

The Devil Went Down to Capernaum

²² The scribes who came down from Jerusalem were saying,

In our verses today, scribes come down from Jerusalem. These are the experts in Jewish law had heard about Jesus' miracles and the demons that He had been casting out. They perhaps had also heard of the controversy between Jesus and the Pharisees, and that they had been plotting to kill Jesus. They were likely official emissaries, a newly-arrived delegation from the Great Sanhedrin in Jerusalem, Israel's combination Congress-Supreme Court.

were saying,

Since the scribes immediately accuse Jesus, without even meeting Him first, this suggests that this is not a neutral, unbiased fact-finding tour, but that their mind is already made up before they even looked at the facts. They had come to accuse and denounce Jesus.

“He is possessed by Beelzebul,” and “He casts out the demons by the ruler of the demons.”

They bring two separate, but related accusations against Jesus: he is demon-possessed, and he casts out demons through collusion with the prince of the demons. The name “Beelzebul” occurs in no other Jewish writing, which may indicate that it was a passing colloquialism for a demon-prince. The name is not found in this sense in pre-Christian Jewish accounts of demons, the only previous occurrence of a similar name being that of the Philistine god, Ba'al zebûb, ‘Baal of flies’ a name also used by Josephus (Ant. 9.19) and in 2 Ki. 1:2, 3, 6, and 16.

²³ And so He called them to Himself

Now, Jesus calls these scribes who have been running off at the mouth to come see him directly. The scribes were speaking about Jesus rather than directly to him, he now initiates a direct confrontation. Jesus is not hiding from political authority here, but is meeting them head-on.

and began speaking to them in parables:

He speaks to them “in parables”. Remember that parables are enigmatic or figurative rather than explicit speech. Why did Jesus teach in parables? In Matthew 13:10–13, Jesus explains to His disciples why He speaks in parables: **10 And the disciples came up and said to Him, “Why do You speak to them in parables?” 11 And Jesus answered them, “To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been granted. 12 For whoever has, to him more shall be given, and he will have an abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has shall be taken away from him. 13 Therefore I speak to them in parables; because while seeing they do not see, and while hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand.** “Because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand” clarifies the dual purpose of parables — to reveal truth to the believing and receptive, and to conceal it from the unbelieving and unreceptive. Here the scribes from Jerusalem are an extreme example of unbelievers who are proud, and will not accept the Truth. Jesus says:

“How can Satan cast out Satan?

These parables that Jesus is using in this section all have the same basic theme: that since strength depends on unity, an attack on any part of Satan's domain is a sign not of collusion with him, but of a threat to his power. Jesus thus ridicules the strange notion that the ruler of demons might allow his power to be used against his own forces. Jesus denies that Satan, or his minions would in any way cooperate with God's plan of salvation. There are clearly hierarchies in the spiritual realm, but there is such control over them by Satan, that they are all under his power. The Mission of Jesus was very clear in regards to the Enemy. **1 John 3:8 8 the one who practices sin is of the devil; for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The Son of God appeared for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil.** This verse reveals that a central purpose of Jesus' mission was to destroy and dismantle the influence, deception, and destructive patterns of Satan in the world.

²⁴ And if a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. ²⁵ If a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. ²⁶ And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but he is finished!

Satan's kingdom, divided against itself could not stand--it would be suicidal; and since Satan wants more power, not less, then it follows that he will not allow his kingdom to be destroyed by civil war. Jesus' attacks against the kingdom of the enemy by casting out demons are successful—an attack by a superior power, Jesus, against an inferior power, Satan and his minions. But, just how does this work? First, demons long to inhabit mortal flesh, and in particular humans, because it gives them an opportunity to carry out more evil than when they are incorporeal spirits. It gives them more opportunity to rob, kill, and destroy. We need only look at the horrible acts committed by those who are possessed by demons, or under their influence to understand this. Some of the most horrible crimes are committed while someone is in an altered state of consciousness, whether from drugs or alcohol, or from demonic influence, or both. *"Sin will take you farther than you want to go, keep you longer than you want to stay, and cost you more than you want to pay"* --Fred Chappell. And that's doubly true when it comes to messing around with demonic forces. And this serves as a cautionary warning about the insidious nature of sin. "Farther than you want to go" — means that small indulgences or harmful habits can escalate quickly, leading to consequences far beyond what was initially anticipated. Sin will "Keep you longer than you want to stay" — once you're in a harmful pattern, it is hard to escape, trapping you in cycles of sin, regret and damage to yourself and others. And, it will "Cost you more than you want to pay" — the spiritual, emotional, financial, family, friendship, and health costs of such choices outweigh any short-term gain. Or, as James 1:14-15 explains James 1:14–15 **16 But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. 15 Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it has run its course, brings forth death. 16 Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers and sisters.** This explains the three-stage process: desire, sin, and death. Temptation begins with a desire within us, which may or may not initially be sinful. If this desire is acted upon or allowed to persist, it gives birth to sin. When sin is "full-grown" or fully matured, it produces death, indicating that the consequences of sin are inevitable if left unchecked. And, Jesus came to set us free from this cycle—destroying the work of Satan to corrupt mankind. So, it is not a matter of a kingdom divided, but of two rival kingdoms in conflict. As proclaimer of the kingdom of God Jesus is necessarily engaged in the destruction of the kingdom of Satan.

27 But no one can enter the strong man's house and plunder his property unless he first ties up the strong man, and then he will plunder his house.

Jesus explains his power over Satan. The strong man is Satan, who represents the whole oppressive force of evil within which individual demons operate), while his opponent and despoiler is Jesus. The point of the parable, then, is that the fact that Jesus is despoiling Satan (through his exorcisms) proves that he has subdued him; the implication is that Satan's power, and that in the ministry of Jesus the kingdom of God is being established. Satan is the strong man whose strength is evidenced in the enslavement of men through sin, possession, disease and death; the demons are his servants in this destructive work. And, only one who is stronger than he can enter into his realm, bind him and plunder his goods. But, because Jesus is God, and because He never sinned, Jesus was in no way under the power of the enemy. So, not only did Satan have **no** power over him—Jesus used the power of the Holy Spirit, and the overall sovereignty of God to tear down Satan's kingdom. Since the 'prey' taken from the strong man there represents God's people rescued from their oppressors, we should perhaps understand the strong man's possessions taken away are the people rescued by Jesus freeing them from Satan's oppression. We no longer live under the shadow of the enemy, but have been set free by Christ.