

"JESUS, THE VICTORY OF GOD" (LUKE 11:14-26)

June 28, 2009; Jerry Truex

A. Introduction

Today, we are going to talk about exorcisms. Exorcism is very difficult to talk about in the modern world, because for it is simply implausible for modern people.

We live in a modern world. It is a world devoted to materialism and technology, where science and reason are the highest authorities. As a result, our society tends to be "Christian" in name only. We are a post-Christian, secular society.

With scientific materialism, we have lost the sense of transcendence. We have lost the sense that behind the appearance of the universe there is an Eternal Reality, an All Pervasive Consciousness that unites and sustains all things.

Our society has swept the house clean of divine mystery—divine transcendence is absolutely implausible—and yet we cannot get rid of the nagging desire for something Ultimate and Mysterious. We long for an enchanted universe. So we fill life with divine substitutes and superstitions and call it entertainment. [Show Power Point of the following images]

- *Angels and Demons* (the book)
- "Angels and Demons" (the movie)
- The Harry Potter Books, the best and fastest selling books in the world, which focuses the secret world of wizards and magic
- "Buffy the Vampire Slayer" (movie and TV series)
- "The Exorcism of Emily Rose" (movie)
- "Underworld" (movie)
- "The Uninvited" (movie)
- "The Haunting" (movie)

[Point to the images above.] Surprisingly, we, who embrace the presuppositions of the modern world, entertain ourselves with what the modern world rejects as *absolutely implausible!*

The modern world of scientific materialism has left us with a spiritual void. Ironically, we fill that void with entertainment that focuses on the mysterious, the horrific, and the irrational.

B. Casting out Demons

The passage we read this morning is about connecting with the Transcendent Divine Life as a healing power and presence from all that is demonic.

The episode comes toward the beginning of Jesus' journey to Jerusalem. The episode shows that there is a widening rift between Jesus and the Jewish authorities. They think Jesus' power comes from Satan. But Jesus argues to the contrary.

1. Jesus accused

¹⁴ Now he was casting out a demon that was mute; when the demon had gone out, the one who had been mute spoke, and the crowds were amazed. ¹⁵ But some of them said, "He casts out demons by Beelzebul, the ruler of the demons." ¹⁶ Others, to test him, kept demanding from him a sign from heaven.

¹⁴ Καὶ ἦν ἐκβάλλων δαιμόνιον [καὶ αὐτὸ ἦν] κωφόν· ἐγένετο δὲ τοῦ δαιμονίου ἐξεληθέντος ἐλάλησεν ὁ κωφὸς καὶ ἐθαύμασαν οἱ ὄχλοι. ¹⁵ τινὲς δὲ ἐξ αὐτῶν εἶπον· ἐν Βεελζεβούλ τῷ ἄρχοντι τῶν δαιμονίων ἐκβάλλει τὰ δαιμόνια· ¹⁶ ἕτεροι δὲ πειράζοντες σημεῖον ἐξ οὐρανοῦ ἐζήτουν παρ' αὐτοῦ.

Historians agree that, in the ancient world, Jesus was widely regarded as an exorcist and healer.¹ That Jesus was an exorcist and healer is attested in Gospels and Acts and, beyond that, by Josephus,² the Talmud,³ Origen,⁴ the magical papyri, and *Testament of Solomon*.⁵

In the ancient world, demons were believed to be the basis of sickness and sin. Mental illness, psychosomatic diseases, and such afflictions as epilepsy were often attributed to demonic possession. Jesus undoubtedly saw himself called to battle against these evils. Jesus wanted to heal people from illness and other physical and spiritual evils. That meant doing exorcisms.

The passage we read focuses on the issue of Jesus' authority to heal. When Jesus expels a demon that causes a man to be mute, a discussion ensues about Jesus' authority.

- Some see Jesus' activity as demonic. They assign his work to Satan, who they call "Beelzebul," which means, "Lord of the Flies."⁶
- Others are less harsh, but they want a sign from heaven, as if healing people was not such a sign.

¹ James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered* (2003) 670.

² Josephus (*Ant.* 18:63) describes Jesus as "a doer of extraordinary deeds" (*Ant.* 18:63).

³ *b. Sanh* 43a has "On the Sabbath of the Passover festival Yeshu the Nazarene was hanged. For forty days before execution took place, a herald went forth and cried: "Here is Jesus the Nazarene, who is going forth to be stoned because he has practiced sorcery and enticed Israel to apostasy. Anyone who can say anything in his favor let him come forth and plead on his behalf." But since nothing was brought forth in his favor, he was hanged on the eve of the Passover ... Our rabbis taught: Yeshu had five disciples: Matthai, Nakai, Nezer, Buni and Toda."

⁴ Origen (*Contra Celsum* 1.25) boasted that "The name of our Lord Jesus has already expelled innumerable demons out of soul and body —there are *de visu* witnesses".⁴ The Latin, *de visu*, means "with his own eyes."

⁵ Well after the first century, the use of Jesus' name continued to be used for exorcisms in the incantations of the magical papyri (PGM 4.1233, 3020; 12.190, 390) and the *Testament of Solomon* (6.8; 11.6; 17.4; 22.20), which attests to the reputation Jesus held as an exorcist and healer.

⁶ Darrell Bock, *Luke*, NIV Application Commentary (1996) 317.

2. Jesus' Defense

¹⁷ But he knew what they were thinking and said to them, "Every kingdom divided against itself becomes a desert, and house falls on house [household against household falls]. ¹⁸ If Satan also is divided against himself, how will his kingdom stand?-- for you say that I cast out the demons by Beelzebul. ¹⁹ Now if I cast out the demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your exorcists cast them out? Therefore they will be your judges. ²⁰ But if it is by the finger of God that I cast out the demons, then the kingdom of God has come to you.

¹⁷ αὐτὸς δὲ εἰδὼς αὐτῶν τὰ διανοήματα εἶπεν αὐτοῖς· πᾶσα βασιλεία ἐφ' ἑαυτὴν διαμερισθεῖσα ἐρημοῦται καὶ οἶκος ἐπὶ οἶκον πίπτει. ¹⁸ εἰ δὲ καὶ ὁ σατανᾶς ἐφ' ἑαυτὸν διμερίσθῃ, πῶς σταθήσεται ἡ βασιλεία αὐτοῦ; ὅτι λέγετε ἐν Βεελζεβούλ ἐκβάλλειν με τὰ δαιμόνια. ¹⁹ εἰ δὲ ἐγὼ ἐν Βεελζεβούλ ἐκβάλλω τὰ δαιμόνια, οἱ υἱοὶ ὑμῶν ἐν τίνι ἐκβάλλουσιν; διὰ τοῦτο αὐτοὶ ὑμῶν κριταὶ ἔσονται. ²⁰ εἰ δὲ ἐν δακτύλῳ θεοῦ [ἐγὼ] ἐκβάλλω τὰ δαιμόνια, ἄρα ἔφθασεν ἐφ' ὑμᾶς ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ.

In this passage, Jesus defends himself against his opponents, who accuse him of working on behalf of Satan. Jesus argues there are only two explanations for his exorcisms. Either he is working for Satan (and he shows that is illogical) or he is working for God. There is no third option.

a. Divided Kingdom

First, Jesus refutes his opponents by using the analogy of a divided kingdom and a divided household.⁷ Neither a kingdom nor a household will survive internal war. They will self-destruct. The same is true of Satan's kingdom. Since Jesus is casting out demons or plundering Satan's kingdom, he can't be working for Satan.

His opponents' thinking is absurd. Anything or anyone with a divided purpose works against itself and will not endure.

In this way, Jesus points to a "two kingdom" theology. There are two kingdoms, that of Satan and that of God. One can serve God or one can serve something other than God. Those are the only choices.

b. Other exorcists

Second, Jesus refutes his opponents by noting that "their exorcists" (lit. "your sons") did the same thing he was doing. Jesus acknowledges that some Pharisees were exorcists and, in so doing, he turns the argument back on the opponents.

If Jesus' opponents impute to him the casting out of demons to Beelzebul, then they imply the same must be true of other healers. Of course, that's absurd. The power to heal people of evil does not come from Evil.

⁷ The phrase, "house falls on house" (NRSV) could be translated, "household against household falls." So Luke Timothy Johnson, *Luke*, Sacra Pagina (1991) 181.

c. The finger of God

Third, Jesus issues one of the most crucial statements of his ministry: “But if it is by the finger of God that I cast out the demons, then the kingdom of God has come to you” (20).

Jesus uses the phrase, “with/by the finger of God,” to indicate the means by which Jesus exorcises demons (v. 20).⁸ The phrase alludes to Exod 8:15. In Exod 8:12-15 we have the story of the third plague that comes upon Egypt, the plague of gnats. Aaron took his staff and hit the dust of the earth, which turned to gnats. Pharaoh’s magicians, who had somehow imitated the two previous plagues, couldn’t reproduce this one. Pharaoh’s magicians confessed: “This is the finger of God.”⁹

Jesus presents himself as controlling “the finger of God.” In the Greek, Jesus says, “with/by the finger of God I cast out demons” (ἐν δακτύλῳ θεοῦ [ἐγὼ] ἐκβάλλω τὰ δαιμόνια).

Like Moses and Aaron, Jesus presents himself as God’s Agent empowered to perform symbolic acts that point to humanity’s liberation from slavery.

4. The Kingdom of God “has come”

Fourth, Jesus says, “If indeed I am casting out demons, and I am,” (1st class conditional) then “The kingdom of God has come to you.”¹⁰ The phrase “has come” is the Greek, *phthanō*. It is an “ingressive aorist,” which means that the Kingdom of God “has already come” or “already arrived”.¹¹ In Jesus’ exorcisms, the Kingdom of God is present!

Jesus is claiming that his exorcisms demonstrate the presence of the invisible power of God in those healed, so that they will feel in their consciousness not only a release from evil, but also a manifestation of the Eternal Divine Consciousness.

3. The Strong Man

²¹ When a strong man, fully armed, guards his castle, his property is safe. ²² But when one stronger than he attacks him and overpowers him, he takes away his armor in which he trusted and divides his plunder. ²³ Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters.

²¹ ὅταν ὁ ἰσχυρὸς καθωπλισμένος φυλάσῃ τὴν ἑαυτοῦ αὐλήν, ἐν εἰρήνῃ ἐστὶν τὰ ὑπάρχοντα αὐτοῦ· ²² ἐπὰν δὲ ἰσχυρότερος αὐτοῦ ἐπελθὼν νικήσῃ αὐτόν, τὴν πανοπλίαν αὐτοῦ αἴρει ἐφ’ ἣ ἐπεποίθει καὶ τὰ σκῦλα αὐτοῦ διαδίδωσιν. ²³ Ὁ μὴ ὦν μετ’ ἐμοῦ κατ’ ἐμοῦ ἐστίν, καὶ ὁ μὴ συνάγων μετ’ ἐμοῦ σκορπίζει.

Here, Jesus tells a mini-parable of a strong man. The parable unmasks what is at stake in Jesus’ ministry. There is a cosmic battle going on. The battle is between the *yetzer ha ra* (the evil spirit) and *yetzer ha tov* (the good spirit). Who has the right to rule—Satan or God.

⁸ Matt 12:28 uses “Spirit of God”.

⁹ LXX Exod 8:19 *daktylos theou estin touto*.

¹⁰ With a 1st Class Conditional, “the speaker assumes that the condition stated in the protasis (*the if clause*) is a reality.” So James A. Brooks and Carlton L. Wiinbery, *Syntax of the New Testament Greek* (1983) 182.

¹¹ So Robert Stein, *Luke*, *The New American Commentary* (1992) 331.

A strong man occupies his castle. He is heavily armed and standing guard, but his security is an illusion. There is One stronger,¹² who conquers him, strips his armor, and takes his possessions.

In this way, Jesus claims he is plundering the house of Satan. Jesus is releasing the captives. The forces that plague human beings are being cast out.

The saying at the end of the parable presents a choice (v. 23). There are only two sides in the cosmic battle. "Neutrality with respect to Jesus is impossible."¹³

- Either one is for Jesus or against him (a fighting metaphor).
- Either one gathers with Jesus or scatters (a farming metaphor).
- With Jesus, one is either for or against, yes or no.

d. The Wandering Spirit

²⁴ "When the unclean spirit has gone out of a person, it wanders through waterless regions looking for a resting place, but not finding any, it says, 'I will return to my house from which I came.' ²⁵ When it comes, it finds it swept and put in order. ²⁶ Then it goes and brings seven other spirits more evil than itself, and they enter and live there; and the last state of that person is worse than the first."

²⁴ "Όταν τὸ ἀκάθαρτον πνεῦμα ἐξέλθῃ ἀπὸ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, διέρχεται δι' ἀνύδρων τόπων ζητοῦν ἀνάπαυσιν καὶ μὴ εὐρίσκον· [τότε] λέγει· ὑποστρέψω εἰς τὸν οἶκόν μου ὅθεν ἐξῆλθον· ²⁵ καὶ ἐλθὼν εὐρίσκει σεσαρωμένον καὶ κεκοσμημένον. ²⁶ τότε πορεύεται καὶ παραλαμβάνει ἕτερα πνεύματα πονηρότερα ἑαυτοῦ ἑπτὰ καὶ εἰσελθόντα κατοικεῖ ἐκεῖ· καὶ γίνεται τὰ ἔσχατα τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἐκείνου χείρονα τῶν πρώτων.

This is the final saying reinforces what Jesus has been teaching. It's a humorous parable of a Wandering Spirit. The exorcised demon is expelled, but then returns to the former dwelling.

I imagine a tenant, who has been kicked out of an apartment for nonpayment of rent. He wanders the streets for days, only to return to the empty apartment after it has been cleaned and painted. Then, in a hostile takeover, he finds seven friends and moves back in.

Once a person has expelled the demonic, one must fill the house with Jesus. Otherwise, one has an "empty house" for more demons to occupy. An empty tenement invites squatters. One must choose between kingdoms.

C. Reflections

1. This passage pulls back "the curtains on the divine perspective of Christ's ministry."¹⁴ Christ is in a cosmic battle with Evil. Jesus' ministry was the key turning point in the battle.
2. The passage tells us that Jesus established victory over Evil, though complete victory awaits us. Skirmishes with Evil are still being fought.

¹² The "one more powerful" refers to Jesus in Luke 3:16.

¹³ Stein, *Luke* (1992) 332.

¹⁴ Bock, *Luke* (1996) 320.

3. This passage sets before us two kingdoms. Evil is a strong opponent, but there is one stronger.

- Evil destroys; Christ restores
- Evil harms relationships; Christ reconciles
- Evil addicts and enslaves; Christ liberates
- Evil brings suffering; Christ ... healing
- Evil ... humiliation; Christ ... humanity
- Evil ... death; Christ ... divine life

4. This passage raises questions.

- Did Jesus heal people? Did he exorcism demons? And what does that mean?
- If so, did he do it in/with the power of the Divine Eternal One?
- If so, were his exorcisms portraits of a more fundamental reality, namely, God's good will to restore creation and triumph over evil?