

St Matthew

Chapter 12:22-30

The Kingdom of God and the House of the Devil



'Christ Healing the Blind Man' El Greco 1577-78

Outline of the text

12:22	The Exorcism of the blind and mute man
12:23-30	Controversy following the miracle
12:23	The Amazement of the Multitude
12:24	The Indictment of the Pharisees: “by the power of Beelzebub”
12:25-30	Jesus' three-fold response to the accusations:
12:25-26	#1: The Devil's kingdom is not divided
12:27	#2: The Jewish Exorcists
12:28-29	#3: The Parable of the Strong Man and the Coming of the Kingdom
12:30	Jesus' Conclusion: The Pharisees are Indicted

The Exorcism

The Gospel text begins with the casting out of a demon. This is nothing new for Jesus, He has come to overthrow the kingdom of the devil. But this chapter is full of Jesus' disputes with the Pharisees, and the miracle of the healing of the blind and mute man is almost an introduction to the disputation that is to follow (much like the eating of the grain in 12:1 and the healing of the withered hand in 12:13).

The multitudes that see Jesus' miracle are amazed, and this, for the Pharisees, is bad news. They had been plotting against Jesus for a while, determining how to spin His miracles so that the multitudes would not follow Him. They trot out the old line (see 9:34), “This fellow does not cast out demons except by Beelzebub, the ruler of demons,” [12:24]. *Beelzebub* is called the god of Ekron, a Philistine city (see 2 Kings 1). Perhaps originally *Beelzebal*- “lord of the house”, but changed in mockery by the Hebrews to *Beelzebub*- “lord of the flies” or “lord of dung.”

This time the false accusations will not go unanswered. Jesus makes a three-fold response. First, if the devil cast out demons then his kingdom would be divided against itself, and would fall on its own. This is not the case, the kingdom of the devil must be overthrown from the outside, from an enemy. The devil would not destroy himself, his lust is for self-preservation, for self-glory. Nor could Adam

and Eve, even in their perfection, overthrow him. No, God made man, Jesus, alone can tear down the devil's house.

Second, Jesus points out that there are exorcists among the Pharisees, and if they are condemning Jesus for casting out demons, then their own sons would stand under the same condemnation.

Third, Jesus tells the parable of the strong man to teach the truth and to give an insight into the unseen reality of His miracles. "How can one enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man? And then he will plunder his house." [12:29; *see also Luke 11:21,22*] Jesus is not here giving advice on how to become a cat burglar; He is explaining what he is doing.

The strong man is the devil, his house is the world and the treasure is all humanity, held in bondage to the devil by the fear of death. Jesus, then, is the one doing the plundering, the binding. He disarms the devil in order to rescue and deliver us. So this 'stealing' is our deliverance.

Consider the following verses which show us the cross as the devil's destruction:

- He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. *For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil.* (1 John 3:8)
- Father, glorify thy name. Then came there a voice from heaven, saying, I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again. The people therefore, that stood by, and heard it, said that it thundered: others said, An angel spake to him. Jesus answered and said, This voice came not because of me, but for your sakes. *Now is the judgment of this world: now shall the prince of this world be cast out.* And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me. This he said, signifying what death he should die. (St. John 12:28-33)
- And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses; Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross; *And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it.* (Colossians 2:13-15)
- Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; *that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil.* (Hebrews 2:14)
- And she brought forth a man child, who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron: and her child was caught up unto God, and to his throne. And the woman fled into the wilderness, where she hath a place prepared of God, that they should feed her there a thousand two hundred and threescore days. And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels, And prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in heaven. *And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him. And I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night. And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death. Therefore rejoice, ye heavens, and ye that dwell in them. Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and of the sea! for the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time.* (Revelation 12:5-12)
- And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years, *And cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled: and after that he must be loosed a little season.* (Revelation 20:2-3)

Jesus concludes the text with an ultimatum: if you are not with Me then you are against Me, and if you are not gathering, you are scattering. The Pharisees are the scatterers, they are sending the Lord's people this way and that, not gathering them together. But this gathering is exactly what Jesus is doing, rescuing His people from the devil's grasp and kingdom and gathering them into His church, the kingdom of His grace and life and gifts.