

Plundered for Kingdom, Household, and Church  
Mark 3:20-35  
Second Sunday after Pentecost  
June 6, 2021

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Our text, Jesus says, “No one can enter a strong man’s house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man. Then indeed he may plunder his house.”

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Taken out of context, the verse I just read may sound as if Jesus is giving tips on master thievery! Obviously, that’s not the case; but it does compel us to consider the importance of setting the scene, as the first few verses do: a whole crowd is gathered around Jesus, pressing in on all sides. His own family members have labeled him insane, and the scribes have come from Jerusalem to denounce him as demonic. With so much immediate pressure to dissuade the people from listening to Jesus, Jesus does not so much defend his own reputation as much as he shows to those gathered the absurdity of the scribes’ claims.

“How can Satan cast out Satan?” In other words, the content of Jesus’ preaching must have been all about His victory over the devil. Though we don’t have his immediate verbiage, all the context clues point to this: (1) how does the question ‘how can Satan **cast out Satan**?’ have any purpose unless the casting out of Satan was the discussion at hand; (2) his own mother and brothers thought he was

crazy – and people don't think us crazy for talking about material, daily life problems that frustrate us all; they think us crazy for talking about "powers and principalities of darkness." (3) This content is always the overarching theme of Jesus' teaching, for this is his work as Messiah – to save us who are captive to sin, death, and the power of the devil. It may sound "crazy" when your proud heart and mind don't want to admit your own sin; it may sound "insane" when your anxieties are fixated on mammon and material wealth and 'your best life now.' But, the apostles remind us, "we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but ...against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places" (Eph. 6). And, again, the apostle John says it is "evident" who are the children of God's light and the children of the devil. And Jesus himself says of the Jews who did not believe in him, "Your father is the devil." Is such just a hyperbolic insult? Or is Jesus speaking of the spiritual warfare that has raged since the Fall, so that – in our own baptism – we hear these words: "The Word of God teaches that we are all conceived and born sinful and are under the power of the devil until Christ claims us as His own." And then, the words of exorcism, "Depart, you unclean spirit, and make room for the Holy Spirit."

Is that all superstitious symbolism? Or is this not the very mission of the Messiah... to win this victory over Satan... a victory God had planned from before the foundation of the world and

promised as his very first response to the Fall in Eden (as our Old Testament reading reminds us). And, if this victory over Satan is the heart and promise of Jesus' teaching, then how could he be *of* Satan? "How can Satan cast out Satan?"

Jesus then puts the illustration into earthly terms earthly-minded audience can better appreciate... especially the audience of *scribes*, who were scholars not only on Jewish religion, but also on legal thought regarding the Jewish *kingdom*, **and** the audience of Jesus' own unbelieving family, who would know the imagery of *household*: "If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand." (We know that all too well, don't we? – as America seems to teeter on the height of greatness and plummet into the hands of weaker nations, not because of superior forces from without, but because of division within.) Next, Jesus hits a little closer to home: "If a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand." President Lincoln may have famously used those words to speak of America at Civil War, but that actually undercuts the intimacy of Jesus' point. Think of your own household and how each member therein depends on one another, so that to bring opposing beliefs or innovative customs into the household causes strife and discord.

And if such is true for "kingdom" on a large scale and for "household" on a more intimate scale, then certainly – on a one-on-one scale – Satan cannot oppose himself. The scribes' argument is

illogical and fallacious: it cannot be that Jesus has **come from** Satan to **oppose** Satan... only one of those can be true. Either he has come from Satan, or he comes to oppose him. And, as his teaching says openly, as the prophecies testify to historically and reverberate through the centuries, the Messiah comes to crush Satan. Jesus says it this way in our text: “No one can enter a strong man’s house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man. Then indeed he may plunder his house.” Jesus cannot plunder you and (as the Baptismal liturgy says) “claim you as His own” until he first binds the strong man. And that’s exactly what he did in his crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension – binding the enemy and leading captivity captive.

The epistle says it this way:

He himself likewise partook of the same (flesh and blood), that through death he might **destroy** the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, **and deliver** all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery. (Heb. 2:14)

Isn’t this what John the Baptist promised when he said of Jesus, “One will come after me who is *stronger*...” indeed One strong enough to burst into the devil’s domain – to descend into hell not in condemnation but in victory – and to bind the strong man. The image of Revelation seems to describe this when it says that “Worthy is Christ the Lamb who was slain” to open the book of life; only He is worthy because only He defeated sin, death, and the

power of the devil... with the result that, Revelation says, an angel (a servant of 'Christ the stronger than the strong') descended from heaven holding in his hand the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain. And he seized the dragon... who is Satan, and bound him ... and threw him into the pit, and shut it and sealed it over him."

Think again of our text, "No one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, *unless* he first binds the strong man. *Then* indeed he may plunder his house."

And that's exactly what Christ has done. He has plundered the house of Satan and rescued you and brought you out of the kingdom of darkness into His kingdom of light: "Depart you unclean spirit and make room for the Holy Spirit"... child, though you were once a child of darkness you are now a child of God's light. That's the promise of your baptism, isn't it? Though we still wrestle with the Old Adam, there's no reason to fear accusation by Satan when we can openly repent and be forgiven in Christ! Satan has been hog-tied and can no longer accuse; and you've been plundered into the kingdom of the Son to share with him in all divine inheritance as a child of God's light.

Now, the text doesn't end there, but Jesus makes what might seem a curious turn. He goes from talking about plundering the devil's domain to talking about the sin against the Holy Spirit. How do we follow this train of thought?

If Jesus is not of Satan, he cannot have an *unclean* Spirit. This was the charge against him, wasn't it? – “for they had said, “He has an *unclean* spirit.” So Jesus defends not *his* reputation, but the *Holy Spirit's* reputation: “whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness.” That's a foreboding warning! And it means this:

Not only does Jesus not have an unclean spirit, but also his spirit is not merely a 'clean *soul*.' His “Spirit” is an equal person of the Triune Godhead, and (recall from the days before Pentecost) He promises to send that Spirit (recall Pentecost) to sustain his Church in the completed victory over Satan that is ours as those baptized into Christ: “Repent and be baptized, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”

But, should one speak of the Holy Spirit whom Jesus gives as unclean, that one would thereby reject the work of the Holy Spirit. And, the reverse is also true: where one disinterestedly rejects the work of the Holy Spirit, that one is thereby declaring the Holy Spirit to be unclean.

What a tragic, blasphemous offense people embrace when they thumb their nose at the work of the Holy Spirit, who – Jesus promises – will bring to our remembrance all things of Christ – namely, His holy Word and his precious Sacraments. Through that Word and its accompanying Sacraments we have God's light and life, the forgiveness of sins, and a share in Christ's victory over darkness.

But, deny and distance one's self from the work of the Holy Spirit in Word and Sacrament – as if he is “unclean” – and one's sins are now unforgivable; faith is unsustainable. For faith and forgiveness come only by that Lord and giver of Life who proceeds from the Father and the Son to give you not common, profane, earthly gifts – but holy, heavenly, divine gifts. And such his work is so vital in bringing you the benefits of the cross, Jesus defends the Holy Spirit's reputation even (if you will) above his own: “All sins will be forgiven the children of man, and whatever blasphemies they utter” (yes, even those who speak against Christ can be brought by the Holy Spirit to repent and be saved by Christ... so, blasphemies against Him, Jesus says, those can be forgiven), “but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness.”

Now, all of this is against the charge of the scribes. But, as we said, Jesus is being challenged on two fronts in our text: both by the scribes, who are the legal minds of the Jewish kingdom (thus the imagery of **kingdom**) and by his own **family** (thus, the imagery of household). Of his cynical family, Jesus' response is famous: “Who are my mother and my brothers?... Whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother.”

Jesus' point isn't only to chastise his mother and brothers; it's also to instruct us in what it means to be a baptized child of God by the work of the Holy Spirit... it instructs us on Christian living. In fact, consider it in the context of what we've heard in this text:

kingdom – household – now, (implicitly) the family of the Church. These really are the three estates of Christian living, aren't they? The whole creation can be seen in this light, and ought to be lived by Christians in this light.

The kingdom has its rightful place, and – if it is divided against itself – cannot stand upright to do its duty to the citizenry. Thus, in our day of political factions, unconstitutional power grabs over the people, media dishonesty, and cultural decay, Christians ought seek, promote, and strive for the unity of the kingdom in all that is good and godly and beneficial for society.

The family has its rightful place, and – if it is divided against itself – cannot stand upright to do its duty to the members of the family. Thus, in our day of slick language tricks that redefine the family and human sexuality in demonic ways that serve the father of lies, Christians ought defend the family as God defined it – not just in **theory** (pointing fingers at the obvious ungodliness of the LGBTQ agenda), but by **example**... no premarital or extramarital dalliances with the marriage bed, no excuses for pornography, no marital laziness toward or lack of gratitude for the unique spouse God has given you, no lack of honoring and cherishing parents and loving and encouraging siblings, no lack of raising children in the fear of the Lord. And – perhaps currently the most subtle family destruction of all – no living among supposed friends and family of virtual reality with more energy, zeal, and interest than living in the real household

God has given you. Instead, joy, eagerness, thankfulness, and boldness in confessing and living in this beautiful, divinely -defined and –gifted estate of the house and family.

And, both kingdom and family will not be divided, but will remain standing, if – and only if – we depend on the *holiness* of Jesus’ Spirit – that is to say, His gift of the pouring out of the Holy Spirit. When our entire lives depend on that mysterious, divine work of the Holy Spirit, He will not only point us to and teach us, but also bestow upon us, all the benefits of the completed work of Jesus Christ – the one stronger than the strong man... the one who has plundered us from the darkness of the devil, the vanity of this broken world, and the self-idolatry of my own sinful flesh... he has plundered us from that strong man and freed us to be people of God... co-heirs of his **kingdom**, baptized children of God’s **household**, and holy saints of His beloved **Church**.

In the Name of the Father  
And of the Son  
And of the Holy Spirit.  
+ AMEN +

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