

## The Finger of God

**Luke 11:14-28** Now he was casting out a demon that was mute. When the demon had gone out, the mute man spoke, and the people marveled. <sup>15</sup> But some of them said, "He casts out demons by Beelze-bul, the prince of demons," <sup>16</sup> while others, to test him, kept seeking from him a sign from heaven. <sup>17</sup> But he, knowing their thoughts, said to them, "Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and a divided household falls. <sup>18</sup> And if Satan also is divided against himself, how will his kingdom stand? For you say that I cast out demons by Beelzebul. <sup>19</sup> And if I cast out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they will be your judges. <sup>20</sup> But if it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. <sup>21</sup> When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own palace, his goods are safe; <sup>22</sup> but when one stronger than he attacks him and overcomes him, he takes away his armor in which he trusted and divides his spoil. <sup>23</sup> Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters. <sup>24</sup> "When the unclean spirit has gone out of a person, it passes through waterless places seeking rest, and finding none it says, 'I will return to my house from which I came.' <sup>25</sup> And when it comes, it finds the house swept and put in order. <sup>26</sup> Then it goes and brings seven other spirits more evil than itself, and they enter and dwell there. And the last state of that person is worse than the first." <sup>27</sup> As he said these things, a woman in the crowd raised her voice and said to him, "Blessed is the womb that bore you, and the breasts at which you nursed!" <sup>28</sup> But he said, "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it!"

*In the name of the Father and of the ✠ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

1 The Pharisees were close. They were dead wrong, but they were close. They accused Jesus of driving out demons by the power of Beelzebul, Satan. There was no middle ground, no fence-sitting. Jesus either did what He did by the power of God or the power of Satan. Jesus admitted that he either drove out demons by Beelzebul or by the finger of God, and so he acknowledged that, at least in seeing things in the extremes, the Pharisees were correct. They were wrong in that they picked the wrong extreme.

2 There is no middle ground. Jesus isn't another nice guy, a prophet with a wise teaching, a moral figurehead or a good example. He's either your Lord or your enemy, your advocate or your adversary. What the Pharisees got right, the world wants to get wrong. They want to find in Jesus a comfortable friend or an advice-giving sage. They want Him to be peaceful like Gandhi or welcoming of all people the way they are like Fred Rogers. But the Pharisees knew what the world ignores: there are no other gods. There is only the true Triune God and the devil who rebelled against him. There is no pantheon of competing gods who will claim their

respective followers after they have died. There is one God, and you either serve Him or you serve Beelzebul, the devil. “Whoever is not with me,” Jesus said, “is against me.”

3 Those in the church are not immune from this kind of sinful thinking. They want a casual, comfortable Jesus, not One who should be feared or revered. A Jesus who walks with you, who drinks coffee with you and laughs at your jokes, is preferable to the Jesus in His blazing glory when He was transfigured. A Jesus who will be your close friend and provide that relationship that’s lacking in your life is better for you than a Jesus who demands your reverent attention, your holy lifestyle, your humble adoration. And you want your Christianity to be as comfy as your Christ. This mild-mannered, fence-sitting Christianity cares more about your neighbor’s favor than his salvation, more about recycling than abortion, and more about defending the honor of the Cardinals than the honor of the Creator.

4 And if you have a more laid-back Lord, then your demons don’t have to be as controlling, either. Or at least, you’d like to pretend they’re innocuous. After all, they seem so subtle. The demons who entice with sins of greed, lust, and self-indulgence want you to believe in this laid-back Jesus who loves you just the way you are and to forget His warning about what happens to divided kingdoms, so you can divide your attention between the Lord and the devil. So repent. Repent of thinking that lukewarm Christianity won’t cause the Lord to spit you out of His mouth. Repent of letting the devil entice you into sin without realizing that he is the strongman who will claim you as his own if he can. Repent of supposing that Jesus wants more to be your buddy than your Savior and your Lord.

5 The devil is indeed the strongman, but Jesus came casting out demons. Thanks be to God that the Pharisees were wrong. Not by the power of Satan, but by the power of God, the finger of God, Jesus drove out demons. The strongman sought to guard the palace of the world, but the Stronger Man entered the palace, was born with human flesh. This One who came wielding the finger of God, driving out demons, healing the sick, raising the dead, despite all His miraculous activity hardly seemed like the One to overthrow the strongman. In fact, He

seemed beaten by the strongman when He was flogged by Roman soldiers, nailed to a cross, and put to death by crucifixion. The One who supposedly wielded the finger of God against the strongman Satan seemed to be crushed by that very finger of God, forsaken on the cross by His Father. But the moment of His death was the moment of His triumph over the strongman, the prince of the world, the devil.

6 When the sinless Son of God died, punished by God in the place of sinners, the strongman was defeated. No longer could the strongman lay claim to those whom the Lord claimed as His own. No longer could he accuse before God the Judge those who by their sin had alienated themselves from this Righteous Judge. In the courtroom of Heaven, the mouth of the accuser, the strongman, was silenced by the blood of Jesus. The Stronger One had prevailed through weakness, through His death. His innocent suffering and death left the devil without any accusation against those for whom the Stronger One, Jesus Christ, died.

7 His death has paid the price for your captivity to sin, death, and the devil. His blood has cleansed you from your fence-sitting. The very finger of God has driven out the demons who afflicted you and would have enslaved you with sin forever. In the waters of Holy Baptism, although you saw only a man's hand and heard a man's voice, the very finger of God sent the devil fleeing. Baptism is an exorcism. The devil and all his works and all his ways are renounced. The One who by the finger of God drove out demons, who was by the finger of God punished for the sins of the world, shatters the strongman's reign. He overcomes the strongman, crushes his armor, and plunders his spoil. You belong to the Lord.

8 Because you belong to Him, because He has claimed you in the waters of Baptism, the Lord is zealous to guard and defend you. The mighty finger of God crushes the devil, overpowers the world, and destroys your sinful flesh in the words of Holy Absolution. Though you hear a man's voice and feel a man's hand upon your forehead, in Holy Absolution, it is the very finger of God that drives out demons and makes the sign of the cross over you, as He pronounces you forgiven. Blessed are you who hear the word of God and keep it because the

finger of God pierces through heaven and earth to deliver faith and forgiveness of sins to you in the proclamation of the Holy Gospel. And in the Lord's Holy Supper, the very finger of God drives away the devil with his lying and deceiving. Here, the Lord gives His very Body and Blood in the simple forms of bread and wine to drive out demons, to keep the tempter at bay, to forgive your sins.

*In the name of the Father and of the ☩ Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

*Soli Deo Gloria*

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