

Immanuel Lutheran Mail Ministry



Mark 3:20-35 *Then he went home, and the crowd gathered again, so that they could not even eat. ²¹ And when his family heard it, they went out to seize him, for they were saying, "He is out of his mind." ²² And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem were saying, "He is possessed by Beelzebul," and "by the prince of demons he casts out the demons." ²³ And he called them to him and said to them in parables, "How can Satan cast out Satan? ²⁴ If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. ²⁵ And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. ²⁶ And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but is coming to an end. ²⁷ But no one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man. Then indeed he may plunder his house. ²⁸ "Truly, I say to you, all sins will be forgiven the children of man, and whatever blasphemies they utter, ²⁹ but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin"-- ³⁰ for they were saying, "He has an unclean spirit." ³¹ And his mother and his brothers came, and standing outside they sent to him and called him. ³² And a crowd was sitting around him, and they said to him, "Your mother and your brothers are outside, seeking you." ³³ And he answered them, "Who are my mother and my brothers?" ³⁴ And looking about at those who sat around him, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! ³⁵ For whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother."*

Is Jesus a lunatic? That's what His family thought; they saw the crowds gathering around Him and said, "**He is out of His mind.**" Perhaps they thought He was suffering from delusions of grandeur. They knew Jesus, they'd lived with Him their whole life. Why was *He* now speaking and leading on these great crowds? "He must be a lunatic," they thought. What about a liar? Is Jesus a liar? That's what the scribes thought, or at least that's what they claimed in our text. "Don't listen to Him, He's not come from God, He's actually come from the devil! He is a liar and not to be trusted." So, what is He? Lunatic? Liar? Something else? Who is Jesus?

The renowned Christian author C.S. Lewis once wrote in his book *Mere Christianity* that Jesus has to be one of three things: He is either a liar, or He is a lunatic, or He is Lord. He argued along these lines because he took note of the many people of the world who do not believe in God nor believe in Jesus as their Savior but are happy to quote Jesus as some great moral or philosophical teacher. They will quote Him, they will reference Him, but they will not believe in Him nor will they worship Him.

Lewis's point was that Jesus' teaching revolved around the truth that He is indeed Lord. He claimed to be God and that all who believed in Him would be saved. And if that was not true, then Jesus would be either a liar, or He'd be a lunatic and out of His mind—either way, not a great moral teacher and certainly not someone to be quoting. Lewis's conclusion was that from Scripture we clearly see that Jesus was neither a liar nor a lunatic, and therefore must be the Lord. And that comes as great news for us. For without Jesus as Lord, we are without hope as we contend against the devil, the world, and our sinful flesh. But, in fact, **Jesus is Lord!** Which means **He's bound Satan and He's set You free.**

Now, obviously by the time of our text Jesus has gained some renown for Himself. People have taken note of His miraculous works, they've heard Him teach, and now wherever He goes, a crowd tends to follow. On this particular occasion, we know from the parallel account in Luke, that Jesus has just cast a demon out of a man, and the religious leaders are none too pleased about any of it. So, they come

with this accusation, **"He is possessed by Beelzebul,"** and **"by the prince of demons he casts out the demons."** This could have been an effective accusation in the minds of the people. Likely, some of them had started to wonder by this time if this Jesus could be the promised Messiah. But if the church leaders are identifying Him as in league with the devil—well, they would want to avoid Him.

It's really ironic that this is what they are saying, *"Jesus is cooperating with Satan,"* since that's actually *exactly* what they were doing. Satan knew that Jesus had come to die for sin, and Satan also knew that Jesus had come to draw all people to Himself that they might believe and be saved! He couldn't let that happen. So, Satan used people—in one case, members of Jesus' own family, in the other case, the church leaders of the day—to try to draw the people *away* from their Savior. And this is something that Satan is able to do, because all people are born sinful and therefore under the sway of the devil. He wants to keep them and us for himself, so the accusations fly.

Well, Jesus doesn't let this accusation hang in the air too long at all. Instead, He effectively swats it down with just a bit of logic. He gives the reply, **"How can Satan cast out Satan? If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but is coming to an end."** President Abraham Lincoln quoted this section of Scripture in his famous "House Divided" speech of 1858. He said, *"A house divided against itself cannot stand. I believe this government cannot endure, permanently half slave and half free. I do not expect the Union to be dissolved—I do not expect the house to fall—but I do expect it will cease to be divided. It will become all one thing or all the other."* The nation of that time, divided as it was, was doomed to destroy itself; and within three years the Civil War had begun. It's intuitive, it's a universal truth—a marriage divided, a house divided, a nation divided—they will all eventually fail.

And that was Jesus' point. If Satan was divided against himself, on the one hand, possessing people through demonic influence while, on the other hand, using Jesus to cast demons out, he would crumble his own empire. His sole goal is to drag as many souls away from God as possible, so, no, he's not in the business of undermining his own efforts. Satan wouldn't be foolish enough to be divided against himself. His is a *unified* kingdom of devil, evil world, and sinful flesh all working in conjunction to possess and destroy souls.

"No," Jesus says, *"I'm not casting out demons by Satan's own power. That would be ridiculous. Satan would be defeating himself."* But then He shifts to say how Satan *could* be defeated. Satan's not going to do us the service of defeating himself. No, to defeat Satan is going to be a much, much more difficult challenge. Which is what Jesus alludes to next: **"No one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man. Then indeed he may plunder his house."**

Kind of an interesting parable here. There's a Man that breaks into someone's house and steals all his stuff. He's a thief, right? But if He's going to steal all this guy's stuff, He has to do something about the master of the house first, since the homeowner is still there. And so, He binds him so that the man can't stop the thief from plundering all his goods. Now, normally, you'd think of course that the thief—He's the bad guy in this story! And in most stories that would be true, but not in this one. For in this parable, the thief is Jesus. And the house is the devil's. Jesus breaks in, binds the devil, and takes everything away. And the goods that Jesus plunders—that's you and me! For the things that lie under the devil's dominion are the people who are lost and dead and bound by sin and guilt and death. As the Apostle John says, **"The whole world lies in the power of the evil one."** (1 John 5:19) We are all under his dark dominion *until* Jesus comes and rescues us, which is exactly what He has done!

Jesus was there casting out demons right and left, and He's doing it easily! With just a Word. And the demons have no choice, they must leave immediately. Not a good look for the devil. So, the devil has to put some spin on the situation. You know how politicians have a PR Team in place, so that they can spin any damaging storyline into a positive one? The candidate says something foolish, and the team scrambles to put a spin on it and control the narrative? Well, the devil does this all the time and especially with Jesus. He can't have people knowing that Jesus has defeated him. He can't have people knowing that he can't stand up to the power of the good news of Jesus Christ. So, he puts a spin on it. That's why he sent in his goons on this occasion to claim that Jesus was actually working for the devil. That's why the demon-possessed people would often cry out that Jesus is the Messiah and Jesus would shut them up. After all, if you heard a demon call somebody the Messiah, are you more or less likely to believe that it's true? It's all part of Satan's strategy of deceit to lead people astray.

And that's still the devil's strategy today. Even still today, while Jesus isn't here physically casting out demons, yet His power is present through His Word casting out Satan's influence and leading people to repentance and salvation. And the Devil can do nothing against that Word. He's powerless. So, he puts a spin on things. He runs a PR campaign to try to twist that Word into fitting his own purposes instead. We have a perfect example of this going on right now, everywhere you look. We are in the month of June, which has been labeled as Pride Month. You can't help but see all the advertisements and campaigns celebrating the gay rights movement, the world celebrating sin and being proud of it.

In connection with this, one claim you hear all the time—remember I said before that people love to quote Jesus even though they don't believe in Him, and this is a good example of that—you often hear the claim, "Jesus would agree with us." They say things like, "Jesus ate with tax collectors and sinners. So, who are we to judge? Jesus wouldn't judge them. Jesus is love and God is love and love is love." The claim is that Jesus would approve of sin.

Well, let's take that idea and put in the terms of the parable which Jesus just told. So, Jesus is breaking into the devil's house, and all these people of the world are held captive there; captive in sin and captive to death. By the way, one of the arguments for sin that's often used is, "They were born that way." Which is true. The Apostle John writes, "***That which is born of the flesh is flesh.***" (John 3:6) We are all born bound in sin, held captive by the devil's dark dominion. And so, in the parable, Jesus enters the Devil's domain, He breaks in, He binds the devil, and then what? Jesus just sits down at the table for a little bit to chat and then gets up and leaves us all there? That's not what Jesus did.

Jesus ate with tax collectors and sinners to call them to repentance, to turn away from their lives of sin and to bring them to Himself through faith. When He spoke with the woman who was caught in adultery, He said, "***Neither do I condemn you,***" but then He added, "***go and sin no more.***" (John 8:11) When Jesus went to the house of Zacchaeus the tax collector, Zacchaeus became a changed man. He didn't continue in his stealing and cheating, he was left with faith and love and generosity.

You know, another phrase which is often used about Jesus which explains this whole idea, is that "*Jesus loves you just the way you are.*" And that's true. But we must add a bit more to it. "*Jesus loves you just the way you are, AND He loves you too much to leave you that way.*" He didn't break into the devil's house to let you stay bound to sin. He broke in to bring you out. He came in love for all people to give His life to pay the ransom for your sins. He came to proclaim the good news that there is forgiveness and eternal life for you! So don't listen to the Devil's PR campaign that would claim that sin is ok, whispering in your ear, "*Go on sinning, it's not a big deal, Jesus will forgive you anyways.*" He wants you to remain bound in sin and to lead you in chains to hell, but Jesus is the chain breaker!

Turn to Him daily in repentance, being assured of forgiveness. For in this way, that unified front of the devil, the evil world, and our sinful flesh is defeated. Not by you, but by the one who came *for* you. He alone delivers you from your sin. He has bound Satan, He has freed you from death and hell, and He now claims you for Himself. And Jesus proclaims as much in the exchange near the end of our text.

Remember, His family is waiting outside. They're a little embarrassed about all the attention that Jesus is getting. Maybe they're concerned that He's having delusions of grandeur, and they say, **"He is out of His mind."** Well, the people notice that His family is there for Him. And just like His family assumed, the people thought that Jesus should be giving precedence to His family. They say, **"Your mother and your brothers are outside, seeking you."** And Jesus does give precedence to His family, just not the family that the people were thinking about. He answers them, **"Who are my mother and my brothers?" And looking about at those who sat around him, he said, 'Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother.'"**

The crowd was His family, and you are too. **"Whoever does the will of God"** is Jesus' family. And what is that will of God? In John chapter 6, another crowd asked that same question. They asked, **"What must we do, to be doing the works of God?" Jesus answered them, 'This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent.'"** (John 6:28-29) When Jesus prayed in the garden, **"Not my will, but yours be done,"** (Luke 22:44) that will of God was that His Son would give His own life upon the cross that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life. (cf. John 3:16) How wonderful that this is God's will for people like us! For if that had not been His will and purpose, we would perish. We would remain bound to our sin and led away in chains to eternal damnation.

But Jesus has called you to be His very own. This was His will from the beginning. Consider our Old Testament reading, the results of that first run-in between the devil and people. Of course, verse 15 is so familiar to us, **"I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel."** (Genesis 3:15) Of course, in there we have that great initial promise of God to conquer the devil for us, that He would send His Son to crush the serpent's head and defeat him once and for all. But it's the first part of that verse that I'm not sure we appreciate as much as we should.

"I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring." To have enmity of course means to be enemies, and that sounds like bad news to our ears. It sounds like God is saying we should be expecting all sorts of problems. And of course, it is true that the devil is our enemy, our adversary always seeking to devour us. (cf. 1 Peter 5:8) But what we forget is that this enmity with the devil is really very good news. Because at that point, Adam and Eve were not at enmity with the devil. In fact, they were united with the devil. Remember that wonderful relationship with the Lord that they had, and they chose to follow the Devil's advice instead. After they had sinned, they sealed their fate and were no longer interested in being in the Lord's presence, instead they hid from Him. They were united with Satan instead.

So, when it comes around and God says to the devil, **"People will not be with you anymore. People will now be separated from you,"** He was really saying, that people would now then be reconciled to God. In other words, for us to be at enmity with the devil is to say that we belong to God instead. And in the crushing of the serpent's head by His death on the cross, Jesus has done this. For you and for me. For now and for all eternity, we are the people of God. The devil has been defeated, and **Jesus is Lord!** He is Lord even over the devil, binding him in defeat. And He is Lord even for you and for me, freeing us from our sins, and bringing us to Himself as His dear people. Thanks be to God. Amen.