

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Third Sunday in Lent, March 8, 2015

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 447, 458:7, 279, 267, 401.

Lessons: 2 Samuel 22:29-41, Romans 8:1-14, Matthew 12:22-20.

Sermon Text: Luke 11:14-28

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

When an army is fighting a battle, there has to be complete unity in fighting the battle. A business has to have everyone behind a plan to make it work. A sports team has to have everyone working for the goal. I think you realize that in these kinds of situations, people must all be on the same side to be successful.

How much more, then, is this true spiritual matters? Today Jesus performs a miracle and explains that

WHOEVER IS NOT WITH JESUS IS AGAINST HIM

- 1. Christ casts out a devil.**
- 2. He explains that you cannot be for Satan and against him at the same time.**

Jesus emphasizes *"He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me, scatters."* It is that simple. If you are not with Jesus, on Jesus' side in every battle; if you are not on God's side, you are against Jesus and against the true God. You cannot be neutral or indifferent.

In the miracle Jesus performs in our text you have another example of how Jesus overcomes the presence and power of evil in the world. His power is greater than that of demons, who are the fellow evil spirits with Satan, the devil. Jesus' power and authority reverses the effect of sin. This exercise of power is why Paul can call the gospel the power of God. We read in Romans 1:16-17: *"I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith.""*

The history of the gospel includes the history of how Satan and sin are overcome through Jesus' work. *"For the kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power."* (1 Corinthians 4:20)

We read in Ephesians about this power of God and what Jesus Christ through his power has accomplished: *"I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way."* (Eph. 1:17-23)

Luke writes in our text that *"Jesus was driving out a demon that was mute. When the demon left, the man who had been mute spoke, and the crowd was amazed. But some of them said, "By Beelzebub, the prince of demons, he is driving out demons." Others tested him by asking for a sign from heaven."*

Luke doesn't give us much historical setting of this story. He simply states the fact that Jesus cast out a demon that was dumb, that is, could not speak. This evil spirit also prevented the man from speaking, and thus

this man could not praise God with his voice. This miracle impressed people, some favorably, some unfavorably. Three groups of people are mentioned as being influenced by the miracle of casting out the demon.

The great majority of the people "*wondered*". That was their usual status after some extraordinary proof of Christ's power. Had they but searched the Scriptures and believed what Jesus said of himself, their astonishment might have had some value. Their direct descendants are people today who want to bear the Christian name, who might marvel at the beauty and power of the Gospel, but are not interested in its deeper meaning, that is, in the salvation of their souls.

The second group was smaller. It came from the Pharisees, and their feeling toward Christ was that of malignant hatred. Mocking, they remarked that in and through the power of Beelzebub (the god of flies) or Beelzebul (the god of dung), the prince and foremost of the demons, Jesus cast out demons. That was just plain slander. Notice that they didn't exactly say Jesus cast out demons by Satan, but accused him by using a sort of a euphemism. They didn't outright accuse him of doing things by the power of Satan, but everyone knew exactly what they were thinking because everyone knew the words Jesus used and what they meant.

And the third group, agreeing with the second in their hatred of Jesus, tempted him and sought a sign from heaven from him, as though the many signs and wonders which had been done previously were not sufficient evidence of the Lord's divine mission. To this day the enemies of the Lord resort to lies and slander to harm the work of the Gospel. Their goal is to suppress the truth of God's Word using any way they can.

Jesus uses the accusation that he casts out demons by the power of the chief demon, Satan, to emphasize our theme: "*He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me, scatters.*"

Luke goes on with his narrative. "*Jesus knew their thoughts and said to them: "Any kingdom divided against itself will be ruined, and a house divided against itself will fall. If Satan is divided against himself, how can his kingdom stand? I say this because you claim that I drive out demons by Beelzebub. Now if I drive out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your followers drive them out? So then, they will be your judges. But if I drive out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come to you."*

By his divine omniscience, Jesus knew the thoughts of his enemies and gives a line of argument that leaves them and their slanderous blasphemy in disgrace. Every kingdom that is divided against itself is destroyed. People who are fighting for a cause must be united. We see this kind of thing even in recent world history.

If Jesus were in league with the prince of the devils, and yet cast out devils to their own harm and disgrace, then it follows that there is a division in the kingdom of the devil, and how will his kingdom then stand?

Then there is another argument. If that accusation were true and the power of Jesus over the demons were derived from Satan, how were they going to explain the fact that their own followers, their disciples, were acting as exorcists, going about through the country and attempting to cast out devils? We read about some of them in Acts 19: "*Some Jews who went around driving out evil spirits tried to invoke the name of the Lord Jesus over those who were demon-possessed. They would say, 'In the name of Jesus, whom Paul preaches, I command you to come out.'*" (Acts 19:13)

If they accused Christ of driving out demons by the power of Satan, they were condemning themselves and their own followers. But, on the other hand, if the miracles of casting out devils which Jesus performed were due to the power of God, which is really necessary in true exorcising, it was an indisputable proof that in and with Christ, the kingdom of God had reached them and come upon them. In his person and in his message they had the means of obtaining everlasting life if they would only accept the grace of God.

In a very graphic way Jesus now tries to show his audience what his coming into the world meant, so far as the rule of Satan was concerned. "*When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own house, his possessions are safe. But when someone stronger attacks and overpowers him, he takes away the armor in which the man trusted and divides up the spoils. He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me, scatters.*"

In Jesus' explanation, the strong man is Satan. The stronger one is Jesus Christ. Satan's cause is ultimately lost because Jesus Christ is the stronger one. This was part of the message of John the Baptist, who

said ***“one more powerful than I will come, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie.”*** (Luke 3:16)

Isaiah records God’s promise of the coming Savior in this way: ***“Therefore I will give him a portion among the great, and he will divide the spoils with the strong, because he poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors. For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.”*** (Isaiah 53:12 NIV)

The devil is the prince of this world and has the children of unbelief in his complete power. And up till now he had held his own without any difficulty to speak of. All his subjects had been willing and obedient. But now the Stronger one had come, in the person of Jesus, the promised Messiah. He came upon the devil and vanquished him. And not only that, but he reduced him to utter subjection and helplessness by taking from him his weapons and his armor, his power in which he placed his trust, and dividing the spoils among his own followers. Paul writes of Jesus overcoming the power of Satan in this way: ***“When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross. And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.”*** (Col. 2:13-15)

These spoils, victory over death and the devil, belong only to those who have chosen this Champion as their own Lord; because those who are not with Christ, on his side, taking his part at all times, are against him and are his enemies; and he that is not working with Jesus in every respect must be considered as belonging to those that disperse and scatter the fruit of his ministry and his work.

Jesus’ work means that Satan is no longer in control. The spoils are the benefits of salvation. Jesus’ lordship is an expression of grace. Neutrality is opposition to Christ.

In life we can be neutral or indifferent about many things – sports, a color of paint, whom to elect to public office, what to eat for supper. But we can’t be neutral or indifferent about Jesus Christ.

It is popular in our day to be neutral. Nonpartisanship is attractive. Tolerance is highly valued by the sinful world, especially where sin is committed. God clearly identifies what is sin. Man would like to ignore that or change people’s minds about what God calls sin. Our world, our nation, even our state and its cities are doing everything they can to soft-pedal sin and make everyone accept what they – the sinful unbelievers – accept and approve, even if God condemns it as sin. When we find the Pope, who is allegedly the head of Christianity in the world, saying “Who am I to judge?”, people think everyone who claims to follow Christ should not judge sin. But there are times and places when Christians must speak out against sin and warn of the eternal judgment of God against unrepented sin, even if it is unpopular. You cannot be both for and against Christ. You are with him or you are against him. It is that simple! You can’t have it both ways. You are either for Jesus or against him.

The devil, the chief evil spirit, wants nothing more than to make us his and to put us completely in his power all the time. And so he is happy with any progress he can make in his fight against everyone who believes in God.

So it is really a daily, constant struggle against Satan, although he may make it seem that he just isn’t so bad. He wants nothing more than to make bad seem good, to make evil seem pleasant, to make disobedience to God seem acceptable and OK. But Jesus has the power in this struggle, and gives us the power as he assures and comforts us in Matthew 28:18-20: ***“And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.”*** Yes, Lord Jesus, Be with us always! Amen.