

# By the Finger of God

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, have you ever been falsely accused of doing something wrong?! It's not a nice feeling, is it?

! How did you respond in the moment? Did you become angry? Did you give back some accusations of your own?

Were you worried that the accusation made against you might stick and that others would hear it and believe it? Well, today as we continue the story of Jesus, we hear about a time when He was falsely accused.

And we hear how He responded to it. We're in the Gospel of Luke, chapter 11. Let me just read the first couple verses.

We're starting in verse 14 to set the scene for us this morning. Jesus was driving out a demon that was mute.

[ 1 : 05 ] When the demon left, the man who had been mute spoke. And the crowd was amazed. But some of them said, By Beelzebul, the prince of demons, he is driving out demons.

So, Luke sets the scene for us. Jesus was driving out this demon.

And this is not the first time we've heard about Jesus casting out a demon. We heard about it back in Luke, chapter 9, when Jesus cast a demon out of a boy. We heard about it in chapter 8, when Jesus healed that man who had many demons.

He cast them out into the pigs. We heard about Jesus casting out multiple demons back in chapter 4. There was the man in the synagogue. And then later that evening, in Capernaum, it says that He cast many demons out of people.

And then we've even heard about the disciples casting out demons, using the authority and power that Jesus gave to them. First, the 12, and then the 72.

[ 2 : 18 ] But here Luke wants to tell us about yet another exorcism done by Jesus. And the thing that's unique about this one is that it leads to this sort of false accusation made against Jesus.

In many ways, this incident, this little chunk of the book here, is more about the dialogue that happened after the exorcism than it is about the exorcism itself.

It all starts with Jesus casting a demon out of a man who could not speak. And the phrasing here is quite interesting. Quite literally, Jesus was driving out a mute demon.

And there's some discussion over that wording. Most take that to mean not that the demon was mute, but that it was a demon of muteness. That it caused this man to be mute and unable to speak.

Think about that for a moment. Can you imagine not being able to speak? And it's not because your body lacks the ability to speak, but because an evil spirit is inside you and has control of you.

[ 3 : 43 ] What was it like for this poor man? Did he feel as though his mouth was taped shut and all he could utter were sounds and noises?

Did he often try to speak and form words, but just no sound would come out? Did this evil spirit torment him or punish him whenever he tried to speak?

Maybe threw him into convulsions so that he no longer tried. And when did this first start happening in this man's life? How long has this been going on for him?

Well, these details are not included by Luke, but it must have been awful for him to be afflicted like this. Luke doesn't even tell us how Jesus drove out the demon.

Just that he was driving out the demon and then when the demon left, the man who had been mute spoke.

[ 4 : 49 ] And then the response of the crowd. They were amazed. The man's ability to speak again, it was clear evidence that he was now set free from this evil spirit.

And the first response of the crowd seems positive. They were amazed. But then some in the crowd challenged Jesus and they made this accusation that we read in verse 15.

But some of them said, by Beelzebul, the prince of demons, he is driving out demons. Others were suspicious and doubtful.

If we just look down to the next verse, 16, others tested him by asking for a sign from heaven. And we kind of wonder here, don't we?

Isn't healing this demon-possessed man a sign from heaven already? Like, what more do you need? It's almost like they didn't even see it.

[ 6 : 06 ] There was skepticism. There was doubt from some of the people. But let's look at this accusation that some made in verse 15.

By Beelzebul, the prince of demons, he is driving out demons. The parallel passages in Matthew and Mark tell us that it was the Pharisees and the teachers of the law who said this.

No surprise there. This was their attempt to explain how Jesus was able to get the evil spirit out of this man.

And so we notice there that they didn't deny that he had got the evil spirit out. They didn't deny that. That much was obvious. But how did he do it?

They couldn't explain that. They accused Jesus of casting out the demon by the power of Beelzebul. Who is Beelzebul?

[ 7 : 13 ] Well, the short answer, we can find it right in the passage here, the Pharisees identify him as the prince of demons. the one who is ruler over all of them.

And if we just glance down the page a little bit to verse 18, we see that Jesus, as he responds, understands that they are referring to Satan. In Jesus' response, he uses the names seemingly interchangeably.

Beelzebul is another name for Satan. This name is thought to have been, to come from the name of an ancient Canaanite god who was worshipped in the land of Canaan even before the children of Israel came into the land.

His name is thought to have been Beelzebul, possibly meaning God of the high place. And it seems as though the Jews, after coming into the land, sort of tweaked his name a little bit.

just the last sound or letter of his name to Baal Zabub. And the meaning of that is Lord of the Flies.

[ 8 : 25 ] And so it's thought that they did this in order to sort of mock this false Canaanite god. But by the time that we get to Jesus' day, this name in the minds of the Jews is basically just another name for Satan, the prince of the demons.

So they make this false accusation. They accuse Jesus of doing this exorcism by the power of the devil. What a nasty and wicked thing to say.

Can you imagine this? You just do this. This poor man has been set free. He's talking again. You did that by the power of the devil. The reason that you're able to get demons to come out of people is because you're in cahoots with the devil himself.

He's their master and so you guys have a thing going on so that they listen and they come out. We'll get to Jesus' response in a minute but let's just acknowledge that there is a kind of logic to this accusation.

They're basically suggesting that the devil and Jesus are working together in some sort of elaborate deception. The demons are coming out of people who they have long afflicted.

[ 9 : 51 ] The Pharisees don't deny that but it's a trick they say. Satan's giving the orders and they're coming out and Jesus is part of this. So there's a kind of logic to it but even before we get to Jesus' response probably you're already thinking like how does that work?

How would this deception of Satan work? I mean it would deceive people into following Jesus and Jesus is telling people to turn away from wickedness and to turn to the Lord.

God so how does that work in Satan's favor? I mean Satan wants people to worship him but Jesus has been going around telling people to do the opposite to love the Lord their God with all their heart, soul, mind and strength and to repent of their sins.

So there's an obvious problem to their suggestion but let's hear Jesus' response to them now in verse 17. 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 Beelzebul.

[ 11 : 24 ] Now if I drive out demons by Beelzebul by whom do your followers drive them out? So then they will be your judges. We'll have to kind of wade through this a bit.

There's a lot there. Let's start with that first statement Jesus makes in verse 17. He says any kingdom divided against itself will fall will be ruined.

Sorry. So let's think about this. If the ruler of a kingdom begins to use his power against his own people then it's not long before that kingdom collapses and then he's no longer the ruler of those people.

I mean history has proven this time and time again. The people of a nation or kingdom will only tolerate so much from the one in charge. So much opposition or cruelty from their own leader and eventually things will come to a head and the conflict will break the kingdom.

And that ruin can happen in different ways. We've seen it in all kinds of ways. Could be a revolt against the leader and replacing him with another one. It could be part of the kingdom breaking away and no we're not going to listen to you anymore.

[ 12 : 45 ] We're going to become our own people. The classic example from the Bible is King Solomon and his son Rehoboam. When Rehoboam became king the people asked him for relief from the heavy burden that Solomon had put on them.

And what did Rehoboam say? He publicly threatened to treat his own citizens even worse than his father had if they didn't do exactly what he told them.

Well it resulted in the immediate ruin of the kingdom. Ten tribes in the north just broke away from Judah in the south and said we won't want nothing to do with you. You guys rule yourself.

The kingdom was divided. The whole thing was ruined. Well Jesus then takes that truth and he applies it to this accusation.

Verse 18. If Satan is divided against himself how can his kingdom stand? If the prince of demons is opposing and driving out the demons that he rules over then his kingdom will fall.

[ 14 : 00 ] people. If Satan is pushing his own forces out of the territory that they've conquered then his kingdom is being ruined.

It's crumbling. He's basically just handing over his own territory. Or to put it maybe in another way if Satan's goal is to harm people and to hurt them and to control people and to tempt people.

Well how can he achieve that goal? By forcing his troops out of the people that they have been afflicting. It just doesn't make sense.

It may even seem like it could work in the short term as a sort of deceptive tactic. But not in the long run. not on this scale.

As we just heard. Jesus has cast many demons out of people. This isn't just a one time thing. Everywhere Jesus goes he's been driving demons out of people.

[ 15 : 07 ] He's been setting people free. Even if it was a form of deception Satan would be utterly losing in the process. Because he's basically just relinquishing control over all these people's lives.

It would be almost like him just trying to gain power and grow stronger by cutting off his own arms and legs. It just doesn't work. Jesus exposes the faultiness of their logic.

Then Jesus goes on in verse 19. Now if I drive out demons by Beelzebul by whom do your followers drive them out? This second answer of Jesus isn't as easy to understand as the first.

Jesus starts with this rhetorical question. If I drive out demons by Beelzebul by whom do your followers drive them out? And I'll be honest I'm not sure I got this figured out myself here.

How does this question work? Is it to stump them? What's the answer to it? Or is it a statement that Jesus is making?

[ 16 : 23 ] I'm not really sure. And then we can add on top of that there's sort of another question about who's being referred to in the second half of this question.

A more literal translation. By whom do your sons drive them out? If I drive out demons by Beelzebul by whom do your sons drive them out?

And so who are the sons? Some see this as referring to the followers of the Pharisees. And that kind of opens up a whole discussion there. Are the Pharisees driving out demons?

Others suggest that your sons actually refers to the disciples. The apostles. That they are the sons of Israel. They're the young men of Israel who are now going around and casting out demons by the authority and power that Jesus has given them.

And maybe Jesus is asking, are you ready to condemn all of the things that they've been doing, that your sons have been doing, going out? I say that all that's been done by the power of the devil.

[ 17 : 34 ] And then there's even one more statement at the end there. For this reason they will be your judges. One thought is that all true exorcisms, no matter who does them, can only be successful by the power of God.

Because he's the only one strong enough who has the power to do it. And so maybe this is something like all who have been casting out demons will stand in judgment over you Pharisees and teachers of the law because they know it was not by the power of Beelzebul that they did it, that it was by the power of God.

This part of the conversation is difficult to understand and I'm not sure I've got it figured out. But then finally in verse 20 Jesus brings out the big statement and this one is very clear.

Jesus brings out the truth that they should be arriving at from his exorcisms. All the exorcisms that he's been doing really point to this one thing and here it is.

He says, but if I drive out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. I love those words.

[ 18 : 55 ] If I drive out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. first Jesus tells us how he does it.

He says he does it by the finger of God. That's a big statement and it's a figure of speech. It basically means by the power of God.

In other words, this is God's doing. This is something that his hand has accomplished. The choice of finger as opposed to hand may even be intentional by Jesus to suggest that only a very small amount of God's power is needed to do this.

So Jesus just makes it really plain, really clear. I drive out these demons not by the power of Satan, but by the power of God. The demons cower, they tremble, they comply when I tell them to get out because when I speak to them, the very power of God is at work compelling them to obey.

It's not Satan making war against his own troops or doing some sort of elaborate deception. That would be foolish. That would be illogical. But Satan's kingdom is being ruined.

[ 20 : 25 ] It is falling. But it's not from the inside. It's from the outside. His troops are being pushed out of their territory by a greater power.

By the only one who has a greater power than he does, and that's God himself. Think about this.

That Jesus is driving out demons, fallen angels, at all, is evidence that God's power is in Jesus and with Jesus.

And the conclusion that we should come to, the truth of the matter that Jesus is saying we should get from this, is that God's kingdom has come.

His kingdom is upon you. It's right now breaking into the world like we've never seen before. it's the beginning of the end for Satan and his kingdom.

At this point, Jesus gives us a little illustration in the next two verses, 21 and 22. He says, 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 his plunder.

[ 22 : 04 ] Now illustrations are there to sort of shed light, they're there to make things clear, to reinforce the truth, to give an example of the truth. But in this case, Jesus' illustration probably makes a little more impact on his original audience than it does on us.

I was thinking about this. Thanks be to God that armed robbery is not all that common in our community. We do have break-ins sometimes, but armed and violent robbery where someone breaks into a home and attacks the man of the house and steals all their family stuff, that doesn't happen maybe as often as it did in Jesus' day and in that place.

Back in those times and in that place, for many, your home and your possessions were only as secure as the strongest man in your house was strong.

If someone wanted to plunder your home successfully, they just had to be stronger than the man of the house. now, we have to remember, this is an illustration.

Of course, Jesus isn't giving us pointers here on how to be successful in armed robbery. This is an illustration. It has to do with how Jesus is able to drive out demons.

[ 23 : 30 ] The demons are strong. They are powerful. And they have taken up residence in people. And once they have the control that they desire of a person, they are not just going to let go.

The only way to do anything in that house is if someone stronger, more powerful comes along and overpowers that spirit and subdues it.

And that's why Jesus is able to cast out demons. This is his answer. Because he does it by the power of the one who is stronger than them and than their prince.

And so as Jesus just said, the exorcisms, they're evidence that a more powerful kingdom has come. Think of the ancient history of our world.

A lot of it in the broadest strokes is just one kingdom rising to power, conquering lands, taking territory, only to fall to another kingdom that comes after and rises up, conquers them and takes their land and their territory.

[ 24 : 54 ] Well, why is it like that? Well, the second kingdom that comes up in its place becomes more powerful than the first. first. And I think that's kind of what Jesus is saying here.

The kingdom of Satan is crumbling. The demons are being driven out because a more powerful kingdom has come. The kingdom of God is here.

the next thing Jesus says in verse 23 seems to stand alone and seems unrelated to this whole discussion.

He says, whoever is not with me is against me and whoever does not gather with me scatters. This might feel a little out of place like what's the relationship to what we've been hearing.

Well, if we look over to Matthew's account, which we won't do this morning, Jesus has more to say that's related to this statement in verse 23, but it's almost like we're just getting the abbreviated version from Luke.

[ 26 : 03 ] He didn't want to leave this one statement out that Jesus made. Whoever is not with me is against me and whoever does not gather with me scatters.

there's a sort of black and whiteness to this whole thing. Jesus is the Messiah. He is the Son of God. He is on the side of God.

He is the very King of the Kingdom of God. And it's like he's saying, when it comes right down to it, there is no middle ground. There is no neutral.

You are either with Jesus as a believer in him, as a follower of his, or you're against him. There's no neutral.

Jesus just kind of draws a line in the sand. You're either with me or you're against me. You either gather with me or you scatter away from me.

[ 27 : 08 ] There's no in between. And so we're kind of brought to this question. Whose side are you on? Finally, in this section, we hear from Jesus about the strange and unfamiliar tendencies of evil spirits.

Verses 24 to 26. He says, when an impure spirit comes out of a person, 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 person is worse than the first.

Well, there's a lot in this explanation that is very strange and unfamiliar to us. I imagine that all who heard it that day had the same reaction that we may be having right now.

Like, Jesus has some, he has this knowledge of the tendencies of evil spirits. He has this knowledge of their motivations, how they think, how they scheme, how they plan.

[ 28 : 36 ] He seems to know things about demon possession that we just have no experience with. We've got no idea about it. And I think that these words of Jesus should really humble us.

They should help us realize that there's a lot going on in the spiritual realm that just we have no idea about. And we have to be careful here, I think, because there's not enough here to boldly and confidently declare, ah, yes, now I understand all that's going on in the spiritual realm, all that's going on with demons and how they operate.

Jesus is just giving us like a little sample, a little glimmer of what he knows about them. According to Jesus, evil spirits seem to be restless if they're not in a person.

and why is that? Well, we don't know. We heard earlier about how the many evil spirits called legion in the man from the Gerasenes begged Jesus to send them into the pigs.

It's like they didn't want to just go out of the man and fly around. Why not? They'd rather be in the pigs. it seems from what Jesus says here that they are without rest when they don't have a home, a person or a creature to inhabit.

[ 30 : 12 ] And why isn't an impure spirit able to find rest after coming out of a person? Why is it that it goes back to that person that it had possessed before?

Is it more difficult for an evil spirit to get into a person or gain control over a person than we might think? You know, this bit of Jesus' teaching raises all kinds of questions about demons, spirits, possession.

And again, I think we need to be careful here that we don't take this glimmer and assume that we have the full light. These words should humble us before Jesus, the one who does have the full light and knowledge of all that's going on in the spiritual realm.

Here I think is a little more evidence that Jesus is greater than the demons. He understands how they operate, what their tendencies are, what their motivations are, how they think.

One thing that's certain from this, I think, Jesus is not saying that all people that he has liberated from demonic possession are likely to become possessed again.

[ 31 : 31 ] Maybe that's how it has been up until now before Jesus came, where they would sort of return to the place where they had been. But now that the one who is stronger is here, the one who casts out by the power of God, those who are set free, don't need to fear the evil spirits returning.

As we keep flipping forward in the story, we discover that the gift of God, the gift of Jesus is his own spirit to live in us.

And to put it in Jesus' terms, if the strongest one there is, is in the house, then everything in the house is secure.

Because there is no greater power than God's. The devil and his demons cannot overpower him.

And so that's encouragement, that if we have God's spirit living in us, we don't need to fear what the devil or the demons may do to us, that they might overpower us.

They can't. Well, let's bring this to a close. How will we respond to all this? put yourself in the crowd that day.

[ 32 : 53 ] Where do you see yourself? Do you relate to the Pharisees and feel inside yourself this inexplicable desire to oppose Jesus and cast doubt on him?

And if so, why? Where does that come from? or do you relate more to the others who are skeptical? Yeah, another casting out of a demon, but let's see something real. There's got to be more than this. Are you still asking for yet another sign?

Or do you believe that Jesus really did drive out demons by the finger of God? Do you believe that the kingdom of God has come?

And finally, I just want to leave us with this question. Whose side are you on? Jesus himself said you are either with him or against him.

[ 34 : 06 ] There are only two kingdoms. What choice have you made? you made the decision to cross that line in the sand to be on Jesus' side and put your trust in him and follow him?

Or in your heart are you still standing opposed and against him? Jesus wants us to know that there is no neutral.

There's no other option. it is black and white. There are only two kingdoms. The kingdom of this world, which is ruled by the devil, and the kingdom of God.

And if we listen to the rest of what Jesus says, it's just a matter of time before the kingdom of God comes and puts an end to the kingdom of this world, the kingdom of Satan as we know it.

have you made the decision to cross that line in the sand? Whose side are you on? Maybe you haven't done that, but you're wondering, how do I do that?

[ 35 : 18 ] What's involved? I just want to encourage you, if that's something you're wondering and you think, yeah, I want to make that decision, but I don't know how to do it, come and talk to me after the service or to anyone here who you know has that faith.

come talk to us after the service and we'd be happy to sit with you and pray with you and talk to you about that. This is the biggest and most important decision in life.

Jesus said, whoever is not with me is against me. Whose side are you on? Let's pray. Father in heaven, please stir our hearts to a response.

Don't let us come away from what we heard in your word today and just forget it. Change us because of it. Give us urgency in our relationships with people that we would be beneficial to them, that we would make the most of the opportunities we have to not only to love them but to speak of you, to put this question before them.

And that's hard, Lord, but we ask that you would give us courage and boldness. May we not be ashamed of you or your words. we ask for this in your name.

[ 36 : 52 ] Amen.