JESUS AND BEELZEBUB
Luke 11:14-28

The connection between this story and the previous is striking and instructive. In the preceding verses, our Jesus had been showing the power and importance of prayer. In the verses before us, He delivers a man from a 'mute' demon. The same Savior who encourages us to pray, is the One who destroys Satan's power people.

JESUS IS FALSELY ACCUSED

In their spiritual blindness the Pharisees falsely accused Jesus of ministering in the power of Satan:

"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" (11:14-16).

Here we see the variety of ways in which Satan exhibits his desire to injure man. We read of a 'mute' demon. Sometimes in the Gospel we come across an "unclean" demon or a raging and violent demon. Here we witness a "mute" demon. Satan has many strategies. He works differently with different people.

Jesus, who can make the deaf to hear and the mute to speak, still lives! It is not enough to be moral, and proper, and respectable in our lives. All this is negative goodness, and nothing more. Is there anything positive about our religion? Do we yield our members as instruments of righteousness to God? (Ro 6:13).

JESUS KNEW THEIR THOUGHTS

"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. 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’” (11:17-22).

We also see here the amazing power of prejudice. When Jesus cast out the mute spirit, there were some who said, "He casts out demons through Beelzebub, the chief of the demons." They could not deny the miracle. And so they refused to acknowledge the divine source. The miracle was plain and indisputable. Therefore they sought to discredit the Jesus’ character by claiming that He was in league with the devil.
There are always people who have a suspicious nature and are therefore determined to see the bad in Christ’s servants. They project their own evil onto others. They seem intent on believing the worse. Not only do they question what others do and say, but even question their motives. If he casts out demons, it is through Beelzebub! Such prejudiced men are to be found in many a congregation. They are the most severe trials of anyone ministering in the name of Christ. No wonder that Paul said,

"And pray that we may be delivered from wicked and evil men, for not everyone has faith" (2 Th 3:2).

Paul says that love “always trusts” (1 Co 13:7).

We must strive to be fair even as we are to be honest and candid. Let us be ready to give up old and cherished opinions the moment that any one can show us a "more excellent way." A prejudiced spirit is the very jaundice of the soul.

We also notice the great evil of religious divisions. Jesus quotes the proverbial saying that "a house divided against itself falls." He infers the absurdity of the idea that Satan would cast out Satan, or the devil cast out his own agents. And in so doing, He teaches Christians a lesson concerning the sin and foolishness of needless divisions.

Religious divisions of some kind there must always be, so long as false doctrine prevails, and men will cleave to it. What communion can there be between light and darkness? How can two walk together except they be agreed? What unity can there be where there is not the unity of the Spirit? Division and separation from those who adhere to false and unscriptural doctrine is a duty and not a sin.

But there are divisions of a very different kind, which are deeply to be deplored. Such, for example, are divisions between men who agree on main points—divisions about matters not needful to salvation—divisions about forms and ceremonies, and ecclesiastical arrangements upon which Scripture is silent. Divisions of this kind are to be avoided and discouraged by all faithful Christians. The existence of them is a melancholy proof of the fallen state of man, and the corruption of his understanding as well as his will. They bring scandal on religion, and weakness on the church. "Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation." What are the best remedies against needless divisions? It is a humble spirit, a readiness to make concessions, and an enlightened acquaintance with Scripture.

We must learn to distinguish between things in religion which are essential, and things which are not essential—things which are needful to salvation, and things which are not needful, things which are of first rate importance, and things which are of second rate importance. On the one hand we must be unbending as the oak tree—"If any man preach any other Gospel than that which we have preached, let him be accursed." (Gal. 1:8.)—on the other we may be yielding and compliant as the willow, "I am made all things to all men that I might by all means save some" (1 Co 9:22).
FOR OR AGAINST

Jesus points to the impossibility of neutrality:

"He who is not with Me is against Me, and he who does not gather with me, scatters." (11:23)

The principle laid down should be constantly remembered by all who make any profession of religion. We all prefer an easy Christianity. We dread being overly righteous. Yet nothing is as offensive to Christ as lukewarmness in religion. To be utterly dead and ignorant is to be an object of pity as well as blame. But to know the truth and yet not giving oneself fully to it is one of the most serious sins.

We need to decide to serve Christ with all our hearts, if we serve Him at all. There is no reserve, no compromise, no half-heartedness and no attempt to reconcile God and mammon in our Christianity.

THE TRAP OF A VACCUUM

Jesus also warns of the danger of being content with religion short of conversion:

"When an evil spirit comes out of a man, it goes through arid places seeking rest and does not find it. Then it says, 'I will return to the house I left.' When it arrives, it finds the house swept clean and put in order. Then it goes and takes seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there. And the final condition of that man is worse than the first" (11:24-26).

Here is a picture of a person who has been delivered from evil spirits, but whose heart has not been indwelt by the Holy Spirit. He describes the evil spirit, after his expulsion, as seeking rest and finding none. He describes him planning a return to the heart which he once inhabited and finding that heart empty of any good, and, like a house swept and cleaned for his reception. He describes Satan as entering in once more, with seven spirits worse than himself, and once more making it his dwelling place.

These are solemn words of warning that we must never be satisfied with religious reformation without heart conversion.

THE BLESSING OF OBEDIENCE

Jesus ends this teaching with emphasis on obedience:

"As Jesus was saying these things, a woman in the crowd called out, "Blessed is the mother who gave you birth and nursed you." He replied, "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it”" (11:27-28).
We dare not lay aside sin unless grace reigns in our hearts. To stop to do evil has little significance if we do not also learn to do well. The house must not only be swept and whitewashed. A new tenant must be introduced. It is not enough for one’s outward appearance to be improved. The formal trappings of religion simply are not enough. Spirituality must be experienced in the inner man. The devil must not only be cast out. The Holy Spirit must take His place. Christ must dwell in our hearts by faith. We must not only be reformed, but born again.

To draw such clear distinctions requires practical wisdom. Such wisdom is available to whose who humbly ask, "If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God" (Jas 1:5.).

APPLICATION

Let us not be houses swept and cleansed, but uninhabited by the Spirit of God. Let us not merely look good on the outside, but worthless on the inside. Let our daily prayer be,

"Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."

(Ps 139:23-24)