

One Stronger than He

Introduction

The Text

¹⁴ Now he was casting out a demon that was mute. When the demon had gone out, the mute man spoke, and the people marveled. ¹⁵ But some of them said, "He casts out demons by Beelzebul, the prince of demons," ¹⁶ while others, to test him, kept seeking from him a sign from heaven. ¹⁷ But he, knowing their thoughts, said to them, "Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and a divided household falls. ¹⁸ And if Satan also is divided against himself, how will his kingdom stand? For you say that I cast out demons by Beelzebul. ¹⁹ And if I cast out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they will be your judges. ²⁰ But if it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. ²¹ When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own palace, his goods are safe; ²² but when one stronger than he attacks him and overcomes him, he takes away his armor in which he trusted and divides his spoil. ²³ Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters.

²⁴ "When the unclean spirit has gone out of a person, it passes through waterless places seeking rest, and finding none it says, 'I will return to my house from which I came.' ²⁵ And when it comes, it finds the house swept and put in order. ²⁶ Then it goes and brings seven other spirits more evil than itself, and they enter and dwell there. And the last state of that person is worse than the first."

²⁷ As he said these things, a woman in the crowd raised her voice and said to him, "Blessed is the womb that bore you, and the breasts at which you nursed!" ²⁸ But he said, "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it!" (Luke 11:14–28)

A World at War

- A. Whenever we come to a text dealing with Satan and demons, we are at once reminded that we are living in a world at war, a cosmos in conflict.
- B. I know this is America. I know we enjoy relative peace, when it comes to the other nations of the world at least. But I say it on the authority of the Bible, this is not peacetime.
 - 1. The Scriptures could not be more plain. In the spiritual dimensions, there is a battle underfoot. From the opening pages of Genesis until the closing of the book in Revelation, God is engaged in combat with the devil. There is a collision of powers, a clashing of kingdoms, a world at war.
 - a. And the war is waging all around us even now.
- C. And the whole point of Jesus' arrival is to finally stomp out the head of this serpent and bring an end to all this mess: "The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil" (1 John 3:8b).
- D. And that's the sort of thing we see Him up to in our text this morning. Four things we're going to look at as we make our way through it: (1) The Restoration of a Man (v. 14); (2) The Response of a

Crowd (vv. 15-16); (3) The Reasoning of a King (vv. 17-23); and (4) The Requirement of a Decision (vv. 24-28).

(1) The Restoration of a Man (v. 14)

- A. This demon oppressed man really only makes a quick cameo appearance in v. 14. We're not told much about him. And, indeed, not much is really made of the miracle itself here. In many ways it seems only to serve as a backdrop for the conflict that ensues between Jesus and the crowd.
 - 1. But, nonetheless, this man and his restoration at the hands of Jesus is worth our reflection for a moment.

- B. The one thing here that particularly captured my attention is the subtle connection that is made between the demon and the man, at least in the way that Luke describes it. I wonder if you noticed, it is not just the man himself who is described as "mute" (v. 14b), but the demon as well: "Now he was casting out a demon that was mute" (v. 14a).
 - 1. How this demon came to be so I do not claim to know, but I do think there is an interesting implication in all of this. And that is this: When you have been playing with the devil, you will come to look like him. You will take on his image, his qualities, and they are not flattering.
 - a. In the same way that those who behold the glory of God in the face of Christ will find themselves being conformed into His image from one degree of glory to the next (2 Cor 3:18), so too those who have fallen under sway of the Satanic, the demonic, will find themselves being distorted into their image from one degree of depravity to the next.
 - i. The demon was mute, so the man was mute.

- C. I know some of us are looking in the mirror these days and saying: "How did I end up here? I'm seriously going to talk to my spouse like that? This is a thing now? This is the new normal? Lashing out? Cutting down? The anger. The bitterness. What's this all about?!" Or "Is this really how I'm handling my money now? There was a time where I was so moved by Jesus I was just dreaming of how I could give it away for His honor. Now all I'm dreaming about is myself—my next vacation, my next car, my next toy. Me, me, me. What has happened? I don't look like God. I look like . . . the devil."
 - 1. You've fallen under his influence. You've been nibbling the bait. You've forgotten the war. When you play with demons you start to look like them. And as a result, you need, at least in some way, what Jesus has come to do for this man in our text here. You need His rescue!

- D. When you step back and think about it, isn't this scene an astounding picture of sovereign grace and the gospel?! This demon-oppressed man, however he got himself into this state, could not get himself out. He could not help himself. He was tied up in knots, as it were. He was muzzled by the devil. He could not even cry out for help as so many others we see in the gospels do.

1. The only way he could be healed is if Jesus found it in His heart to approach him, if Jesus decided on His own initiative to come to him with mercy and power. And so He does. And so, perhaps, He is doing in this room for you, even now!

(2) The Response of a Crowd (vv. 15-16)

Two Objections

- A. So because of the intervention of Jesus here in our text, the mute man speaks. In light of such things we would certainly expect a sort of celebration, a joyous response. And I suppose some of that may be included in this idea that “the people marveled” (v. 14).
- B. But there is an undercurrent of resistance among the crowd, an opposition, a group of naysayers begin to emerge. In Matthew and Mark’s account of this story we are told that these opponents are of the scribes and Pharisees. And I suppose that such a detail is quite unsurprising. We’ve seen them pushing back on Jesus’ ministry from the start.
- C. They push back here with two objections in particular. Look at [Luke 11:15-16](#): “¹⁵ But some of them said, ‘He casts out demons by Beelzebul, the prince of demons [from the context we know this is a reference to Satan],’ ¹⁶ while others, to test him, kept seeking from him a sign from heaven.”
 1. The first group seems to be saying: “I see this miracle, and it’s not from God.” And the second group: “I see this miracle, and it’s not enough.” Both are radical affronts to the majesty of Christ.
 - a. Jesus is going to deal with these objections one at a time. Our text this morning outlines His dealings with the first.

Never Enough Evidence

- A. But before we go any further, let me at least say this: What both of these objections make plain for us is that no amount of evidence will ever be enough for the person who is committed to unbelief. Did you hear that? That’s important.
 1. Some of us like to think that the reason we are holding back on Christ, the reason we aren’t ready to go all in with Jesus is because we don’t have enough evidence yet. If and when we got the evidence, well then surely we’d be ready to make a decision. But that is simply not the case.
 - a. Such an opinion severely underestimates the corrupting sway of our fallen natures, grossly overestimates the capacity and supposed objectivity of our native faculties, and blatantly contradicts what we see so clearly in this text: namely, again, no amount of evidence will ever be enough for the person who is committed to unbelief. There is always a way to interpret reality in line with your biases.
- B. Let me show you what I mean. Take the first group of objectors as an example.

1. No doubt, if Jesus had tried to expel this demon and failed, the scribes and Pharisees would have mocked Him as an imposter. “See we told you that God was not with Him, that His claims are false, that He is not the Christ, nor the Son of God in any way whatsoever.”
 2. But, here in our text, Jesus is successful in this exorcism and, therefore, His opponents are forced to take a different approach, more radical perhaps, but of the same root and stalk of unbelief as the former. “O sure He has power. But it is only because he taps the devil as His source.”
- C. How convenient, you see? No matter which way Jesus goes with these people, He shall not win them. Which is why as the gospel progresses we shall see that eventually Jesus just shuts His mouth. Not because He doesn’t have anything to say, but because they don’t have ears to hear.

(3) The Reasoning of a King (vv. 17-23)

- A. But at this point, Jesus is still willing to engage with them, to reason with them. That is really what we see next in [vv. 17-23](#). He is trying to show these men the irrationality, the foolishness, of their position. It doesn’t accord with reality, with the way things work.
- B. Look at [vv. 17-18](#): “¹⁷ But he, knowing their thoughts, said to them, “Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and a divided household falls. ¹⁸ And if Satan also is divided against himself, how will his kingdom stand? For you say that I cast out demons by Beelzebul.”
1. You see His logic plainly do you not? We get this. A divided kingdom, a divided house will fall. That’s no way to win a war. We get this.
 - a. Take my household for example. If my girls go to Megan and ask her for another cookie and she says, “No, you’ve had enough for sugar for one day”, and then they come straightaway over to daddy and ask me for the very same thing, and I respond: “Sure, why not! You can never have too much sugar.”
 - i. Let me ask you this: How long will that kind of household stand? How long until that household falls? I’d be sleeping in the garage, right? And rightfully so. That’s a divided house. It’s not going to work.
- C. And that’s the sort of thing Jesus is getting at here with these guys. “Your claim that the devil is empowering Me makes no sense. You’ve seen my power. You know I use it for good and not for ill. You know I use it to destroy the works of the devil. Your conclusion about Me doesn’t align with the facts. It is not reasonable.”

Two Observations

- A. Now, before I proceed, let me make two observations at this point.

Observation #1: Faith Accords with Reason

- A. This is one implication that should be drawn from the very fact that Jesus even enters into rational argumentation with them at all. I think this is an especially important point for us post-

Enlightenment, modern world folk, who have bought into this idea that science, logic, and reason belong in one domain and religion, faith, and spirituality belong in another.

1. If you're going to be a modern, secular, atheist, well you use your reason and science. If you're going to be a good little Bible-believing Christian, well you close your eyes, plug your ears, and you take a leap of faith.
- B. But Jesus hasn't bought into this divide. That's the whole point of His engagement here. Faith is the reasonable conclusion concerning the facts. It's these guys' unbelief and skepticism that is illogical.
1. In other words: Our faith has good reason and their reasons require much faith.
- C. Let me give you a modern example of this sort of thing, concerning objections you might face out on the streets. I wonder if you've heard this objection before: "If God exists like you say, why is there so much evil in the world? I can't believe in a God who would permit so much evil."
1. Of course there are many ways we could attempt to answer this, but one way, perhaps the most effective way, is to show how such an objection in itself is fundamentally unreasonable. To do so, we can take this question and re-spin it back to them. "If God does not exist, how do you even have a conception of evil in the first place?"
 - a. Don't you see? If we remove God from the picture, if we truly embrace the basic principles of atheism, evolution, or whatever, then there is no overarching reality, no absolute truth, no right or wrong, no good or evil. Every man makes his own truth, his own ethics. Who's to say it's wrong for me to reach out right now and kill you? Survival of the fittest. Such categories of good and evil are relativized and rendered, ultimately, meaningless.
- D. The only way evil even makes any sense as a rational category is in a world over which God resides—where a law has been established and written on our hearts, and we all can sense it and reference its reality.
1. You see, in their attempt to disprove God they are actually making a case for Him. In their attempt to rid God from the world, they unwittingly expose the fact that they are living in His world after all.
- E. It's this sort of thing that Jesus is doing with these men here. So, like Him, we too should be willing as a church, as His disciples, to engage the doubting, the skeptical, the unbelieving with both compassion and confidence, knowing that the Christian worldview really does make the most sense of the facts of life.

Observation #2: Unbelief Runs Deeper than Logic

- A. This touches once more on what we said about evidence, but we'll go a little further. With these men, Jesus makes a compelling case for the irrationality of their unbelief, and yet the unbelief remains.

1. What we see here, then, is that, often, when it comes to unbelief, there are reasons beneath the reasons. Of course we might put forward this or that reason as to why we cannot believe what Jesus is saying or what the church is trying to teach, but often when we press into these things we find something lurking behind the smoke.
- B. The clear, albeit scandalous, teaching from Scripture is that beneath all of our reasons and logic is desire. We often twist what we know to serve what we want.
1. Jesus is a threat to our ego, to our self-rule, to our way of life. We don't want Christ to be from God, we don't want Him coming in and telling us what to do, we don't want some other King. And that is the fundamental issue. That is the reason beneath the reason.
 - a. "Show me all the evidence, let me see another miracle, lay out all your rational arguments, but I don't care, I don't want your Jesus coming in and mucking up my life!" That's the issue.
- C. "[T]he light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light . . ." (John 3:19a). It's not an issue of whether they see the light or not. "Oh I see it. I just don't love it. I love myself. I love my sin. Don't you take that away from me."

The Finger of God

- A. This is what Jesus, in love, is taking on as He engages these scribes and Pharisees. All of His reasoning is intended to move them towards faith. In particular, His argument is meant to lead them to the conclusion He puts forward in v. 20: "But if it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you."
1. "If it is not rational that Satan would be divided against himself, then I cannot be doing these things by his power. And if I cannot be doing these things by His power, well then I must be doing these things by the power of God and His kingdom has come upon you!"
- B. Jesus' reference to "the finger of God" here is of particular significance. It's a phrase drawn from the OT, used only a few other places, most notably in Exodus 8:19.
1. God is moving to free His people from bondage to Pharaoh in Egypt. The plagues have begun. Now, the magicians in Egypt, with their secret arts, were, in one way or another, able to mimic the first couple of plagues, but when it came to the third, the gnats that covered the land, the magicians couldn't replicate it.
 - a. So they come to Pharaoh and hear now what they say: "This is the finger of God" (v. 19a). Their point was: "Pharaoh, you better take this YHWH seriously." But the verse continues: "But Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he would not listen to them . . ." (v. 19b).
- C. The parallels between this OT story and our text are striking. Jesus has come to work a new and greater Exodus. He's come to overthrow the Pharaoh figure, the strong man, Satan, and set free the children of God. He is our Passover Lamb—slaughtered in our place in judgment for our sin.

1. The demons were howling as the Son hung lifeless on Calvary's tree. The strong man thought He had won as they sealed Him in the tomb.
 - a. But in a rush of sheer power, Jesus rose. The stronger man will **attack, overcome**, take away the devil's **armor** and divide his **spoil** (v. 22). That's you and me by the way. Where Satan, sin, and death, had us pinned to the mat, because of Jesus we can be free.

- D. But just like Pharaoh, there will be many who see these sorts of things, experience some of these things, and respond not with faith and openness to Jesus, but with hardness.
 1. I think that's why Jesus goes where He goes next in vv. 24-28, and I'd like to close this out there now.

(4) The Requirement of a Decision (vv. 24-28)

- A. Look at vv. 24-26: "When the unclean spirit has gone out of a person, it passes through waterless places seeking rest, and finding none it says, 'I will return to my house from which I came.'²⁵ And when it comes, it finds the house swept and put in order.²⁶ Then it goes and brings seven other spirits more evil than itself, and they enter and dwell there. And the last state of that person is worse than the first."

You Need More than a Spring-Cleaning

- A. There are really two things that Jesus is trying to say here I think. The first is this: You and I need more than a spring-cleaning.
 1. The man in the story here as experienced something of Jesus. A demon has been cast out. Things have been put back in order. But if such an experience of the grace and power of God doesn't lead one to fully embrace Jesus and the good news of His kingdom breaking in, if you still hold that off at a distance, if you thank Jesus for the help but then go on your way without Him . . . your final state will be worse than the first.

- B. If I could shift metaphors for a moment. I'm not a tech guy, though I realize I live in the promised land of tech. When something goes wrong with one of my devices—my laptop, phone, or whatever—I realize there may be more effective ways of fixing things, and many of you guys probably know slick tricks and backend secrets and things, but my go to approach is, are you ready for this? Turn the thing off, wait a couple seconds, and then turn it on again. The good old reboot. And do you know what? Nine times out of ten, it works. I don't know why or how, but it works.

- C. Now I bring this up because I think that's the way most people think of their lives. Yes, we'd admit we've fallen on some hard times, okay maybe we've gotten into some narrow straits lately, we've ended up in a mess of our own making. It's true. But all we need is a good old-fashioned reboot and we'll be up and running again. We look to Jesus for this sort of thing. "Get that demon out of here, clean me up a bit, then send me on my way. I'll be okay. I'll take it from here."
 1. But that is not how the Christian life works. You don't just need a reboot you need a rebirth. You need to be rebuilt from the ground up. Do you see that?

- a. A spring cleaning is not enough. You need a new master of the house. If you do not let Him fill you, something else will. That's the point. You're not going to get better without Him. It'll just get worse.

You Have a Decision to Make

- A. So then this leads to the second thing I think Jesus is getting at here, and I might put it this way: You have a decision to make.
- B. When you see or experience something of the kingdom of God your life is thrown into crisis. You have come to a Y in the road. Things cannot go on the way they always have. You must do something with this Jesus. There is no option of neutrality. You will either harden towards Him or soften. You will either shut the door, or let Him in.
- C. The woman's interruption in [vv. 27-28](#) really just gives Jesus an opportunity to put an exclamation point on this idea. She's saying: "Blessed is your mom." But He says: "[Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it](#)" (v. 28). "If you want true blessedness, hear what I am saying and take action on it. Let me into your life, into your heart, into your house."