

**The Vilification of Jesus, Part 2**

Scripture: Luke 11:14-23

Code: 42-160

I had the opportunity this week to...as I frequently do...teach some preaching classes in the seminary. And it's always a special treat to spend time with the students there and talk a little bit about preaching and preparing for sermons and studying and doing all the things you need to do. And inevitably it turns into a question and answer session as they try to pick my brain after having done this for such a very long time. And whenever I get into a setting like that, I always sort of have to confess that the ideal in preparing a sermon would be to study a passage of Scripture, pick a unit of truth out of the text, develop the interpretation of it, get a good outline so people can follow the flow, create an introduction and a conclusion and preach it. That would be ideal. That would be a real sermon. But then I have to confess that I rarely ever do that. I always prepare everything as a unit, I rarely ever preach it as a unit. There is a...there is a science to preaching and that's the science of interpretation. Interpretation of the Bible is done by fixed rules, in that sense it's a science. You don't have any latitude, you can't approach the Scripture any other way than by the legitimate fixed rules of biblical interpretation. So that's the science part of it. You work in the text, you deal with the syntax, lexicography, language, you get all the elements of the text in the original language. You work together with the relationship of words. You deal with context, history, whatever might inform that text. And that's the science part of it.

And when you've done all of that and you've created this thing and you've got a good outline and flow and you've got an introduction that's always right at the end because I can't introduce until I know what I'm going to say. And then you come up with a conclusion last of all. Put the whole package together and you've got a unit. Rarely ever am I able to preach that. And therein lies the other element of preaching. It's not just science, it's also art. It doesn't just depend upon fixed rules, it depends upon the experience of the very event itself.

If I sound like I'm saying that to sort of defend myself, I am. I just...I want you to know that I really do prepare a sermon as a sermon. And it all has good intention. But the adventure of preaching takes me places that I don't necessarily expect to go. In fact, I would confess to you that I come on Sunday morning just like you do to find out what I'm going to say. I...I have no more idea of what's going to come out than you do. I mean, I know some general categories and I have a few pieces of paper up here with some things written down on them, never to be confused with what actually is said. But there's a certain adventure to this whole thing. There's a certain dynamic going on in my mind as

truth comes together. There's not only that which has been deposited in my mind in the previous week on the text, but that well of things that has been accumulating there through all the years and all the years and in the sort of the fire of the moment and I trust aided somewhat by the Holy Spirit, things happen and things are said that aren't necessarily planned for. And so, if I may take a step further in defending myself, I am far more concerned with the richness of the truth than the sermonic unit, if I may say it that way. It doesn't matter a lot to me. And I try to tell the students, it doesn't matter a lot to me what the homiletics are, what the technique is. One of the students said, "Do you rehearse your sermon in a mirror?" Oh....I...no, never. I mean, if I became preoccupied with my physical expressions and the tone of my voice and the shape of my mouth, I'd be paralyzed up here...to say nothing of being bored watching myself for however long it took me to do that. No, I've never rehearsed a sermon in my life. There have been many I've preached I wish I could do over and thought maybe if I had rehearsed they might have been better. But this is an event.

You know, you can't think of preaching as dispensing information that you're never going to forget, because I know in a few hours you're going to forget a lot of it. This is not about depositing information that you'll never forget. This is an event, this is a spiritual event in which at the moment, at the time your mind becomes captive to the truth of God and your mind then takes your emotions and your will and your soul in the direction of obedience to the Word of God and a spiritual work is done in your heart and it's done in the event itself. Time after time and week after week as you accumulate the truth of God's Word, as you listen to it, as you read God's truth, there will be things that you remember and you will accumulate a foundation of understanding and a set of convictions and beliefs that become the fabric of your life. But there's a certain dynamic in the event of preaching that I really can't control and I'm not willing to yield to some fixed sermonic prescription and give up the sheer exhilaration of the event. And so I confess to you that the Lord sometimes directs me in places that I never really expected to be directed. And I say all of that simply to say I had intended to finish this sermon last week, and couldn't do it. Now you in the second service have the benefit, I can tell you, I will finish it today because I did in the last hour. And that is a binding constraint because I have to preach the same thing to both audiences next week and so if I finish first hour, I'll finish now.

Luke 11 is our text...Luke 11. And we're looking at what is a very, very compelling and interesting portion of Scripture. It is, frankly, a rather large chunk for us to take, even in two weeks, verses 14 through 23 of Luke 11 and I want to read the text for you because I think it's important for you to have it in your mind. "And He was casting out a demon and it was dumb and it came about that when the demon had gone out, the dumb man spoke and the multitudes marveled. But some of them said, 'He casts out demons by Beelzebul, the ruler of the demons.' And others to test or taunt Him were demanding of Him a sign from heaven. But He knew their thoughts and said to them, 'Any kingdom divided against itself is laid waste and a house divided against itself falls. And if Satan also is divided against himself, how shall his kingdom stand? For you say that I cast out demons by Beelzebul and if

I by Beelzebul cast out demons, by whom do your sons cast them out? Consequently they shall be your judges. But if I cast out demons by the finger of God, then the Kingdom of God has come upon you. When a strong man fully armed guards his own homestead, his possessions are undisturbed. But when someone stronger than he attacks him and overpowers him, he takes away from him all his armor on which he had relied and distributes his plunder. He who is not with Me is against Me and he who does not gather with Me scatters."

This is a very, very important text of Scripture, as I pointed out last week. It is not an oversimplification to say that the whole world with all of its diversity is divided into only two groups of people identified in verse 23 as those who are either with Christ or against Him. That is from the lips of Jesus Himself. "He who is not with Me is against Me. He who does not gather with Me, scatters." Cutting through all the religion and all the confusion of philosophies, ideas, ideologies, world views, cutting through all the muddle of human opinion, you are either with Christ or you are against Him, and there is no third category, there is no neutral ground, there is no middle position. You are either with Christ in the sense that you acknowledge Him as Savior and Lord and you are participating in the work of gathering souls into His eternal Kingdom, or you are against Him and you are aiding in the scattering of souls away from the Kingdom of God and into eternal judgment. You are either with Christ personally and in the enterprise of populating His Kingdom, or you're against Christ and with the devil in sending souls away from His Kingdom. No possibility of neutrality exists. And as I said, it is not necessary to oppose Jesus Christ openly, it is not necessary to think evil of Christ, to be hostile to Him, it isn't even necessary to know Him. It's not necessary to attack Him, to attempt to discredit Him, to slander Him. It's not necessary to try to interfere with His purposes. Whoever is not with Christ gathering souls into His Kingdom is therefore necessarily against Him since there are no other alternatives. No decision regarding Christ is sufficient to set you against Him, not even knowing of Christ is sufficient to set you against Him, having virtually no attitude toward Christ is enough to set you against Him. Everyone in the world is either a member of the kingdom of darkness or the Kingdom of Light.

To put it another way, spiritually there's no such thing as an orphan in the world. No one is a spiritual orphan. No one in the world belongs to nobody. You are either a child of God, or you're a child of the devil...there is no orphan category. God is your Father or Satan is your father. And it all depends on your relationship to Jesus Christ. If you are with Christ by faith in Him and a part of His Kingdom and the gathering of souls into His Kingdom, then you are the child of God. If you are not with Christ in that enterprise, you are against Him and you belong to Satan. That is the central theme of our text. That is a key turning point in Luke's gospel because it's a key turning point in the life and ministry of our Lord. By the time you get to chapter 11 in Luke's story, we are months away from Jesus' death. He has been ministering over two years now, sufficient teaching, sufficient miracles, sufficient healings, sufficient casting out of demons, sufficient raising of the dead, sufficient forgiving of sins have been done to make it irrefutable that He is indeed God a very God, the Son of God, the Messiah, the Lord come down, the Savior of the world. The evidence is absolutely complete and

sufficient and now we begin to see the crystalizing of people's decision. All the evidence in, all that needs to be done done, all that needs to be said said. It is now time to look at the response. Jesus crystalizes it as clearly as it could be, you're either with Me or you're against Me. There is no middle ground.

And as I told you last time, and I will reiterate to you many times in the weeks to come, the people, sad to say, are hardening into fixed unbelief. In spite of the astonishing miracles, in spite of the power displayed, they are hardening into fixed states of unbelief, resisting and rejecting Christ to the point where after a brief emotional high on Palm Sunday as they hailed Him as Messiah, only a few days later they screamed for His blood and He is crucified on the cross and rejected by His people. This has largely been aided and abetted, of course, by the religious leaders, the Pharisees and the scribes, including others like the Herodians and the Sadducees. They've all orchestrated a campaign against Him. They've sent the Word, the buzz out into both Galilee and now in Judea that He is not the Messiah, He is not from God, He is from the devil. People are buying in to the propagandist lie.

We see this in this particular incident, verse 14 records for us a miracle that would have been the kind of thing that happened on a daily basis in the ministry of Jesus and He was casting out a demon which He did all the time, sometimes one demon, sometimes several, sometimes many and sometimes large amount of demons such as the maniac who was cutting himself and living in the tombs. There were enough demons in him to be identified as a legion of demons. And so He is expelling these demons. He is invading the kingdom of darkness. He is overpowering Satan and freeing up souls from this satanic bondage. And here is one, this demon had made the man unable to speak, had made him mute and when the demon was cast out, of course, the man spoke and the multitudes, as they always did, marveled, wondered, were amazed, were astonished. One of the things you will see if you read Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, the gospel account, and you would see it even in the apostolic miracles in the book of Acts, there never was a denial of the miracles, never. They never denied the miracles. They never denied that they happened because they were undeniable. Dead people came to life. Crippled people walked. Blind people saw. Deaf people heard. Mute people spoke. There's no way they could ever have denied the miracles, they never intended to deny them, they never tried to deny them.

What they began to do was to deny that the source was divine. And that's what happened on this occasion. As you remember, verse 15, "Some of them said," and this is whispering, they're saying it in their minds, this is what they're thinking and probably whispering quietly circulating this rumor that has been basically designed by the leadership of Israel that are set against Jesus, some of them said He cast out demons by Beelzebul, the ruler of the demons. Their conclusion was that what He does

is powerful. What He does is supernatural. We refuse to acknowledge that it's the power of God, therefore there's only one other possibility in the universe, there's only one other great power in the universe, that is Satan. It's just God and His holy angels and Satan and his evil angels and it's one or the other, the two great forces in the universe, force of good, namely God, the force of evil, Satan. They do not dispute that it's supernatural. They do not dispute that it's powerful. They can't, the evidence is too overwhelming, too inarguable and so they come to the point that they identify the source as not God, but Satan. They called Satan Beelzebul, it was a sort of a Jewish twist on an old Canaanitish god meaning the lord of the high place, a term referring to Baal...Baal, the lord of the high place. They corrupted it from lord of the high place to lord of the dung, or lord of the flies as a way to mock that Canaanitish deity. But over the years Beelzebul became sort of their word for Satan, and so they conclude that He does what He does by the power of the ruler of the demons. And verse 16 says, "Others to taunt Him," as we saw last time, "to mock Him, to further slander Him were demanding of Him a sign from heaven." And this is like saying, "Come on, if you're not doing it by the power of Satan, then do some great sign to prove it." All the evidence is in and they conclude exactly 180 degrees the opposite of the truth. They're completely wrong. It's one thing to say, "Well, we're not sure." It's something else to say, "Well, you know, we'd like to believe it's of God but we don't have enough evidence." No, they're way beyond that. Their conclusion is He does what He does by the power of Satan and that, my friend, is the severest form of blasphemy possible. There's no where else to go when you've gone there. What is the worst thing you could ever say about God would say that He is Satan, to say that Jesus does what He does by the power of Satan is to say that the Son of God is a servant of Satan, is to say that God is Satan, it is to say that what God is doing and saying is really Satan. This is the severest and the most ultimate of all blasphemies.

But, you know, in some sense it's understandable because if Jesus is not who He says He is, then He is diabolical, He has to be. He cannot just be an ordinary man because ordinary men do not have that kind of supernatural power. And they were right, I mean, their theology forced them there. If He is not of God, then how do you explain the supernatural power? You have to go to the only other place you can go. They were forced there. They had only two options. That's why I say there's no middle ground. If you're not with Jesus affirming Him as the Son of God, then you're a part of Satan's kingdom. Jesus summed it up, "If you're not with Me, you're against Me." Saying you're against Jesus simply means you don't agree that He's from God. If He's not from God, then, my friend, He is hellish. Why? Because He claimed to be God and that is blasphemy. If He is not who He said He is, then He's the ultimate blasphemer. In fact, He's the most effective blasphemer ever. He has pulled off the greatest deception in human history.

So they were forced into this in some ways. This is the logical conclusion of their rejection. They have to go there, there can be no middle ground. You have to explain His supernatural power some way, and you only have two options.

Now how did our Lord respond to this? I mean, this is blasphemy of the blessed Son of God. How does He respond? Amazingly He responds with great...He responds with grace and mercy. He could have obliterated them off the face of the earth on the spot. He could have incinerated them with heavenly fire on the moment. He could have opened the ground and they would have been swallowed like in the Old Testament. He could have brought a horrible judgment upon their heads instantly but He doesn't. He does the very opposite. He acts graciously and mercifully by reasoning with them. And this really constitutes sort of an evangelistic appeal. What He does here is He speaks to them and calls them to rethink their conclusion. This is mercy to them. He wants them to abandon their blasphemous folly.

So, in speaking to them He gives three reasons to turn from being against Him...three reasons to stop blaspheming Him. One, blasphemy against Christ lacks rationality...it lacks rationality. He's going to show them that this isn't reasonable. This is, in fact, an absurd conclusion that they have come to. Look at verse 17, "He knew their thoughts," we talked about that last time. These were things going on in their minds, this was the stuff they were processing in their heads. Of course He knows everybody's thought, John 2:25, He didn't need anybody to tell Him about the heart of man because He knew what was in the heart of man. He knew their *dianoema*, He knew their...their thinking, what they were thinking, *diathrough*, He knew their thought processes is what it means. He knew their...their purpose, their intent. They were certainly whispering these things in the crowd and He could hear with His omniscience what His ears couldn't hear, and He read their thoughts. He knew their thoughts were sinful. He knew their thoughts were blasphemous. He knew their thoughts were damning thoughts, damning ideas. And He every right at this particular point, given the evidence that they had had, to seal them in their eternal doom in unbelief, but He is merciful and He exposes their rationality. He exposes the absurdity of what they're thinking. And He does that in order to help them to rethink that.

And so He said to them, verse 17, "Any kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and a house divided against itself falls." Now remember where we are in the story, okay? They're saying He does it by Satan. They're saying He's satanic. But they're whispering it and they're thinking it and they don't know He heard it. They don't know He knows it. So He just steps in and out of nowhere says, "Any kingdom divided against itself is laid waste and a house divided against itself falls." You know what that would get out of them? A bunch of amens...amen, amen, that's right, absolutely right. That's axiomatic, that's a self-evident truth, doesn't need proof, it's obvious. Any kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, *aireo(?)*, destroyed, self-destructs. That's...that doesn't need proof, and they would agree. And then He adds, "Any house divided against itself falls." No one is going to argue that, and they're all nodding, you know, their heads...Yes, this is so. And then He jumps right into their minds, "And if...verse 18...Satan is also divided against himself, how shall his kingdom stand? For you say that I cast out demons by Beelzebul." Right in the middle of all their amens.

He's trapped them in the absurdity of that conclusion. If you are right, then Satan is in the self-destruct mode. If you are right then Satan has empowered Me to destroy his own kingdom, this is an absurdity. Everybody knows that Satan wants to destroy the Kingdom of God and the work of God and not his own kingdom. And while we would all agree that there is inconsistency in the kingdom of Satan because evil is in itself inconsistent and because Satan is omniscient and because Satan is not omnipresent, and because there's a certain amount of wretched, wicked, evil independence from demon to demon to demon, you will find inconsistency and you will find a measure of chaos. But you will not find Satan himself energizing some person with great power to destroy his own kingdom, that's an absurdity...that's an absurdity.

And you look back and the life and the ministry of Jesus and one of the main features through His life as recorded in the gospel is how He assaulted Satan's kingdom. And how He threw the demons out of people and cleansed them and made them pure. His power over demons was constant and relentless as He one way proved His messiahship by His ability to overpower the kingdom of darkness. Whoever the Messiah is obviously has to be able to crush the serpent's head...they knew that from Genesis 3:15. Whoever the Messiah is has to be able to take back the earth from the usurper Satan. Whoever the Messiah is is going to have to conquer evil to establish the kingdom of righteousness. And Jesus demonstrated that He had that power again and again and again. I mean, it would be an absolute absurdity for Satan to be casting out his own agents.

And Jesus points out the absurdity and unmasks the stupidity of their mind and their clandestine conversation by saying, "For you say that I cast out demons by Beelzebul. And they were at that moment exposed. He reads minds. He hears things His ears don't hear. They are caught in their own stupidity. The whole idea of this ridiculous party line that Jesus does what He does by the power of Satan is in itself impossible. You remember the man who had the legion of demons that were cast into two thousand pigs? A massive miracle. In Luke chapter 8 you find that man completely changed, transformed, clean. Jesus tells him to spend the rest of his life being a witness. They have seen this power. You can't believe this is Satan...Satan casting out demons and leaving people cleansed and whole and delivered and clothed and in their right minds. And when the demons made them deaf or dumb or blind as in the account of Matthew or in this case mute, they then are delivered from that. We're to believe that Satan is doing that, undoing his destructive work in people's lives. No that's the absurdity of it.

Here's the point for us. If you look at the life of Jesus, you have two choices. Either He did what He did by the power of God, or He did it by the power of Satan. If you concluded He did it by the power of Satan, that's absurd, that is insanity. Why would Satan self-destruct? Why would Satan destroy his own kingdom? That is an irrational absurdity. You are left with only one real option. Jesus did what He did by whose power? God's power. Any other option leaves you with one possible source of

power, Satan. And if you do not acknowledge Jesus as God incarnate, operating under the power of God, then you are left with nothing possible except that He is the agent of Satan and He Himself is a Satan-serving blaspheming and very effective deceiver and there is no middle ground.

So blasphemy against Christ lacks rationality. Secondly, it lacks integrity...it lacks integrity. It just isn't honest.

Verse 19, "And if I by Beelzebul cast out demons, by whom do your sons cast them out? Consequently, they shall be your judges." This is just brilliant, it's brilliant.

If I by Beelzebul cast out demons...okay, I'll grant you the point. If I'm doing it by demons, could I ask you a question? By whom are your sons doing it? Because they're going to stand as your judges.

Now among the Jews there were some of their sons, meaning some Jews, who were rabbis, or the associates of rabbis, or scribes, Pharisees, who engaged themselves in exorcisms. They purported to be able to cast out demons and they went through all kinds of machinations much like exorcists do today. And they called down their formulas on the heads of demons and they tried to interact with demons and they went through all of their histrionics in dealing with demons. And within the context of Judaism, Jewish exorcists were said by the rabbis, and it is recorded in their literature, to be doing the work of God. Okay? To be doing the work of God. They took an uncritical approach to their own exorcists. They just said they're doing the work of God, that was their tradition. That's what they believed. So Jesus says, "Let me ask you this question. If I'm casting out demons by Satan, are you telling me your sons are casting them out by God's power? And the reason that was such a potent point was because the Jewish exercise...exorcists were so ineffective. This lacked honesty. This lacked integrity. There's no way you could say that what Jesus was doing was by Satan and what the Jewish exorcists were doing was by God unless Satan was far more powerful than God.

Let me give you an illustration. Turn to Acts 19...Acts 19, this is the only illustration and it's enough really in the New Testament where we have Jewish exorcists. And there's a sense of sadness in this but there's also some humor in it. Acts 19, now Paul the Apostle is being used by God, look at verse 11, God is performing extraordinary miracles by the hands of Paul and part of it is verse 12, "Evil spirits are coming out." You remember that the Lord Jesus who had the power over Satan delegated that to the original Twelve and also to Paul, and so Paul is doing miracles by the power of God, it says, "God was performing extraordinary miracles through Paul, including verse 12, evil spirits going out." Well, the Jewish exorcists were watching this. And they never saw anything like that. You know, they made their little meager attempts as exorcists do today, and sometimes demons cooperate because it's all in the same domain anyway, to give the illusion that these people have certain powers which causes people to believe in them and that's a deception. Sometimes Satan will



allow false teachers, apostate teachers, false exorcists to succeed on the surface so that they appear as angels of light. Whatever successes these guys may have had, we read in verse 13, "Some of the Jewish exorcists...this is what they did, they went from place to place...everywhere they went, but now they found a new approach...attempting to name over those who had the evil spirits the name of the Lord Jesus." They started saying, "I adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preaches." Why would they do that? Because they were seeing Paul do things they never conceived of doing. They were seeing the power of God the likes of which they had never seen over demons. And so they said, "Hey, we're going to take that name, steal that formula. I adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preaches." This is what the Jewish exorcists started doing.

And one group, verse 14, was a man named Sceva who had seven sons, he's a main leader and his sons were in to this business by which they made money and gave the illusion of being powerful. So they were doing this and they started saying, "I adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preaches." They didn't know what they were saying. I think this is so interesting. "And the evil spirit answered and said to them...verse 15...I recognize Jesus and I know about Paul, but who are you?" They knew divine authority when they were confronted by it and they knew delegated divine authority to the Apostles when they were confronted, but who in the world are you? And I love this, verse 16, "And the man in whom was the evil spirit leaped on top of the seven sons of Sceva, subdued all of them, overpowered them so they ran out of the house naked and wounded."

I would not say that they had a high degree of success in their exorcism. This is typical stuff. This is a silly game they played to which the demons might from time to time agree to play along to carry off the illusion of deception. That was Jewish exorcism. You never saw Jesus confront a demon and have a demon, or a legion of demon jump on his back and send him out of the house naked and wounded. Never happened to an Apostle who had the delegated authority from Him.

The point is this. If I in verse 19...if I by Beelzebul cast out demons, then what do you call this? Charlatanism, this fakery, this phoney exorcism, this ineffective stuff. And they knew it. Jump down ahead of this text to verses 24 to 26 and we'll look at this next time, but just to show you. When the unclean spirit goes out of a man under a Jewish exorcism or a phoney exorcism, when the unclean spirit does go out, if he chooses to go out, he passes through waterless places seeking rest, not finding any he says, I'll return to my house from which I came. And when it comes it finds it swept and put in order...I'll explain that next week, it just means the guy cleaned up his life a little bit. But it goes in verse 26, takes along seven other spirits more evil than itself, they go in, live there and the last state of the man becomes worst than the first. That's the best that the Jewish exorcists could do. The best they could do was a temporary sort of moral respite. The best they could do was hammer on the man and the demons, get the man maybe to step away from some sinful activity and maybe the demon disappeared for a little while but sooner came back with seven of his buddies and the end of the man was worse than the beginning. That's the best that they could do. That in contrast to what

Jesus did when He permanently and forever delivered a soul from the power of Satan. And Jesus says, "Look, you know the trickery, you know the chicanery, you know the ineffectiveness of Jewish exorcists, you know their phony operation and consequently they are going to be your judges. They sit in judgment on you. If you uncritically say they do what they do by the power of God and you say I do what I do by the power of Satan, then your Satan is more powerful than your God. If you hold to your own empty, phoney, external religion and reject the power of God, then you're lacking honesty and integrity. You are hypocrites."

You know, that's the way it is today. People are unwilling to receive the irrefutable evidence that is who He said He was. And they make stupid choices. "Well, I don't accept Jesus as my Savior, I follow L. Ron Hubbard." Give me a break. Are you kidding me? Don't tell me there's greater evidence that he is the power of God then there is that Jesus is the power of God who overpowered the kingdom of darkness, who raised people from the dead and Himself is raised from the dead and you have the record here." Well, I follow Mohammed." Don't tell...don't compare Jesus to Mohammed or anybody else. This is...this is hypocrisy, this lacks integrity. This shows the dishonesty of your mind. If you've looked at Jesus Christ and concluded that you should follow anyone else, you're no different than these Jewish exorcists. You said Jesus is of Satan and I choose this inferior agent of Satan and label him as of God. Tell me the biblical Jesus is not who He says He is, but the Jesus you made up in your mind is? The Jesus you made up in your mind is an idol and you've just broken the first commandment. You tell me that Jesus is not who He says He is, that Jesus of the Bible is not who He says He is but Moroni is some angel from God who delivered a message from God, an inferior message, complete and attended with immorality and sexual perversion and multiple marriage and this is of God? Those people that you have chosen become your own judges. There's nobody to compare with Jesus Christ, absolutely no one. You've chosen your little mystical guru, your little religious leader, whoever it is that's got all the little spiritual insights that appeal to you compared to Jesus Christ? That just demonstrates your lack of honesty because there is no comparison if you look at the evidence. If you reject Jesus Christ, anything else or anyone else you accept shows the dishonesty of your own heart.

Blasphemy against Christ is irrational and it is inconsistent. It is absurd and it is hypocritical. To blaspheme Christ lacks rationality, it lacks integrity and thirdly, and lastly, it lacks spirituality...it lacks spirituality.

This kind of blasphemy which is the severest blasphemy possible to call Jesus an agent of Satan and therefore to identify God and His work as Satan and his work demonstrates how spiritually dead a person is. Notice in verse 20, He says, "But if I cast out demons by the finger of God, then the Kingdom of God has come upon you." You know, He's pleading with them, do not be irrational, do not be hypocritical, recognize that if what I am doing is by the finger of God, then you are face-to-face

with the Kingdom of God because the King is right here. You're talking to the King. And where the King is, the Kingdom is, right?

Blasphemy like they did shows their absolute lack of spirituality. They were so lost and so sinful and so self-righteous and so hard-hearted and so hateful and so determined to reject Him, so blind and so dead that they considered themselves to be the enlightened and the religious and the righteous, they couldn't even recognize the King of heaven when He stood there and talked to them. They couldn't see the Kingdom of God when it was right in their midst. The god of this world has blinded their minds so the light of the glorious gospel can't shine to them. They are the natural men who understand not the things of God.

And so stating the obvious as compared to the impotent Jewish exorcists who deliver nobody and heal no one, Jesus says if I'm doing this on the other hand by the Kingdom of God, or in the Kingdom of God, if I'm demonstrating the finger of God at work, then you are in a serious situation, very serious. They didn't even entertain the possibility that this might be the King.

Now just take a look at that phrase "the finger of God." It's very, very important. In this similar dialogue that occurred on the occasion of the...this kind of question and answer in Matthew 12 up in Galilee, Jesus referred to the Spirit of God. But here He speaks of the finger of God and it's really important that He did. This brings the whole drama into historical focus. Let me tell you how. You don't need to turn to it, I'll just talk it through with you. Back in the eighth chapter of Exodus, God began to do a series of miracles to deliver Israel out of Egypt, remember that? And then the Egyptian magicians did their trickery to try to replicate those, remember? Well in the sixteenth verse of Exodus 8 you remember the rod of Moses hits the ground...hits the dust and the dust flies up and the dust immediately becomes...what?...gnats, remember that? And gnats cover the land.

Well the Egyptian magicians can't duplicate that. They had a little trick rod deal they could throw down and make a snake, but they can't get close to this. You remember what they said? Exodus 8, they said, "This is the finger of God, we can't do this." These are Egyptian Gentile pagan deceivers, magicians...even they knew the finger of God when they saw it. They knew what wasn't like what they did. And Jesus is saying, "You know that what your Jewish exorcists attempt to do isn't anything like what you're seeing here." What you've got again is the finger of God and you know from your knowledge of Exodus that when the finger of God moves, God is present. His Kingdom is there because the King is there. When the phoney satanic deceivers couldn't falsify the wonders that Moses did by the power of God, they said this is the finger of God, this is the finger of God, it's beyond us. And so Jesus says, "You've been seeing the finger of God and you who pride yourselves on being in His Kingdom can't even recognize the finger of God. There was a day when the finger of God in Daniel wrote, "*Mene mene, tekel upharsin*," you've been weighed in the balances and found

wanting. There was a time in Exodus when the finger of God wrote the Law on stone but the occasion of the finger of God they're referring to here is that Exodus when...that Exodus event when the comparison between the power of God through His servant is compared to the false and deceptive power of earthly magicians. The Jewish exorcists were just like those phony magicians of Pharaoh. They couldn't do what Jesus did. They couldn't even come close to what He did. And they...at least they knew it, the Egyptians did. They knew God was present and the Jews should have said, "This is the finger of God, this is the finger of God, this is the finger of God therefore God is here, His Kingdom is here, this is His King." And not to say that shows you had no spirituality. They prided themselves on their rationality, their reason, they prided themselves on their integrity and their absence of hypocrisy. They prided themselves on their spirituality. They had none of it, as evidenced by their blasphemy. The Kingdom of God has come upon you if this is the finger of God and there is no other conclusion...I'm telling you, folks, you take any religious leader, any religious claimant, any false teacher, anybody from the history of the world and all its religions in ancient times, in modern times, even current times, compare them to Jesus Christ and you will see that they can't come close. What Jesus did in this world could be explained as nothing other than the finger of God indicating the Kingdom of God has come upon you. Not yet in its final form, great millennial kingdom yet to come, the new heaven and the new earth, the eternal kingdom, but the King being present His Kingdom was also here for He carries His realm and the glory of His realm wherever He goes. Only the intentionally irrational, only the hypocritical and inconsistent, only the fleshly and the carnal could ever look at Jesus Christ and come up with any other conclusion that He did...than that He did what He did by the power of God.

To say that He is a liar and a blasphemer and an agent of Satan, then or now, is absurd. It is damning as well. Either He is a blasphemer or you are. And our Lord concludes with an illustration, a simple one, to show how blind they were. Verses 21 and 22, it's just a simple analogy, "When a strong man fully armed guards his own homestead, his possessions are undisturbed. But when someone stronger than he attacks him and overpowers him, he takes away from him all his armor on which he had relied and distributes his plunder." Is that simple enough? A strong man is okay if somebody stronger doesn't show up...that's all it says. Satan is a strong man, fully armed. Guards his own homestead. He has his souls and they're undisturbed and they're protected, his palace is protected and all his subjects are protected there until someone stronger comes along. And who is it that can plunder the kingdom of Satan? Well there's only one stronger than him and that's Jesus. And so He's saying, "Look, to show you how spiritually blind you are, can't you see what's happening? You know that Satan is being overpowered. You've seen it. And when someone stronger than he attacks him and overpowers him," again it's axiomatic, it's a little analogy that's self-evident. Obviously a man is secure until somebody stronger comes along and attacks him. And when someone stronger, namely Christ, comes and attacks him and overpowers him, he takes away from him all his armor on which he has relied and then he plunders all of the souls in the kingdom of

darkness and sets them free into the kingdom of light. The bottom line, Satan and his demons have no capability to save themselves against Christ when He comes to rescue a soul from their kingdom. They are powerless against Him. We are all living testimony of that, are we not? We have been all rescued from the kingdom of darkness, Satan's kingdom where we were held captive was plundered by Christ and His power and He delivered us forever.

They had seen it. Ephesians 4:8 to 10 basically borrowing from Psalm 68:18 says that Jesus plundered the kingdom of darkness and led captivity captive, remember that great phrase? Rescued Satan's captives and took them to glory. Jesus plunders Satan's kingdom every day, every day when souls are added to the Kingdom of God, every day when people are converted and come to Christ Satan's kingdom is plundered again and again and again. And his armor is not capable of defending against the Lord. And in the ministry of Jesus, you look at His life, everything He said and did was opposed to Satan, everything. He healed sickness and disease which were brought upon mankind because Satan had led the human race into sin. Jesus raised people from death which also is a consequence of sin and indirectly the work of Satan who holds in his hand the power of death, Hebrews says. Jesus cast out demons, even forgave sin...something that Satan could not do and would not do. And He verified His authority to forgive sin by doing miracles. Jesus' point is this, "Haven't I demonstrated before you and all of Israel My power over Satan? Can't you see this is the finger of God plundering the kingdom of evil, the kingdom of darkness, the kingdom of destruction? Haven't I demonstrated beyond all shadow of doubt My authority is greater than Satan's, My power is greater than Satan's? Haven't I cleansed people of every kind of disease, freed them from every form of demonic control and demonic oppression and possession? Haven't I shown My power over sin, shown My power over death? Have I not rescued souls from hell? Who can have such power over Satan but God and God alone?"

Who is it but God who can enter the house of Satan, smash his fortifications and carry off his property as plunder. This is the finger of God, this is the finger of God...this is not even to be compared with the petty trivialities of your Jewish exorcists to whom you give divine credit. You can take all the religions of the world, folks, and stick them in the category with the Jewish exorcists. They're all doing the work of Satan and to anyone who looks with open heart and open eyes, there is no comparison between any and the person of Jesus Christ.

The record is set. The decisions are to be made. Jesus brings it to its culmination in verse 23, "He who is not with Me is against Me and he who does not gather with Me scatters." And you are faced with the fact that you are in one or the other of those two groups and there is no third option. There are not spiritual orphans. You are Satan's or you are Christ's. It's always so helpful to see how our Lord with such simple words grasps such profound realities and makes them unmistakably clear to us. And my admonition to you is to take a look at where you are and be sure that you understand the

incomparable Christ who was moving with the finger of God and therefore is the King who brought His Kingdom. No one is to be compared to Him. And you only have two options. You either affirm that He is who He says He is, or you cannot say anything other than that He is the ultimate blasphemer because He claimed to be God and He is not. So you are either with Him or you're left against Him. And He offers to you the same invitation. Wherever your thinking is, think it through again. Understand the irrationality of rejecting Christ. Understand the inconsistency of rejecting Christ against all the evidence, comparing Him to any other religious leader. Understand the lack of spirituality, the spiritual deadness and blindness of rejecting Christ. These Jews couldn't see what was obvious, it was the finger of God because the stronger man had plundered the palace.

Father, we thank You for Your truth. We are, in a sense, compelled by this, forced by this to look very clearly and circumspectly at our own lives. And I pray, Lord, that You would open the hearts of many, open their minds, open their eyes to see. Shake them out of the absurdity of rejection, the inconsistency of rejection, the carnality of rejection. And for those who think they're sort of feeling good thoughts about Jesus but haven't confessed Him as Lord, may they know that they are therefore the children of Satan who are against Him as much as if they were verbal blasphemers. We either love You and embrace You and affirm You, or we stand with those who despise You. Father, thank You for saving us all from the blasphemy of unbelief and may You save many more for Your eternal glory. We pray in Christ's name. Amen.

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