been bound.

✓ Luke 10:17-20 (cf. Jn. 16:8-11) – The seventy-two returned with joy, saying, “Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name!” And he said to them, “I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. Behold, I have given you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy.”

And yet there is a sense in which the binding of Satan was not complete until the cross. It was in reference to the cross that Paul wrote:

✓ Colossians 2:15 – [God] *disarmed* the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by *triumphing* over them in [Christ].

And yet again, there is a sense in which the binding of Satan was not complete until Christ was resurrected from the dead and ascended to the right hand of God.

- ✓ Revelation 12:5, 9-10 – She gave birth to a male child, one who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron, but her child was caught up to God and to his throne... And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world—he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him. And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, “Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down.”

With the coming of the kingdom of God, Satan has been bound. He has fallen from heaven like lightning. He has been disarmed and put to open shame. And now that he has been bound, his kingdom is being plundered. What does this binding, and this falling, and this disarming mean? These are obviously three different figurative ways of describing one very literal reality. Where does Satan’s great power lie? It lies in his ability to keep people under his influence and rule through lies and deceit. Satan used deceit in the garden with Adam and Eve. Satan used deceit in the desert with Jesus. Jesus says that Satan “has nothing to do with the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies” (Jn. 8:44). The Apostle John refers to Satan as “that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world” (Rev. 12:9). So to say that Satan has been bound, and cast out, and disarmed, is to say that his power to deceive has been severely limited and curtailed (cf. Rev. 20:1-3). It is to say that many (cf. 2 Cor. 4:4) who were once under the powerful influence of his deceptions and lies will be set free as their eyes are opened to the truth.

- ✓ John 12:31-32 – *Now* is the judgment of this world; *now* will the ruler of this world be cast out. And I, *when* I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.

This was not the case in the Old Testament. Before Christ, Satan was allowed to keep the nations in almost complete and total darkness through his lies and deceptions (this even included Israel to a great extent; Eph. 2:11-12; Acts 7:51-53). But in the present age, the age of the Messiah’s kingdom, Satan has been bound, his kingdom is being plundered, and multitudes of people (both Jews and Gentiles) are being saved.

- ✓ Acts 26:17-18 – I am sending you [to the Gentiles] to *open their eyes*, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.
- ✓ Colossians 1:13 – He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son.

This is the wonderful reality to which our eyes need to be opened more and more. And this is the reality that was proved and displayed as by the Spirit of God, Jesus regularly and routinely cast out the demons with a simple word of command. The kingdom of God has come in the Messiah. And now Satan has been bound, and his kingdom is being plundered. Praise the Lord!

Conclusion

And yet the binding of Satan and the plundering of His kingdom has filled Satan with wrath. John writes that having been cast out of heaven, the devil has come down to the earth in great wrath, because he knows that his time is short – he knows now that his days are numbered (Rev. 12:12). And so now John says that Satan is making war on those who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus (Rev. 12:17). Satan still seeks to deceive us, disguising himself as an angel of light (2 Cor. 11:13-14), and *because of the sin* that remains within us, we can still be vulnerable to his lies. This is why Peter warns us:

- ✓ 1 Peter 5:8-9 – Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world.

James also warns us:

- ✓ James 4:6-7 – “God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.” Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

And then there is the warning of John:

- ✓ 1 John 4:1, 4 – Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world... you are from God and have overcome them, for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.

Paul writes:

- ✓ Ephesians 4:26-27 – Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil.

And finally:

- ✓ Ephesians 6:11, 14-18 – Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil... Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of *truth*, and having put on the breastplate of *righteousness*, and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the *gospel of peace*. In all circumstances take up the shield of *faith*, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; and take the helmet of *salvation*, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the *word of God*, *praying* at all times in the Spirit.

Because we live in the age of the Messiah’s kingdom, we know that Satan has been disarmed, bound, and cast out of heaven, and now his kingdom is being plundered. But we also know that Satan has been filled with great wrath, and that he is waging an incessant war against all those who have been delivered from his rule. We need to remember that we have a powerful enemy who seeks to destroy us through lies and deceit, and by tempting us to doubt the goodness, the sufficiency, and the truth of God’s word. We must remember that our struggle is not against flesh

and blood, but against the devil and his forces (cf. Eph. 6:12). And so we must resist him, *firm in our faith*. We must give no opportunity to the devil (any place for a foothold). We must put on the whole armor of God, knowing that one day the devil will be “thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet [will be], and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever” (Rev. 20:10). As Martin Luther writes: “And tho’ this world, with devils filled, should threaten to undo us, we will not fear, for God hath willed His truth to triumph thro’ us. The prince of darkness grim, we tremble not for him- his rage we can endure, for lo, his doom is sure: one little word shall fell him.” And he ends with these words: “The body they may kill; God’s truth abideth still: *His kingdom is forever.*”

Teaching our Children

- Q.** When the Pharisees heard that the people were wondering if Jesus could be the Son of David because of His power to cast out demons, what did the Pharisees say?
- A. The Pharisees said that Jesus was casting out demons by the power of Satan, the ruler of the demons!
- Q.** How did Jesus show that this was impossible and made no sense at all?
- A. Jesus pointed out that if Satan were supplying the power to cast out his own demons, he would be fighting against himself!
- ✓ Talk with your children about the fact that *whenever anyone* doubts God’s truth or disbelieves God’s Word, their reasons can never truly make sense.
- Q.** If Jesus is not casting out demons by Satan, then how is He casting out demons?
- A. Jesus can only be casting out demons by the Spirit of God.
- Q.** What did Jesus say we can learn from the fact that He is regularly casting out demons by the Spirit of God?
- A. We learn that God’s kingdom (His rule and reign in the Messiah) has now arrived!
- Q.** Did the Pharisees recognize the presence of God’s kingdom?
- A. No. They couldn’t see it. We must pray that God would open *our* eyes and make us able to *see* His rule and reign through Jesus Christ (See Eph. 2:4-6; esp. Col. 3:2-4).
- Q.** What had to happen before Jesus could start casting out Satan’s demons?
- A. Before Jesus could plunder Satan’s house, he had to bind Satan! (See Scriptures on bottom of page 4 and top of page 5)
- Q.** How did we first come under Satan’s power and rule?
- A. We gave ourselves over to do Satan’s will by sinfully believing his lies and doubting God’s word (cf. Gen. 3:1-7).
- Q.** How did Jesus begin the binding of Satan?
- A. When Satan tempted Jesus, instead of believing Satan’s lies, Jesus defeated Satan with the truth of God’s word (Mat. 4:1-11).
- Q.** How is Satan bound (disarmed / cast out)?
- A. Satan’s power and ability to deceive has been greatly limited. He is no longer allowed to keep the nations in darkness (*see Scriptures on bottom of page 5*; contrast Eph. 2:11-12)
- Q.** The binding of Satan and the plundering of Satan has filled Satan with anger. Upon whom does Satan take out his anger?
- A. Satan tries to take out his anger especially on those whom Jesus has rescued from his rule.
- Q.** How does Satan try to take out his anger on those who have been rescued from his rule?
- A. See Scriptures on page 6 (including Revelation 12:12, 17 in first paragraph)
- ✓ Read the last paragraph (beginning at the bottom of page 6); sing “A Mighty Fortress”