

Lent III

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[0 : 0 0] May the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be always acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, our Rock and Redeemer, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

Amen. Please be seated. There have been many portrayals of Jesus throughout the world after his ministry on this earth.

If you ask ten random people on the street about Jesus, you will most likely get ten different answers about what he came to do, who he is, and the message that he brought with him.

There is a popular portrayal of Jesus today that I would describe as the empowering Jesus. This Jesus is a great friend because he is very chill and relaxed about everything that we do.

He's always ready to give us advice when we need or want. His advice is always great because it's never imposing. He never says anything that we don't want to hear. He never requires anything from us.

[1 : 0 0] Yet, he forgives us without any sort of need for faith or repentance. And he affirms us in all our life decisions and our desires. Friends, this Jesus cannot love you.

He cannot love you or help you because he does not exist. Our gospel text today also portrays for us a glimpse of others who tried to pin down and trap Jesus into a specific identity.

One that was the opposite of reality. He casts out a demon from a person suffering from possession. When this person is exercised, their lips are freed once again to speak.

And the crowds were amazed at what happened. However, there were many who said that the real reason he was able to cast out these demons was because he had the power of Beelzebub, who is the prince or the ruler of the demons.

Others, instead of making such drastic claims, required from him signs from heaven to prove that he really is from God. While these accusations and demands are different in their content, they are ultimately challenging the authority of Christ.

[2 : 1 2] They want to know, or at least they say they do, if Jesus really is a prophet and the Son of God. The irony of this is that St. Luke's Gospel has made it quite clear that Jesus does have authority from God.

This was seen in the previous chapter by the wonders that the 70 emissaries did when they went out ahead of Jesus to let the cities know that the Messiah was approaching.

The people asked Jesus to perform a sign from heaven, but the reality is that Jesus gave other people the power to cast out demons. When the 70 returned and said, Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name.

Jesus responds by saying that he saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. The 70 had power to trample on serpents and scorpions, and the enemy, who is Satan, had no power over them.

The irony is even further pressed if we think about what the skeptic saw before he asked for a sign from heaven. He watched the power of Satan get crushed when the demon was exorcised from this mute person, and this lame person was able to speak.

[3 : 23] It was as if he was trying not to see what was going on before his very eyes. Jesus, knowing the thoughts of all these skeptics, begins his speech on power and authority.

He begins by saying that if there is a kingdom with multiple factions that are fighting with each other, that kingdom would be destined for ruin. How could Jesus possibly be defeating the powers of Satan with the power of Satan?

What purpose would that have? Not only that, but what about the emissaries that Jesus sent out? Wouldn't they also be sending out demons by the power of Beelzebub? It's as if Jesus says, You better be careful what you ascribe to these people, because they will be the ones to judge you when the day of the Lord comes upon you.

But, he says, If I am not casting out demons by the power of Beelzebub, but by the very power of God, that that means the kingdom of God has come upon you.

Not only is he saying that the kingdom of God has come upon them, but that he casts out these demons by the finger of God. Well, where else do we see this?

[4 : 33] St. Luke here is making a direct allusion to the book of Exodus, when Aaron, at the command of Moses, bests the magicians at Pharaoh's court. The magicians are forced to acknowledge that this is the finger of God.

Jesus is likened unto the prophet Moses, and just like how Aaron was sent by Moses, who was sent by God, the emissaries were sent by Christ, who was sent by God.

Acceptance, or rejection of the prophet, means acceptance, or rejection by God. Jesus continues by saying that if a strong man is taken over by an even stronger man, that first man has no more power over the house.

If Jesus overpowers Satan in his dominion over this earth, then Satan truly no longer has power over the earth. That is the point that Jesus is making to these people.

They now have the choice. They can either follow and accompany him, or they can be scattered like the guards of the strong man who was overpowered. Lastly, Jesus tells about the spirit that was cast out of a man, and then returns to find that the house had been cleaned, and lies vacant and ready to be lodged.

[5 : 51] He takes seven other spirits who are even wickedder than himself, and they enter into the man. This man is even worse off than when he only had one demon.

What Jesus tells them is this, If I cast out the one who was once the ruler, but you do not swear allegiance to me, the previous ruler will come back into your heart with more strength and power than you could imagine.

Let me live within your heart, since I have freed you from your captivity. Friends, listen closely. In baptism, we have experienced the exorcism of Christ.

In the words of the parable, our houses have been cleared and cleaned. Just as the demon came back with seven other ones after the house was made ready for visitors, but did not house someone new, we must be sure to have Christ in our hearts always.

The strong man has been conquered, and Jesus is Lord, both over the universe and our individual lives. He has established a church, and like the 70, he has called many people to be priests and bishops to rule over that house, that is the church.

[7 : 08] They carry the authority that Jesus does, as he gave it to the apostles before he sent it back into heaven. Jesus is not the friend who never tells us things that we don't want to hear.

Rather, he is the King of kings, he is the Lord of lords, he is the one who has taken over Satan's dominion and claimed this house as his own.

Our old man was removed from our house when we were baptized, so we must take care to fill our own house with Christ. Prayer, reading of the scriptures, partaking of the Eucharist, confession of sins, and fellowshiping with one another are ways that we fill our house with Christ, so that the old man may not return to our house.

This is the love of Jesus, not that he lets us destroy our lives through complete autonomy, but rather that he shows us the way of life in obedience to him.

We beseech thee, almighty God, look upon the hearty desires of thy humble servants and stretch forth the right hand of thy majesty to be our defense against all our enemies through Christ our Lord.

[8 : 21] Amen. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.