

Plundering a Strong Man's House

Thomas Robinson, *Following or Rejecting Jesus*, 6, November 3, 2013

Matthew 12:15-34 [Cf. Mark]

¹⁵ **Jesus**, aware of this [the Pharisees' plans against him], **withdrew from there**. And **many followed him**, and he **healed** them all ¹⁶ and ordered them **not to make him known**.

¹⁷ This was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet **Isaiah**:

¹⁸ *"Behold, my servant whom I have chosen, nor will anyone hear his voice in the streets;
my beloved with whom ²⁰ a bruised reed he will not break,*

*my soul is well pleased. and a smoldering wick he will not quench,
I will put my Spirit upon him, until he brings justice to victory;*

and he will proclaim justice to the Gentiles. ²¹ and in his name the Gentiles will hope."

¹⁹ *He will not quarrel or cry aloud,* [Isaiah 42:1-4]

²² Then a **demon-oppressed man** who was **blind** and **mute** was brought to him, and he **healed him**, so that the man spoke and saw. ²³ And all the people were **amazed**, and said, **"Can this be the Son of David?"**

²⁴ But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, "It is only by **Beelzebul, the prince of demons**, that this man casts out demons."

²⁵ Knowing their thoughts, he said to them, "**Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste**, and no **city** or **house** divided against itself will stand. ²⁶ And if **Satan casts out Satan**, he is divided against himself. How then will **his kingdom** stand? ²⁷ And if **I cast out demons by Beelzebul**, by whom do **your sons** cast them out? Therefore **they will be your judges**.

²⁸ But if it is **by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons**, then the **kingdom of God has come upon you**.

²⁹ Or how can someone **enter a strong man's house** and **plunder his goods**, unless he first **binds the strong man**? Then indeed he may plunder his house. ³⁰ Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters. ³¹ Therefore I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven people, but the **blasphemy against the Spirit** will not be forgiven. ³² And whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come.

³³ "Either **make the tree good** and its **fruit good**, or make the tree bad and its fruit bad, for the tree is known by its fruit. ³⁴ You brood of vipers! How can you speak good, when you are bad? For **out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks**.

Isaiah 11:1-6,9

¹ There shall come a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit.

² And the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD.

³ And his delight shall be in the fear of the LORD. He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide disputes by what his ears hear,

⁴ but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth;

he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall destroy the wicked.

⁵ Righteousness shall be the belt of his waist, and faithfulness the belt of his loins.

⁶ The wolf shall dwell with the lamb; the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, ... and a little child shall lead them. ...

⁹ They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.

Isaiah 42:18-20

¹⁸ Hear, you deaf, and look, you blind, that you may see! ¹⁹ Who is blind but my servant, or deaf as my messenger whom I send? Who is blind as my dedicated one, or blind as the servant of the LORD?

²⁰ He sees many things, but does not observe them; his ears are open, but he does not hear.

Matthew 10:24-25

²⁴ "A **disciple** is not above his **teacher**, nor a servant above his master. ²⁵ It is enough for the disciple to be like his teacher, and the servant like his master. If they have called **the master of the house Beelzebul**, how much more will they malign those of his household."

Servant of the Lord and Son of David

Through Mt 11 & 12 we have watched the rising tension over Jesus' identity in the context of Israel's hopes and prophecies. Is he 'the one to come'? Is he the rebellious son: 'a glutton and a drunkard'? Is he a Sabbath breaker? How can he be a friend of tax collectors and sinners? The Pharisees see evil here and set out to destroy him. Mt. says Jesus was being God's Servant of Isa 42, pleasing to God, empowered by God's Spirit, helping the weak, giving justice & hope. But what about a powerful Messiah, the Son of David, a King, a purifier to destroy the world's evil? The hope shines out of a miracle briefly told. A person, totally vulnerable, blind and mute (deaf), tormented by a demon. Jesus heals, gives his life to him. Is this 'the Son of David'?

The Power Behind Gentle Healing

What does the sign mean? The Servant, the Messiah embodies his people. But the people are often blind & deaf (Isa 42:18-20). Jesus takes on the tormented pain of the people and heals. But what do they see/hear? The Pharisees embody the people's brokenness. To see but not see. Their master narrative has no place for a Servant/Messiah, friend of sinners. To see Jesus' work as God's work would be to affirm all he did. It can only be the work of Satan, Beelzebul: 'Lord of the Dwelling,' 'master of the house.' (Mt 10:25) Cf. Baal-zebul, 'Lord of the Flies' (2Kg 1:2). An old charge. Jesus turns it back on them. It makes no sense for Satan to cast out Satan. Their 'sons' also claim to cast out demons. By whom? But Jesus goes much further. What do you see? Do you see God's Spirit (on the Servant/Messiah). This is God's kingdom now!

Binding the Strong Man

Jesus gives a remarkable image of his ministry. Satan is like a 'strong man,' a war-lord with a stronghold full of plunder (like Herod with Masada). Jesus has bound that strong man and is taking the plunder back. His healings including casting out demons are signs of the great inbreaking of God's kingdom coming through his incarnation, death, and resurrection. Satan means 'slanderer,' 'accuser' = *diabolos*, 'devil' (Rev 12:10). He is also the 'tempter,' who puts people to test of will and commitment (Mt 4:1-3). He is also the 'oppressor,' and enslaver, 'prince of demons' who destroy the will and identity. The victim is not responsible. Jesus turns back slander. He faces temptations and teaches his followers to deal with it. He casts out demons like he heals diseases. The victims are often the most pitiable, signs of the strong man's plunder. Jesus gives back health, identity, will, life. They often respond by becoming disciples. In that response, the strong man's deepest power is broken. The Spirit of God transforms them as they become disciples, God's kingdom breaks in.

Following or Rejecting Jesus

Matthew emphasizes the irony of the Pharisees' position in this passage. They are in the role of 'slanderers' against Jesus and God's Spirit. They have put Jesus to the test through the man with a withered hand. They defend the strong man's fortress. Jesus' warns them against opposing God's Spirit/God's kingdom, where alone forgiveness & life are available. Jesus' work as Servant & Son of David continues. Healing, delivering, giving people renewed life and God's life. What do I see? Hear? Say? Do I follow or reject?