

The Finger of God

Luke 11:14-28

Key Verse: 11:20

“But if I drive out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come to you.”

In today’s passage Jesus sets a man free from a mute demon. It was a life-giving work of God’s grace. But right afterward, some Jewish religious leaders slandered Jesus. They accused Jesus of driving out demons by the power of demons. They were dangerously ignorant of the spiritual reality. However, Jesus answered them with patience and compassion and showed them clearly what decision they needed to make to get out of the devil’s power and enter the kingdom of God. Like the Jewish leaders, many people today speak about the spiritual world in ignorance. It is almost fashionable to say, “I am spiritual, but not religious.” But just being spiritual is not enough. There are two kinds of spirits: the Holy Spirit and evil spirits. We must know how to discern between the two, and how to stand on the side of God. Then we can enter the kingdom of God. Let’s listen to Jesus’ words carefully so that we may make right decisions and be blessed by God.

I. Jesus drove out a demon that was mute (14-16)

Look at verse 14a. **“Jesus was driving out a demon that was mute.”** At first glance, this statement seems to suddenly fly off the page. Luke does not set the background of the event. He simply jumps into it right after the Lord’s Prayer. In this way, Luke emphasizes that Jesus was involved in an intense and ongoing spiritual battle with demons. Demons are not polite and cooperative. They do not leave just because someone asks them to. They must be driven out, in the same way that freeloading tenants must be evicted. This particular demon was mute. Not all demons are mute. In fact most demons Jesus encountered were talkative and offensive. Jesus rebuked them to be quiet, and they were. But this demon was mute. When it entered the man, it made him mute as well. Its dark power oppressed his spirit and crushed his humanity. If the man could have spoken, he might have cried out in misery. But he was mute. It is easy to ignore such people. However, Jesus heard the cry of his soul. Jesus took the time, and spent the energy to drive out the demon. The dark power that had long oppressed the man vanished. Heavenly sunshine flooded his inner man. He must have felt light and free and joyful. Then he began to speak: “Thank you, Jesus!” “Mom, Dad, I am sorry for burdening you. I will make you happy from now on.” Perhaps he went to a girl and said, “You are pretty. I like you.” Those watching were amazed. They had

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seen a miracle. Who can make the mute tongue shout for joy? According to Isaiah, it was a sign that Jesus was the Messiah (Isa 35:6).

However, there was another group of people who responded quite differently. Look at verse 15. **“But some of them said, ‘By Beelzebub, the prince of demons, he is driving out demons.’”** These people could not deny that a great miracle had been done, but they were still determined to discredit Jesus. So they attributed his power to the devil. What terrible slander against the Son of God! Who were these people? Other gospels tell us that it was the Pharisees and the teachers of the law from Jerusalem (Mt 12:24; Mk 3:22). These respected religious leaders represented Israel’s tradition and they were well educated. Why would they make this charge? It was to suppress the truth that Jesus was doing the work of the Messiah. They adamantly refused to accept this, for if they did, they would have had to follow his teachings. They would have had to repent of their hypocrisy and learn to love God from their hearts, and to love others, even “tax collectors and sinners.” They feared losing their honor and wealth. So they concocted a blatant lie that slandered Jesus. They tried to use the devil for political purposes. It was a serious mistake. They were supposed to be the conscience of their nation. But they abandoned this responsibility. They were ready to sacrifice anything and anyone in order to save themselves.

In this part we learn that the devil’s malicious slander may very well follow the work of Christ. If we Google fruitful Christian ministries in the USA, we find many “anti” websites that slander them. This should not surprise us; rather, it is a sign that Jesus is at work. We also learn in this part that the selfishness of religious leaders is a serious sin. Jesus had taught his disciples to deny themselves, take up their crosses and follow him. Denying our sinful nature, essentially selfishness, is at the core of discipleship. Those who don’t deny themselves will become wicked. We must repent our selfishness. Let’s ask the Holy Spirit to put to death our selfishness (Ro 8:13).

II. “...the kingdom of God has come to you” (17-28)

Jesus was not personally offended by the vicious religious leaders. He did not respond by calling fire down from heaven to burn them up in an instant. Rather, Jesus understood them. Jesus responded to them with compassion and wisdom. Let's see how he helped them.

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First, “...if I drive out demons by the finger of God” (17-20). Verse 17 begins, **“Jesus knew their thoughts....”** Jesus knew the thoughts that were lurking within them. They were trapped in the devil’s clever deception. With great compassion, Jesus spoke truth into their lives. Jesus did not rebuke them or lecture them one-sidedly. Jesus spoke in a conditional style--using the word “if” three times--to reason together with them. Jesus wanted to help them think clearly so that the truth might set them free from the devil.

Jesus began with a major premise: **“Any kingdom divided against itself will be ruined, and a house divided against itself will fall.”** This is true. When Israel was united under King David, and people worshiped one God together, she enjoyed the zenith of her power and glory. But when Solomon began to worship idols, through the bad influence of his foreign wives, it was the beginning of division. God raised an adversary, Jeroboam. After Solomon's death, Jeroboam led ten tribes of northern Israel away, and the nation was divided. Israel’s history is largely one of decline until she disappeared. Unity makes a nation strong; division can ruin any nation. The Jewish leaders would likely have agreed with this major premise.

Then Jesus applied this principle to the spiritual world. Jesus plainly taught that Satan is the ruler of a kingdom (18). Satan reigns over a well-organized, orderly army of evil spirits. Like any ruler, he marshals the full strength of his kingdom to fight adversaries. Satan does not divide his forces and tell them to destroy each other. This would be tantamount to a military commander shooting his own foot soldiers during a battle and saying, “I won! I won!” Other soldiers would soon recognize the treachery and run away from him. Even the most foolish kings in history were not that stupid. The religious leaders’ slander was irrational. Their claim was contradictory and could not be truthful.

Jesus further explained that the inconsistency of the religious leaders’ statement would have direct consequences on themselves. Apparently, some of their own followers were driving out demons. If they charged Jesus with driving out demons by Beelzebub, they exposed their followers to the same charge. The religious leaders’ irrational, subjective favoritism would be exposed sooner or later. Then, their own followers would judge them.

Jesus made it clear that the religious leaders’ position was untenable. Still, he spoke humbly, in a conditional manner, as he proposed the most reasonable conclusion based on the evidence. Look at verse 20. **“But if I drive out demons**

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by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come to you.” Jesus indicated that his power source was the Almighty God. But Jesus used the expression, “the finger of God.” Through these special words Jesus wanted to remind them of God’s work in Israel’s history.

The first time the phrase “the finger of God” appears in the Scriptures is in Exodus 8:19. It was actually used by Egyptian magicians to indicate that they could not duplicate the power of God by their magic arts. Pharaoh, the Egyptian king, had been confident in the military, economic, intellectual and magic power of Egypt. So he ignored God’s word through Moses to let the Israelites go. But God cannot be mocked. Those who oppose God will be dealt with. God decided to reveal his glory through Pharaoh. God began to work miracles that would reveal his power was greater than Egypt’s. The first miracles were turning a staff into a snake, and turning water to blood. Egyptian magicians were able to duplicate these. But when God turned dust into gnats, the Egyptian magicians could not duplicate it. So they told Pharaoh “This is the finger of God.” They acknowledged that they had reached their limitation and that God’s power was greater than theirs. But Pharaoh would not bow down before God. So this “finger of God” continued to touch Egypt through more plagues. These plagues humiliated the gods of Egypt in a systematic manner, ending in the plague of death on the firstborn. Finally, Pharaoh acknowledged the God of Israel and let the Israelites go. In this way, God revealed that he is the one true God. Here we learn that “the finger of God” was more powerful than the nation of Egypt. The Jewish religious leaders should have realized that Jesus was driving out demons by “the finger of God,” and that they were no match for him.

“The finger of God” is a poetic reference to God’s almighty power. God does not need his entire arm, or even a hand, but just one finger to win complete victory over his enemies. Jesus revealed that this power source at work in his ministry. The kingdom of Satan was being destroyed by “the finger of God.” God’s victory would be complete and there was no power that could stand against him. So Jesus said, **“the kingdom of God has come to you.”** The religious leaders’ establishment power would fall. But Jesus’ word and God’s kingdom would endure forever.

What does this mean to us? The finger of God is more powerful than nuclear weapons, high-tech research labs, social networks, money, or magic arts. The finger of God is more powerful than all the power devils combined. Even though the devil works very hard with all his power, God Almighty defeats him

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completely with just a finger. This is good news to mankind. Demons deceive, but Jesus is the Truth. Demons oppress, but Jesus sets captives free. Demons destroy, but Jesus gives abundant life. Jesus liberates us from all the power of the devil and enables us to serve God without fear, all our days (Lk 1:74,75) If the Jewish religious leaders simply accepted this good news, they could have eternal life and peace. This is what Jesus wanted for them; it is what he wants for us. Let's read verse 20. **“But if I drive out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come to you.”**

Second, Jesus is stronger; stand on his side (21-26). In verses 21-22, Jesus continued to speak truth to the religious leaders through military images. Here “the strong man” is the devil. The devil’s temptation is so strong and seductive that no one can resist. This strong devil had invaded the former mute man and ruled over him. But someone stronger came along. He was Jesus Christ. Jesus attacked and overpowered the devil and took away the man from the devil’s control. Jesus set the man free to use his faculties to glorify God. When the man began to speak, this testified that Jesus is the Messiah sent by God. Jesus is the stronger man. Jesus is God. The devil cannot stop Jesus from setting prisoners free. St. Paul said that the kingdom of God is not a matter of talk, but of power (1 Cor 4:20).

After reasoning soundly with the religious leaders, Jesus challenged them to make a decision. Look at verse 23. **“He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me, scatters.”** There are only two sides: Jesus’ side and the devil’s side. All people are on one side or the other. The only way to stand on Jesus’ side is to make a deliberate decision to accept him as the Lord on the basis of what he has done. It was time for the religious leaders to make such a decision. At this point, some people don’t want to make any decision. But no decision turns out to be against Jesus in the end. Those against Jesus work against him by scattering his flock at every opportunity. On the other hand, those who are with Jesus work willingly for the kingdom of God. They know the spiritual joy of living for Jesus, and they hate the devil, who destroys people. Here we learn that each one of us must make a decision to accept Jesus as Lord and to stand on his side. Then we can dwell in his kingdom, and “gather,” together with him.

In order to help the religious leaders make a right decision, Jesus taught them further about the work of evil spirits. After coming out of a person, they do not forget his address. When they have been homeless for a while, they come back to the person they left. They find the house swept clean and put in order. This can be the result of many kinds of efforts to improve oneself. But if Jesus does not

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reign over that person's soul, the evil spirit may come right back in with seven other spirits more evil than itself. The man's final condition is worse than the first. Only Jesus is strong enough to protect us from evil spirits. We must accept him as King, or we are at risk.

Third, "...hear the word of God and obey it" (27-28). There was a woman in the crowd who marveled at Jesus' teaching. Maybe she felt a bit of envy, wishing she had a son like Jesus who could teach about the spiritual world so clearly. So she called out, "**Blessed is the mother who gave you birth and nursed you**" (27). It was common in Jewish culture to credit the mother for the success of her children. However, this kind of humanistic praise was a great distraction to Jesus' teaching. So Jesus contradicted the woman, saying, "**Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it.**"

The best blessing is to enter the kingdom of God and dwell there permanently. God's kingdom members have complete and final victory over the devil. How can we enter his kingdom? We need to hear the word of God and obey it. The word of God has a connection to the finger of God. God inscribed his word--the Ten Commandments--on stone tablets with his finger (Ex 31:18; Deut 9:10). So "the finger of God" may be synonymous with the word of God. One word of God, like one finger, may seem small. But it can drive out demons, topple kingdoms, and even remake heaven and earth.

In the Old Testament, God inscribed his word with his finger on tablets of stone. But Jesus has given us a new covenant through his blood. Now the Spirit of God can write the word of God in our minds and on our hearts (Jer 31:33; 2 Cor 3:3). This word is living and active and speaks to us every day. As we hear and obey God's word, we can experience the kingdom of God and victory over all evil for his glory. St. Augustine was an intellectual hedonist. He could not control his pleasure-seeking desires and made man mistakes. He could not change himself. But he heard Romans 13:13,14, including "**...clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature.**" Then he was freed from the power of sin and changed into a holy saint and shepherd for God's children.

Martin Luther heard and lived by one word of God, "**the righteous will live by faith.**" Then he could solve his tormenting sin problem and be free from the oppression of the devil. Furthermore, God worked through this word to overthrow the power of the devil at work in Christendom--even though it had seemed

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insurmountable. So Luther wrote in his hymn, **“one little word shall fell him.”** Our God is Almighty God. Just one word from his mouth, just one touch of his finger, is enough to slay all the forces of evil and rescue his children from the enemy. The finger of God can guard our hearts and our minds completely and keep us in perfect peace. The finger of God can give us eternal life and draw us to his everlasting kingdom. This is why we often pray to receive “one word of God” in UBF ministry.

In these relativistic times, let's decide to stand on Jesus' side. Let's ask him to write his word in our minds and on our hearts. Then we can dwell in the house of the Lord forever and enjoy his peace and love.