

The Finger Of God

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[0 : 00] Let's just look at this passage, which comes from the 11th chapter of Luke. And it's in this series that we've done on Luke 11, that we're working our way through that chapter.

And we looked at the first thing, which is the Lord's Prayer, which is the pattern prayer for Christians, and the five things that you address the Father and you build your prayer around the five petitions in that prayer.

And so you've got, in the first few verses of Luke 11, you've got the pattern of prayer. In the second, you have the picture of powerlessness, where the man stands alone in the dark with the need on one side and the resource on the other, and he has to act in that situation.

And the picture, the parable of how that's done is in the next verses up to verse 13 of Luke 11. And then today there is the power struggle.

And I want just to tell you the story, because what happens is Jesus has this gathering around him, and there's one man there who has a dumb spirit.

[1 : 20] That is, he doesn't talk. I thought about this. I wondered why there was no miracle in the New Testament that took somebody who talked too much and shut them up.

However, that's a miracle I often pray for. And I'm sure that people listening to me often pray for it too.

Anyway, this dumb man who couldn't speak, and it wasn't a physical disability, and it wasn't a psychological disability.

It seems to have been a spiritual disability. And Christ demonstrated his spiritual authority by taking the dumb spirit out of the man so that he then was able to speak.

And that, of course, caused a division, because people wanted to figure out how that happened.

And it would be the same if I asked one of you to come up here, as I'm sure many of you could, and say, give us a word on what the Lord has done for you.

[2 : 37] Then we would divide the group into, you don't know what you're talking about, or, you know, it's divisive. That's why it's dangerous to do. But Jesus didn't seem to be afraid of doing it, and he brought this man out and delivered him, and he was able to speak.

And the division was between the people on the one hand who marveled and said how wonderful this is, and the people who were threatened by what Jesus had done and by the authority that he had demonstrated in doing it.

And so they went together to figure out what happened. And it says that Jesus, knowing their thoughts, starts an argument with them. And I think you have to see that this is really, I mean, the miracle is dealt with in one verse, but the rest of it, this argument goes on for the rest of the verses of the passage that you have in front of you.

Jesus knowing that he has to capture their minds and understanding in order that they will acknowledge who he is. And so he, knowing their thoughts, speaks to them.

And the thoughts that they'd been having, which they'd been having privately, Jesus brings out into the open. I would love to be able to bring some of your thoughts out into the open right now, but here I am, hopeless and helpless.

[4 : 03] What they were thinking was, as they watched this miracle take place, he casts out demons by Beelzebul, the prince of demons.

The quick, rapid dismissal of what he's done. Now, I don't like to tell you this, but I have a parish that I work at, and it's at 27th and Granville.

We have services on Sunday at 10. No, no, I won't go into that. But I, in the course of my life there, which is now almost 11 years, there have been times when I have done something which perhaps I shouldn't have done or perhaps I should have done, but I was subjected to what I call the

Shaughnessy shaft, you know.

And you're just, you're just like a fly pinned to a wall, you know, you get it. And of course, this is a kind of shaft here, you know. The miracle is done, everybody sees it, and then pow!

It's done by Beelzebub, the prince of demons. It's evil, you know. And, you know, Billy Graham gets it all the time just for standing up and preaching the gospel.

[5 : 30] He just, he gets something like 25,000 hate letters a month. Isn't that wonderful to think of? That, that this put down in which our society is so practiced, you know, that they can do it very quickly, very effectively, very efficiently.

It's all over. We know what he did, we know how he did it. And so we can dismiss this man. But Jesus, knowing their thoughts, said, all right, let's put this on the table and talk about it.

So he puts it on the table and he tells them what they're talking about. They're not talking about Beelzebub at all, who was a, a sort of strange local god.

that he says, you're talking about Satan and you're talking about the power and authority of Satan. And Satan is the accuser of the brethren.

He is the one who drives home the shaft. So you're talking about Satan and we won't go into why they're doing that, but that's what he says is happening.

[6 : 41] And Jesus says these things because he's very respectful of Satan. He said his kingdom is not divided. Don't think that there are cracks appearing in the authority that the prince of darkness holds over humanity.

There are no cracks. The kingdom is not divided. He says further about him that his household is secure. You know, there is, everybody is subject to him.

They know it. They are under his power and his authority and they don't question it. And he says, his kingdom stands. So Jesus gives those three great tributes to the power of evil.

But what has happened and what he's explaining to them is that a miracle has taken place in that somebody who was under the authority of Satan being possessed by a demon and that demon possession demonstrating itself in that this man could not open his mouth to speak, that suddenly he is released from that power and he's able to speak.

So that in this little diminutive miracle, if you want, something has happened that demonstrates a totally different kind of authority than the unbroken authority which Jesus, which Satan has over the world.

[8 : 14] Something has happened and they say that it has happened. I mean, the pious Pharisees say that it's happened because he's in league with the prince of demons.

Now remember that they don't know who this man is and they're trying to figure out who he is and they hear him teaching and they watch this demonstration of his power and they dismiss it on these grounds.

And he says to them in effect, this miracle has taken place. I did it but you don't know how I did it. And what's more, you don't know who I am that did it.

And what's more, it may even be that you don't want to know who I am. But the reason that I have done it is so that you will question, well, who is this man?

Because the gospel is centered entirely on this question. Who is this man, Jesus Christ? and they're forced to face it.

[9 : 32] And so they say, you know, what they said in response to Jesus, they said, well, perhaps you could give us a sign. Now, the fact is that he had just given them a sign.

But that was not the kind of evidence that they wanted. They wanted a different kind of sign. Now, most people will tell you that if the sign they require is given to them, they will believe.

But they have lived these three score years and seven and it's never been given to them yet and so they don't believe yet. But when it is given, they're ready to believe. And this is sort of characteristic of our humanity in that we ignore the sign that is given and we look for another that meets the specifications that we have for the sign that would cause us to make the big change from non-faith to faith.

And so it would be worthwhile for you to sit down with a piece of paper and write out the specs for the miracle that would mean a change for you in terms of faith in God.

What sign would God have to do in order to convince you? and share it with a friend sometime.

You'll be interested to see what happens. Well, Jesus having said this to them, he goes on to carry out the argument a little further and he says, it is impossible that Satan's kingdom is divided and

that a demon who is an instrument of his power and authority should be cast out by him.

[11 : 19] His kingdom is not divided, it's whole, his kingdom stands. He has authority and power within his own realm and that authority and power is not questioned but I've just questioned it.

You've just seen that authority questioned. And so he goes on to tell them if you want to figure out, if you want to work this thing through a little further, he says, by whom do your sons cast out demons?

Now, people talk about Jewish exorcists that went around casting out demons. I wonder about that myself as to whether that in fact happened or whether Jesus was putting to them a kind of rhetorical question, the answer to which was our sons don't cast out demons.

we don't challenge the authority and the power of evil. We live under it and are managed to live with it. The reason I say that is because Jesus goes on to say, let them be your judges.

And then raises the final hypothesis. Now, what this was based on is an incident in the Old Testament with which they would all be familiar. And that was one of the miracles that were done by Aaron in the presence of Pharaoh of Egypt.

[12 : 42] When Aaron took his rod and said that this country will be cursed with gnats and he threw his rod down onto the ground and it seemed as if all the dust of the country turned into living vermin which afflicted men and women and beasts throughout the whole of the country.

And Pharaoh turned to his magicians and said, you do that now. And the magician said, we can't. This must be the finger of God because we can't duplicate that anti-miracle if you want of turning things in.

And so Jesus sets them up and says, this is the hypothesis that I want you to consider on the basis of what you've just seen. if it is, Jesus says, by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.

Here it is, right here. The kingdom of God is present, the kingdom for which you pray. It's right here among you.

That possibility is there. Now, Jesus leaves them with that hypothesis and the story is closed and you'll go on from there next week in looking at the subsequent passage of scripture.

[14 : 08] But what I want you to see there is this, that the way we live in our world today is that we call the good bad and the bad good so that we can look at the best possible situation humanly and can see the kind of snake in the garden.

This great charitable organization sends money to the third world at a cost of 25%. You know, so that you sort of see, well, the altruism and the purity of the motive simply isn't there.

And of course, the church is held up and people see what's wrong with it. They see what's bad about it. And preachers are subject to that.

And the reason for this is that we live in a world in which the effect of sin, that fine biblical word that it's hard for us to handle, the effect of sin is that the good isn't totally good and the bad isn't totally bad.

And if you want to, you can find some good in the bad and you can find some bad in the good. And this is the way we look at our things so that we, in a sense, live a world of accommodation.

[15 : 35] We allow that there is some bad, but on the whole it's pretty good. And in the worst situation, we are able to see some good. So that when the ladies who work in the striptease business have a Christmas fund for crippled children, you see something which is I think bad, morally bad for the city, but it's being used for a good purpose.

And that's the way our world works. We keep both sides in touch with each other. And nobody has to come out and say that there is anything which is ultimately good and there's probably nothing which is ultimately bad and we all live somewhere in the middle.

And we protect ourselves by very sophisticated means against the possibility that there is something which is totally good. There is someone who is totally good.

We have this very elaborate and sophisticated protection against that possibility. And that's the way we live our lives. so they say to Jesus well give us a sign so that if you are who you claim to be it will be unmistakably apparent to us.

Show us that there really is the thing that you claim and that is the kingdom of God. That you by the finger of God have cast out this demon and that demonstrates the presence of the kingdom among us.

[17 : 15] Well in order to be near to the kingdom a friend of mine is always saying you should live your life close to the miracle. The Globe and Mail referred to commercial miracles last week you know sort of when this company buys out this company and they put them together and squeeze and a hundred million dollars pours out that's free to do with whatever you want you know that's a kind of commercial miracle and people like living close to it but this is a different kind of miracle we're familiar with what I would call anti-miracles when a great airliner comes crashing to the ground and hundreds of people are killed that's a kind of anti-miracle our whole technological society shudders because that shouldn't happen we say that about an airline crash in the same way that we say about the miracles of the

New Testament that shouldn't happen and so we go to work to show that it didn't happen in fact by chance it happened because of pilot error it happened because of a technical breakdown it happened because of a wind shear it happened because and we find a reason for it and so I would like to suggest to you that miracles don't happen when a dumb man was able to speak that was not a medical miracle it was not a psychological miracle there must be some reason why it happened and the thing that the reason that it happened was that was so that the people who saw it happen might begin to search around and figure out what the miracle was how that that took place how did that take place and it's a miracle you see is and I find this very helpful where Jesus Christ is present and exercises his authority and a blind man sees a deaf man hears a dumb man speaks a lame man walks a dead man rises it has a reason and the reason is that Jesus is who he says he is and he has the authority for that to happen now a lot of people say look there's a big business in that if you can make blind men see deaf men hear lame men walk and dead men rise we could do something with that but it's not for that reason the reason that these unique events took place were so that people would look at the person of Jesus Christ and decide who he was come to terms with who he was and you see the difficulty with these miracles which point to something beyond themselves they don't point to themselves they can't the nature of a miracle is sort of like dropping a stone in the water you see it hit the water and you see the circles go out but very quickly it's gone and you can see no trace of it and the water is perfectly smooth again and for somebody to come along and say there was a miracle you say well how could that be well I can see well so can I I can walk so can I I can hear but you see what he has to convince people of is that once he was blind once he was down once he was lame once he was dead but that's very hard to do because after a miracle has happened you just look like everybody else you know and it's it's hard to in a sense work from that unless it has an immediate purpose and the immediate purpose of a miracle like this is to raise the question of who is Jesus Christ and you see what happens then is when when they say to him we want a sign it means that they want something more than what they've already seen and what has so suddenly disappeared you know this man who used to have a demon and couldn't speak and just went there because he couldn't say it he now is speaking just like everybody else so what you see it's so easy to dismiss but the question it raises is about the person of Jesus

Christ and when they say they want a sign what is the sign that's to be given to them well the central miracle on which the whole of Christian faith is based the central miracle which you have to get near to and understand is the miracle of the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead because that was not raising a dead man so that he would die again that was raising a dead man so that he would never die again so that when Peter suddenly recognizes what it means and is preaching to the people he says it was impossible that this man should remain dead it couldn't happen it had to happen that he was raised from the dead because that is who he is and that is the great affirmation of who he is and the sign for which we long and the sign which we need and the sign which alone [23 : 00] I think can satisfy us is the great miracle which is at the center of Christianity and that is the miracle of the resurrection of Jesus Christ and Paul says if that doesn't happen then there's nothing left here worth looking at if that does happen then we got to figure out what the implications are in our own lives and in the circumstances of our own lives if this has happened and that's why in a sense you you have to live close to close to the miracle you see what it there was an article in Western Report I don't know how you feel about Western Report so I don't know whether to say that great magazine or just to say Western Report so I'm just going to say Western Report and it was a very articulate and powerful objection by the Jewish community to a history which excluded the story of the Holocaust or didn't give adequate coverage to the story of the

Holocaust and one of the lawyers who was attacking this textbook which is being used in Canada one of the reasons he attacked it was he says that the Holocaust is the terminal event of history history now that's what Jews have always done they say history is not meaningless history has meaning and Christians have picked that up from the Jews and they say history has meaning and they say the central pivotal fact of history is the man Jesus Christ and his resurrection from the dead that's the great event and you see that's why Jesus approaches this group an exorcism takes place they say it's Beelzebul he says it couldn't be he says but it has happened and because it's happened there is the possibility of another reality and that other reality is the kingdom of God and it may have come and you may be witnessing it and if you are what does it mean and you see what what the reason for this story is that you and I who live in under the tyranny of the prince of darkness believe in the coming of the kingdom and we believe in the coming of the kingdom because

Christ has pointed it to us pointed it out to us and demonstrated it to us and the reality of that kingdom is based on the historical reality of the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead that is the sign and Jesus said you're not going to get any other sign so don't look for it that's the sign and in that sign the kingdom of God is revealed let me say prayer father we we recognize that you are our father we also recognize that we are in a world in which the power of evil is tremendously powerful and we easily submit to it but you have in Jesus Christ demonstrated the reality of your kingdom and we ask that you will give us grace to see the reality of your kingdom in the private and individual circumstances of each of our lives we ask this in

Christ's name amen place for second one one and one one going to where shall uh precise possible to and here it to another