

## A House Divided

Matt. 12:22-32

First of all, there is in this scripture a recollection of my youth and the experience of the preaching of an evangelist named Jimmy Cook. Jimmy Cook made the Hazel Avenue Baptist Church of Fair Oaks CA, his home church and this was the church that I grew up in. He was usually traveling but would be "home" occasionally and when he was around he would go golfing with the pastor and they also would go suit shopping together Jimmy told the pastor that if he was a child of the King he should dress like it and so I think they spent a fair amount of money at the men's store.

Jimmy preached meetings in our church on several occasions and I think that every meeting included his message from this scripture, apparently his favorite sermon was his message on the strong man. Jimmy used the occasion of Jesus' reference to the strong man's house to preach the importance of a man acquiring the spiritual strength needed to protect his house from the onslaughts of the devil. Jimmy's passion was to inspire and challenge men to be the spiritual leaders that God intended them to be.

It is a good thing to have memories that are prompted by certain scriptures but also good to be reminded that there is always more. The depth of meaning and the ability of the Holy Spirit to speak to us is not limited by past experience.

Our scripture begins with Jesus' healing a demon possessed man who was both blind and dumb, that is, unable to speak. The crowds were amazed by this miracle and everyone was saying that Jesus must be the Messiah. Think of the relationship between hearing and speaking for we learn to speak by listening and then by imitating what we hear. Jesus simultaneously gave both hearing and speech to the man He healed. It was a miracle on top of a miracle. The Pharisees, who were part of the religious establishment, countered these conclusions by accusing Jesus of using the power of the devil to cast out the minions of the devil.

Jesus was faced with hostile propaganda at every turn. The premise that if you tell a lie often enough, it will eventually be believed rings true. People are vulnerable to the lies of the devil, these lies are powerful because they give us the excuse we are looking for to continue as we are rather than to deal with the reality of our situation and make the changes required for us to be right with God. If it were true that Jesus was the Messiah then this would have had a profound effect upon the lives of all the people - just as it had upon His disciples who did believe. The Pharisees propaganda provided cover for those who wanted to hide from the reality that Jesus represented. Jesus understood all of this and so He challenged the propaganda of the Pharisees and demonstrated the fallacy of their argument against Him.

Jesus began this rebuttal by stating a general principle easily recognized as valid, "Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and every city or house divided against itself will not stand." It does not make sense to make war within a nation or business or family if you want that entity to survive and to prosper. This is wisdom that is easy to recognize but it is too often ignored. Problem solving in relationships is a fairly straightforward exercise if you want to solve your problem. It is not so straight-forward if you just want to have your own way. The determination of so many to impose their will upon others is the poison seed that divides. Look around! How many examples of destructive division can you see?

Now, even though we have such a problem dealing with this principle, the devil understands it very well. He knows that a house divided against itself cannot stand and that if he allows such division within the ranks his kingdom would soon collapse. This proves the fallacy of the Pharisees ruse. Jesus did not use the power of the devil to cast out the minions of the devil. The devil knows better than to act like that. This was Jesus' specific point, "If Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then will his kingdom stand?"

The controversy broke down to the choice between opposite conclusions. If Jesus were casting out demons by the power of the devil then Satan's own kingdom would have to be divided against itself. This was a position that was theoretically

illogical and practically untenable. The devil's power was too evident to be dismissed and too pervasive to be limited by self inflicted weakness. The other choice was to accept that Jesus had cast out the demon by the power of God. This would mean that "surely the kingdom of God has come upon you." Jesus the miracle worker and teacher of the Scriptures was the Messiah. He should be embraced and revered and followed. Pharisees, Sadducees, priests, and scribes should all join the fishermen and become His disciples. This was the alternative to the premise of the propaganda that claimed that Jesus had cast out demons by the power of the devil.

Jesus took His argument even further again by citing a behavioral principle that everyone would recognize as valid. "Or how can one enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man? And then he will plunder his house." If you did not take this approach and you entered the strong man's house then he would likely catch you in the act and defeat and even kill you. With this saying Jesus clearly claimed that in order to plunder Satan's "house" He had first needed to bind Satan and that He had done so as the evidence made this clear. A demon possessed blind and dumb man had been freed from oppression and now he could both hear and speak. This kind of plundering of the devil's house required the binding of the devil so that the work could be done. Jesus had not only cast out a demon but He had bound Satan in order to do so. This claim created a spiritual crisis, a reality

that already existed but now was too large to ignore, everyone present made a choice that day to either embrace Jesus as the Messiah or to reject Him. Believing was a reality based decision grounded in the evidence of what was seen and experienced. Rejecting Jesus was a decision that mindlessly accepted the negative propaganda of the religious leaders and that ignored the sound logic of Jesus' rebuttal because of a desire to avoid the consequences of belief.

But everyone took a side. We would like to think that Jesus' words were as persuasive then as they are convincing now. The attacks of Jesus' enemies would continue. They attempted to undermine Him at every turn and, Jesus' agenda was not popular with the crowds. Soon, His following was to be diminished so that eventually He would die alone.