

The Kingdom is Near

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[0 : 00] Well now, despite the fact that certain pieces of the passage were censored this morning, it's a censorship passage.

It's like standing in front of a furnace, this passage. It's a little bit disturbing, I warn you about it. If you'd like to open and follow along, just check me out.

It's Luke 11 on page 69, verses 14. I'm going to go 13 to 28. And you'll notice that Satan is all over the passage.

Verse 13, Jesus talks about us being evil. Verse 26, he talks about more evil spirits. And in between, he talks about Satan, the Lord of demons, demons and unclean spirits.

And if there's anyone who still holds the antiquated view that Jesus was preaching a message of universal brotherhood, love and tolerance, and it's that nasty apostle Paul who brings in Satan and demons, this passage completely blows that out of the water.

[1 : 06] And of course, most people today think that any talk of Satan and demons puts your sanity in question. You know, talking about Satan and demons is for fanatics, extremists, mentally unhinged people.

We are all basically good people, except for some over there who talk about demons from time to time. And because of our intrinsic goodness, we can overcome all the evil in the world by drawing on the world's goodness.

I've noticed this last week in the papers, there's been a lot of advice given to the new President Obama in the States. Yesterday, the longest piece of advice was a column that came from Conrad Black, writing from the security of the prison cell about all that evil out there, advising Obama how to deal with the axis of evil, without any scintilla of irony.

You might also know that the atheist bus campaign that's been so successful, I guess it's been successful in England, is coming to Canada next week. A number of atheists have got together and have donated to put signs on the side of buses.

And the sign they've put reads like this, There's probably no God. Now stop worrying and enjoy your life. Now I'm no expert on this, but I think that's what agnostics believe, isn't it?

[2 : 38] I might be wrong about that. It seems like the atheists have kind of lost their nerve on this. I mean, a true atheist sign would say, There's absolutely no God, now go and enjoy your life.

But they know that most people know that you can't disprove that God exists, and they know that most people believe God exists, and they've chosen a modest sign that doesn't really represent what they believe.

Why am I telling you this? It's because if you believe that there is a personal supernatural power of good, it's irrational to think that it's impossible that there's a personal supernatural power of evil. Still, most contemporary people will say, You can't believe in demons and devils. That is a primitive view of the world. Primitive cultures confuse demons and mental illness and physical sickness. After all, we're people of science, and we've unraveled all those things, so we're not naive and superstitious. And it's true, some cultures do make those confusions, but never the Bible.

[3 : 45] Just keep your finger in chapter 11 and turn back to chapter 6, verse 18 for a moment. She's 17. This gospel is written by a man of science, a doctor, a physician, and a number of the medical terms he uses are only found elsewhere in Hippocrates.

And in verse 17, speaking about Jesus, Luke says, There are people, at the end of the verse, who came to hear him and to be healed of their diseases.

Here's another group. And those who were troubled with unclean spirits were cured. He knows the difference between sickness, and he knows the difference from demons, and Jesus has power over both.

And I only noticed this week in chapter 13 that Jesus himself makes that distinction. If you want to, just turn over to 13.32. Jesus says, Go and tell that fox, speaking of King Herod, Behold, I cast out demons and perform cures today and tomorrow.

The Bible has the most nuanced and sophisticated, least naive view of reality that there is.

[5 : 01] It never reduces our problems just down to one issue, medical, psychological, or spiritual, and puts them all in the same basket.

It never reduces our issues just to morality. Jesus teaches that there is a personal, supernatural dimension in everything we do, and that we cannot begin to understand ourselves unless we understand God and sin and Satan.

Every decision you and I make has a spiritual dimension to it. Look back at chapter 11, verse 13, which is the last verse of last week's passage.

Jesus says, If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him?

That is an amazing verse. Jesus is talking about good people giving good gifts to their good children, and he says still, you are evil.

[6 : 11] It's Jesus' view. If we're all basically good deep down, my question is, how do you explain the tremendous wickedness and evil in the world?

If you leave out God and sin and Satan, how can you account for what we read in the newspapers? Forget the Holocaust.

Forget the genocides over the past 90 years. How do you account for Penny Boudreau from Nova Scotia, who we read about yesterday, who murdered her 12-year-old daughter because she didn't want to lose her boyfriend?

I did it out of love, she said. I would do anything for that man. Simon Fraser University, criminologist, said, we don't understand it. It doesn't make sense.

You just cannot explain all the evil in the world by a lack of parenting, a lack of opportunity, a lack of education, by mental instability, or by bad distribution of resources. Jesus teaches that there is a spiritual dimension of every decision that we make, that there are personal, spiritual forces of evil who are at work in us, intensifying and mixing up all the other factors, making it impossible for us to solve these things just with goodwill and good education and good breeding.

[7 : 37] And what Jesus does in this passage is he exposes two key strategies of Satan, both of which are spiritually deadly, both of which by which Satan keeps us enslaved.

And I think one of the reasons we find reading this passage so strange is because Jesus is exposing delusions that all of us operate under most of the time.

What are the two things? The first is the deadly delusion of spiritual neutrality. Look at verse 23 for a moment. These are the words of Jesus.

He who is not with me is against me. He who does not gather with me scatters. Now, in all sorts of areas of life, neutrality is a good thing.

The snow, for example. Being neutral about the snow is a good thing. I'm struggling with it, but it's a good thing. If you're the referee of the under-seven soccer competition, neutrality is an important thing.

[8 : 47] But when it comes to spiritual things, Jesus says neutrality is impossible. If we do not side with him, we are against him.

Now, why does Jesus say this? Well, he's just finished in verse 13, you remember, telling us that the best thing that we can give our children are good gifts, a happy and stable home, a good education, some wisdom we've learned from our mistakes and a bit of self-confidence.

But as parents, we cannot deal with the thing that they faced spiritually, and that is evil. We cannot deal with evil in ourselves. It is completely beyond us to deal with evil because it is a spiritual force stronger than we are.

We can limit some of the fallout, but we can't deal with the thing itself because evil is a supernatural personal power. All religion, all morality, all goodwill in the world will not deal with it.

What we need is the Holy Spirit. And then in verse 14, we come into our passage and almost as a passing reference, Jesus casts the demon out of a man who has made him literally speechless, dehumanising, cutting him off from other people, which is part of the work of evil.

[10 : 08] And the crowd reacts by thinking up this ridiculous explanation. The only reason Jesus can cast out demons is because he's working for the Lord of demons, Satan, Beelzebul.

They don't mean a word of it, of course. They don't have a clue. They don't know the first thing that they are talking about. What they want to do is to not make a decision for Jesus.

They only say this to remain spiritually neutral. You think about it. If they had really thought, if they had really thought that Jesus was using the power of Satan, they would have fallen on him and killed him instantly.

No, no, they're just playing spiritual games. It is their intention to avoid deciding for Christ. And the best way to do that is to play spiritually neutral. It's lovely to see the way Jesus deals with this. You know, he doesn't stamp his feet and have a tantrum. He speaks to them on their grounds. He enters into their worldview and he demonstrates the absurdity of it. He says, look, if you believe there's a Lord of demons and he's in charge of all the demons, why on earth would I be casting out demons?

[11:16] And besides, who do your followers use to cast out demons? And then in verse 20, he brings it to a point. He says, if it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you or among you.

He says, look, this is real. He says, I'm not using the Hogwarts magic book of spells. He says, it's by the finger of God.

I am the very power of God, he is saying, driving out evil. That is why I've come. This phrase, the finger of God, comes twice in the book of Exodus and it shows, I think it shows a number of things. But one is how easy this is for God. But more importantly, that through Jesus' ministry, everything that Jesus does in his ministry, God himself is personally involved in the great rescue mission, the redemption.

It's not against Pharaoh this time, but this time it is against Satan himself who stood behind Pharaoh. So in everything that Jesus does, the reign of God, the rule of God, the kingdom of God is present and to enter the kingdom of God means to allow Jesus to deal with the evil and not yourself.

[12:33] But that's why it's absolutely impossible to be spiritually neutral towards Jesus. If he has come to release us from a power far greater than any of us can handle, if he is God's king who's come to save us, fence sitting is fatal.

It means you've not seen what Jesus is doing and in Jesus' mind, you still belong to Satan. There is no fence.

This week Robert Fulford wrote a book review of a new book on the Vichy regime in France during the German occupation in the Second World War. It's called *The Shameful Peace* by Frederick Spots.

Despite the claims of a number of contemporary French leaders, during the occupation of France, French artists and intellectuals largely collaborated with the Nazis.

Some did so grudgingly and some did so enthusiastically but on the whole they cooperated. Spots has this devastating line, the occupation was merciless at exposing character.

[13:44] And Jesus says, we have been occupied by a foreign power and we have to choose whether we'll collaborate or whether we'll be part of the resistance and if we collaborate we give the enemy greater foothold to become more secure.

The trouble for us, you see, is we think Satan is only involved with those poor people over there who might be demon possessed. That we're above all that.

That I'm spiritually objective about this. The Apostle Paul says that's exactly how Satan gets us, you see, because when we are proud we fall into the trap of the devil and we come under his influence. Whereas Peter says, we must humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God because it's through our pride that Satan wants to devour us. It's through our pride that we are occupied and influenced by Satan.

All of us. Whether you are not a Christian or whether you've been a Christian for 43 years, every proud thought, every proud and selfish word is a collaboration with Satan and the acme of pride is to think, I am above this.

[14:59] I'm above Satan and Jesus. I don't really need rescuing. I'm good enough to deal with my own evil. And we take the position of neutrality.

It's amazing how we've come to idolise agnosticism in our culture. We have pride ourselves in being open-minded and non-judgmental.

And Jesus says, in spiritual things, that's being captive to pride. That's not having any genuine conviction. That's just being self-protective.

We want an in-between position. We want to be able to call ourselves humble, having an intellectual integrity. And Jesus says, that's nothing but spiritual pride and arrogance and it puts you against me.

To think that you can take a position above Jesus and above Satan, sitting safely on some fence and being ambivalent and not taking sides, is just naive and a deadly spiritual delusion.

[15:59] That's the first delusion. The second is in verses 21 and 22 and it is the deadly delusion of our own spiritual ability.

An amazing picture here in 21 and 22 of what Jesus does in his ministry and particularly through his death and resurrection. Just verse 21 first, speaking of Satan, when a strong man fully armed guards his own palace, his goods are in peace.

There it is. Jesus says, Satan is a strong man. He's much stronger than we are. He was stronger than our parents in Adam and Eve. He's taken all of us captive since and he is armed.

He's armed with deception and all our attempts to deal with evil apart from Jesus Christ just make him laugh. And here is the most chilling line, I think.

Jesus says, his goods are at peace. That all of those who are under Satan's influence lie still enjoying a kind of a peace and they don't give Satan any trouble.

[17:06] There is peace in Satan's house but it is the peace of a prison. Because Satan wants to keep us quiet and distracted and not really concerned about our spiritual state, convinced that's nothing wrong, that I have the ability to deal with my evil.

Despite Jesus' clear power and warnings, there's a tremendous arrogance to think that I can deal with this evil, that I have the ability to deal with it. See, Jesus' goal is to take us away from Jesus Christ, to stop us hearing his word.

And even when we hear his word in chapter 8, you remember what Satan wants to do? He wants to snatch it away from our minds so that it won't take root there. If that happens, there might be a breakout.

But what does Jesus do? Verse 22. When one's stronger than he assails him and overcomes him, he takes away his armour in which he trusted and divides his spoil.

This is Jesus' picture of what he's come to do. He is stronger than Satan. He is the son of the Most High. He's just as demonstrated his power in verse 14, one of a number of castings out and exorcisms.

[18:19] And Jesus says, I've come to assail Satan, to attack Satan, not for the fun of it, but to deal with the evil that holds you captive. And we as prisoners, we didn't invite him to intervene, but we were far too much at peace.

But this is why Jesus was born. This is why he left heaven. This is why he entered our world. He entered into the prison to free us from the hands of all who hate us.

And in his death, Jesus has gone into the deepest dungeons in the enemy's stronghold and freed us from all that would hold us there. And that's what it takes to deal with spiritual evil.

It is the death of the Son of God. And I think that's why the thought that we can deal with evil apart from Christ is a deadly delusion. And I think that's the point of these strange verses 24 to 26.

Let me just read them to you again. When the unclean spirit goes out of a man, he passes through waterless places seeking rest. Notice, it hasn't been cast out, it just goes out.

[19:29] And finding none, it says, I'll return to the house from which I came. And when he comes, he finds it swept and put in order. And then he goes and brings seven other spirits more evil than himself. And they enter and dwell there.

And the last state of the man becomes worse than the first. If we believe in our spiritual ability apart from Christ, if we try to reform ourselves without Christ and without his spirit, it will have no lasting value and it opens us to greater danger down the track.

Until evil is dealt with by the stronger man, by Jesus, until we gather with Christ and allow Christ to deal with our evil, everything else is merely rearranging deck chairs and opening the door to seven other demons down the track.

This is exactly how pride works. A lovely quote from C.S. Lewis' Mere Christianity. He says, Pride is purely spiritual. I quote, Pride can often be used to beat down simpler vices.

Many a man or woman has overcome cowardice or lust or ill temper by learning to think that they are beneath their dignity. That's pride. And the devil laughs.

[20 : 50] He is perfectly content to see you becoming chaste and brave and self-controlled provided all the time he is setting up in you the dictatorship of pride just as he would be quite content to see your chill blades cured if he were allowed in return to give you cancer.

Pride is spiritual cancer. The idea that I am good enough deep down to overcome my evil that somewhere in my life deep down I am worthy and righteous that this life is about finding my righteousness you know what that is Jesus says it is sweeping the carpet and it is opening the door to greater evil.

Jesus has not come to call the righteous he has come to call sinners to repentance because he has come to face our evil and to deal with our sin and to cast him out.

So what do we do? What does this passage tell us that we should do? There are two things. The first simply is we have to recognise the true source of spiritual power to overcome evil.

Jesus is the stronger man. He brings the kingdom of God and in his death he defeats the strong man overcomes him takes away his spoil and dies in the doing of it.

[22 : 10] That's what Jesus does on the cross. He absorbs evil and sin into himself. He dies to wipe out evil without wiping us out. He comes to bring forgiveness.

He comes to free us from the strong man and we need to see ourselves dare I say it as those who need him to deal with our sin and evil.

That's the first thing. See where the source of spiritual strength is. And the second very simply is to cling to Christ to go to him and allow him and ask him to deal with the evil. This is what Jesus has been saying all along about repentance.

The way that we deal with sin is not by trying to deal with sin ourselves but by going to Christ for he will deal with our sin. I think that's the point of the last two verses as the woman comes up and raises her voice and says blessed is the womb that bore you and the breast that you sucked.

And Jesus says blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it. True spiritual blessing is not being physically related to Jesus.

[23 : 17] It's being spiritually related and we do that as the Holy Spirit brings the word of God into our hearts as we hear the word of God and as we do it. Jesus has come to overcome and overpower Satan.

He's given the Holy Spirit now the Holy Spirit fills our hearts and cleans us. Ask him to give you the spirit so that you can hear his word.

I read this week this is a great point for me to say. There is nothing I can do, there is nothing any human being can do to give you or any other person a consciousness of your own sin.

That is something that comes from God alone. That's why Jesus says ask your heavenly father to send your Holy Spirit. Only Christ has the power to deal with evil and how wonderful it is that he does that.

As we this morning come up and receive the bread and the wine ask God to forgive you of your sins as you forgive those to whom you are debted. Humble yourself under the mighty hand of God because in due time he will exalt you and he will bless you and he will bring you home.

[24 : 31] Amen. Let's kneel and pray. Father we thank you for our belief and as we honour and reveal your name we thank you in particular for what you have done for us this past week.

We thank you for our daily sustenance for comfort for minor and maybe even some major miracles and we even thank you for our troubles because through them the muscles of our faith grew stronger.

We thank you for Jesus. We thank you for the love which led him to the cross and for the teaching he gave his disciples to help us follow God's path into heaven.

We particularly thank you for what we've learnt this morning. Father shatter every delusion we allow in our lives. Spare us from the comforts of spiritual delusions and open our eyes to the uncomfortable delusion of fence setting.

Father keep us help us as we face the merciless occupation by Satan. Help us to deal with our prideful claim to be to be objective and all the other things that we so readily delude ourselves with and keep ourselves from acknowledging who you are and what you've done for us.

[26 : 11] Lord in your mercy. Father help us to realize that Jesus is stronger than Satan and help us to realize even though it sounds weird that Jesus is stronger than us because we so often do

things in our own strength and then to pridefully claim credit for it.

help us to know that we can have pride in nothing. Strip pride from us and strip away we ask our sense of spiritual self-righteousness.

Help us to cling to Christ and know that everything we do we do through him. We pray now for the church universal.

we pray a blessing for those who prayerfully preached your word this Sunday and for those who listened and accepted your guidance from it.

Give us courage we pray to put the lessons we hear into action and into our daily lives and particularly those nasty ones we've heard about delusions.

[27 : 32] We pray especially for those in difficult mission fields in places that are hostile or apathetic like here in Vancouver. When those of fire and we hear witness to your saving grace and your mighty authority whether in Africa, Afghanistan, the Genesis Project, UBC or the Arbutus Club, we pray that people will open their ears to hear the gospel.

people. We pray that their eyes will be opened so that they will see the comfortable delusions they live by and see what you offer.

From board room to classroom, sick room to play room, whatever situation we're in, help us to talk openly about our faith and our gratitude that Christ came and freed us from Satan's authority over us.

Father, help us open our mouths. May your kingdom grow and your will be done on earth. Lord, in your mercy.

And speaking of the sick room, we ask your healing power on Paul, Gail, Rowena, Carl, Mark.

[28 : 55] And we ask for you to control various legal situations. We pray that money will come forth for our legal fund.

We pray for the strategy that our lawyers are thinking of employing. We ask that it will comply to what you want. And we ask for us as a congregation that we will have the grace to accept whatever verdict comes about.

And in another illegal situation, we pray for Miran, your child. We ask that you will allow his permanent residence in Canada.

Lord, in your mercy. And now, Lord, we ask that as we go out into the coming week, that you will keep us from evil, guide us from temptation and bring us back next week to hear your word.

Amen. Amen.