

Introduction

This past week marked the 75th anniversary of D-Day. The largest joint military operation ever undertaken took place on that date. Tens of thousands of troops from the United States, the UK, France and Canada landed on the Normandy coastline in France on June 6, 1944. The landing commenced the Allied operation to liberate Europe from the diabolical Third Reich. War raged across Europe until victory over the German forces was secured on May 8, 1945. Could you imagine what life would be like today if that invasion had not been carried out and if the victory had not been secured? I shudder to think.

As we come to our time in God's word this morning, our attention is directed to an invasion of far greater proportion in the war of all wars. Ever since the serpent succeeded in his evil scheme to lure humanity into sin, a cosmic war persists. It involves two sides—the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan. The war of all wars is largely unseen, generally taking place beneath the surface of what the world observes. But the reality of this war was undeniable when Jesus invaded to over throw Satan's occupation. The reality of battle is indisputable as we observe the interaction between Jesus and the Pharisees in Matthew 12.

[Read Text; Pray]

If you remember a couple weeks back in our study, Jesus had an encounter with the Pharisees in regard to the Sabbath. They were pointing their accusatory fingers first at the disciples and then at Jesus when he healed a man with a withered hand on the Sabbath. With the callousness of their hearts exposed, the Pharisees were seething inside. They went out and conspired how to destroy Jesus. He withdrew but continued to minister. In the course of that ministry, a blind and mute man who was also oppressed by demons was brought to him. And at this point, we observe a collision between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan.

Jesus strikes a crushing blow. He heals the demon oppressed man. The bystanders witness the power of Jesus and are amazed. They do the natural thing. They automatically begin to wonder if this is the Messiah, the Son of David. They begin discussing the possibility among themselves. The Pharisees hear the discussion and fight back. Jesus is of the devil, they say. He casts out demons by the power of Satan. They imply that Jesus is absolutely disgusting, reprehensible, and appalling. Jesus responds by exposing the absurdity of their charges. He reveals that they are in fact railing against the Holy Spirit of God and warmongering against the kingdom of God. The insinuation is that the Pharisees are the ones who are on the side of the devil because they oppose Jesus as he comes to plunder the devil's house.

In examining this text this morning, I want to look at it in terms of what it reveals about the kingdoms that are at war. By considering it this way, Christ-followers and those yet to follow are met with crucial distinctions and an important conclusion.

So, let's start with . . .

I. The Kingdom of Satan.

Several aspects of the domain of darkness emerge in the text.

A. Satan's Kingdom is detrimental.

Satan's kingdom brings captivity, darkness, bondage. This fact appears in the condition of the man brought to Jesus. He was oppressed by a demon, and as a result he was unable to see or speak. Satan closed this man's eyes and shut his mouth and held him in bondage.

These outward marks of bondage give us just a glimpse into the spiritual darkness and death in which this man was engulfed. This is what Satan does. He comes to steal, kill, and destroy. Look around at the blindness and hurt and pain and the ravages of a sinful world and you see the result of Satan's work. He tempts and people are deceived. They sin and come to absolute ruin. The devil is full of hostility and hate. The first domino fell in Eden's garden and the cataclysmic results are what we see and hear and feel today. Satan's kingdom is a kingdom of depravity, of darkness, of destruction, of delusion, and of despair. This is what he brings.

What an important reminder for when we face temptation. Temptation to sin is never for our ultimate joy. It never delivers the goods it promises—only destruction, bondage, and sorrow.

If you are not a follower of Jesus, you need to think long and hard about the nature of Satan's kingdom. It is detrimental and destructive to hearts and minds and bodies. Do you want to be a part of a kingdom like this? Surely not! Well there is another option.

B. Satan's dominion is delusional.

It promotes delusion and deceit and operates by those same tactics. Satan is a liar and the father of lies. And though the lies can be exposed, they are still believed.

The Pharisees had accused Jesus of casting out demons only by the power of Beelzebul. This accusation was highly provocative. Beelzebul literally means "Lord of Dung." It was the most contemptible expression the Jews had to speak of the devil. So this accusation was charged with emotion and public contempt. Whether the accusation was true or reasonable or even logical was simply irrelevant to these enemies of Jesus.

I am reminded of some news stories that have appeared in the last few years in which news agencies have propagated reports they knew were not true. They did it simply to energize public sentiment. There is an agenda other than to report. It is an agenda clearly to shape the public mindset. And that is what the Pharisees were doing in regard to Jesus. They were trying to shape an antagonistic mindset toward him.

And they were having an effect. You notice that when Jesus performed the miracle, the bystanders were asking whether Jesus might be the "Son of David." Any hesitation they had was probably due in some part to the presence of the Pharisees who were emerging as rival enemies to him.

Jesus on his part exposed the delusions of the Pharisees. He pointed out that it was ludicrous to think he was operating with the power of Satan. That would mean Satan was operating against himself. And if that were so, his kingdom would be imploding from the inside. Furthermore, there were,

among associates of the Pharisees, certain ones who claimed to cast out demons. The Pharisees were only too glad to share the glory of their claims. Their rejection of Jesus's exorcism by ascribing it to the devil was terribly inconsistent. So they are shown to be illogical and inconsistent in their accusation. But for them it really did not matter. Satan and those who side with him operate by delusion and by feelings, not by facts.

Look around at the voices crying out these days with words like "Bigot" and "Homophobe." I am willing to admit that these kinds of people exist, but in many cases what you have is the same kind of delusional cry that was uttered by the Pharisees. They are not interested in truth or accuracy. There is a spirit of delusion and it operates with the same tactic. They are interested in stirring up a frenzy that redirects the attention of the world away from the power and righteousness of the kingdom of God and his people and away from the guilt that sinners experience within their hearts. They do not want to be exposed. And the name of the game is not "get at the truth" but "sway public opinion." When you see that, understand that this is not from God. These ways and methods are the methods of the enemies of God.

C. Satan's kingdom includes very religious people.

The Pharisees of Jesus' day were the most highly regarded in Jewish society. They were the most rigorous rule-followers probably in the history of humanity. But this encounter with Jesus reveals that they were enemies to the kingdom of God and by default they were part of the kingdom of the devil. They were not with Jesus but against him and the kingdom of God has come upon them. And that was just fine with the devil. Satan loves religious people so long as they love religion instead of God.

From the example of the Pharisees we learn that religion is of no value when it comes to being right-hearted toward God or being in right standing with God. It does not matter how many hail Mary's you do. It does not matter how many Sunday's you go to church or how often you fast. Religious rule-following is no help in attaining right standing with God. There must be a heart change that rejects the delusion and embraces the truth. Do not be deluded by religion or by religious ritual or by religious enterprise. You don't need religion, you need Jesus.

D. Satan's dominion cannot withstand the offensive maneuvering of Jesus. The devil was not able to withstand the healing work of Jesus in the case of the blind and mute man. The fact that Jesus was able to cast out the demon and heal the man shows the superior power of Jesus. Effortlessly, Jesus exerts his sovereignty over the demonic realm. We saw this previously when Jesus engaged a whole host of demons on the Gentile side of the Sea of Galilee. The demons caused the men to be fierce and strong. They caused an entire herd of pigs to run into the sea. But they were no match for Christ. Jesus would become weary from traveling and hungry from going without food. But he exhibits no fatigue in casting out the enemy spirits.

The devil goes about like a roaring lion, but he can do nothing to thwart the ultimate purpose and power of Jesus. The kingdom of Satan is dark, delusional, destructive, down-loaded with religion, but it is as good as defeated. Its final defeat is just on the horizon. Why would anyone want to be a part of it? Most would not. And yet though perhaps unwittingly, most people are. We will look at that in a few moments.

Next, let's consider what we learn in this text about . . .

II. The Kingdom of God.

A. Jesus' kingdom overrules Satanic dominance and brings deliverance. What Satan's kingdom does to brings detriment is no match for the authority of Jesus. Before the demon-oppressed man was brought to Christ, he was blind and mute. He could not see and he could not speak. He was dominated satanically.

But the answer to his situation was Jesus. He was brought to Jesus, and Jesus healed him. The man was no longer blind but saw. He was no longer mute but spoke. His physical ailments and his spiritual bondage were removed. And in their place came healing and wholeness. Sight replaced blindness. Speech replaced silence. Freedom replaced bondage.

The dead and debilitated state of humanity as a result of sin and the influence of Satan is no match for the power of the Spirit of God operating under the authority of Christ Jesus. Paul depicts it beautifully to the Ephesians; "And you were dead in your trespasses and sins in which you

once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in th sons of disobedience—among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath like the rest of mankind. But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.”

If you are a follower of Jesus, it is because you have been delivered by Jesus. Through him you have been set free from bondage. You have been given eyes to see the kingdom. You have also been given a voice with which to speak God’s praise. He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved son in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. It is good for us to open our eyes and see what great things Christ has done for us. And it is good for us to open our mouths and sing his praise.

B. Jesus’ kingdom is insulted by its opponents.

Think about it. These Pharisees are ascribing the work of Jesus Christ to the devil. The hostility of the world for Christ is vehement. Jesus had already said, “you will be hated by all for my name’s sake.” He also said, “If they called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household.”

If you are a Christ-follower, look at these Pharisees and be placed on high alert. Be prepared. Do not expect this world to respect you because there is good reason to hold to biblical and God-honoring convictions. No. Expect it to try to soil your reputation. It will accuse you of being devilish and hateful and hostile no matter what even simple logic might reveal. You and I have no right to become hostile or hateful ourselves. We must simply persevere in godliness and holiness and let God take care of setting the record straight. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Never avenge yourselves but leave it to the wrath of God.

C. Jesus' kingdom is vindicated by truth. It is not defeated by lies and delusion. The Pharisees' insults notwithstanding, Jesus was undaunted in his assertions. And he was undaunted in his mission. Even when they led the charge to put him to death, it was not because Jesus was overcome by the enemy. The cross was the plan of God. Jesus bore up under the hostility that was directed at him in order to complete the work given him by the Father. The lies of the Pharisees and the deceit of the devil are shown to be what they in fact are.

Jesus was clearly working by the power of the Spirit of God and the Kingdom of God was present manifesting authority.

D. Jesus' kingdom plunders the kingdom of the devil.

Having asserted that the kingdom of God has made itself known, Jesus uses the image of a thief to depict his own ministry.

Most thieves do not break in when someone is at home because it complicates matters. If they do, they will have to neutralize the home owner. The intruder will have to tie up the owner in order to burglarize and take what he wants. He will bind the strong man first and then he will plunder his house. By this imagery, Jesus declares that he has invaded the strong man's house. Satan is the strong man. By his strength, he has brought humanity into bondage in his house. Now Christ has appeared. He has not come to do the devil's work but to work in opposition to the devil. He has come to pillage Satan's house.

By the Spirit Jesus has bound the strong man. It is by the Spirit that the devil has been restrained. He has been bound. And Jesus is plundering his house. Jesus has invaded to set captives free. He has come to bring release to those held captive under the prince of the power of the air. The plunder is the people Christ has come to gather. They are the sheep for which he came to give himself. Like Moses coming back to Egypt to lead the Israelites out from under the captivity of Pharaoh, Jesus has come to lead out his people from the dominion of the devil. And as the Israelites plundered Egypt, Jesus is plundering the house of the devil.

By the Spirit he has bound the strong man and he is leading captives to the promised land. Just as sure as the allied forces landed on Normandy beach to plunder the Third Reich and deliver the captives from German occupation, Jesus came to redeem his people and set us free from the delusional and destructive reign of the devil. And he will fully accomplish what he came to do. Satan is a strong man and by his power he wreaks all kinds of havoc. But Jesus Christ is stronger. He showed his strength when he resisted the temptation of Satan in the wilderness. He showed his power every time he put demons on the move and people back in their right minds.

And if you are in Christ, that power is at your disposal. Greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world.

The fact that these two kingdoms are at odds demands a choice.

III. There Is No Neutrality.

Look to verse 30. Jesus says, "Whoever is not with me is against me. And whoever does not gather with me scatters." What he is indicating is that there is no such thing as neutrality when it comes to these two kingdoms. You either belong to one or you belong to the other.

A. By default you and I are on the side of the devil. By nature we all follow the course of this world and the prince of the power of the air. We live under the dominion of Satan. We are slaves to sin and show it by living in the passions of the flesh carrying out the desires of the body and the mind.

What do you have to do to join up with Satan's kingdom? Nothing! You are born into that kingdom and subject to it. Satan worshipers are not the only ones who exist under his dominion. If you are not with Jesus, you are against him. If you are against Jesus, you are with the devil. There is no neutrality in this war. If you are not part of the kingdom of God, you are on the side of the devil. If you do not want to be on the devil's side, there is only one option. You must change sides and join up with Jesus.

B. If you join up with Jesus, you join up with him to plunder the devil's house. That is what Jesus came to the earth to do. To join up with Jesus is to join up to gather with him. People who truly join up with Jesus join up

with his cause. He who does not gather with Christ scatters. Either promote Jesus Christ or support the devil's cause. The devil silences people. Jesus enables his people to speak. Jesus has bound the strong man and he calls his disciples to get in on the plunder. And we get in on the plunder by speaking the gospel.

Conclusion

There can be no doubt, the Third Reich was hellish. Much blood had to be shed in order to overturn the bondage and darkness it brought on the European continent. 150,000 Allied troops came ashore on D Day. Thousands perished in the mission. But they succeeded in binding the strong man and began plundering his house. The world celebrates a monumental victory at Normandy and beyond that delivered Europe.

In contrast, our passage in Matthew this morning points us to a single soldier who infiltrated the stronghold of the devil. His works bound the strong man. And the death of this one soldier secured invincible victory for all who follow him. But if you are not with him, you are against him. If you do not gather with him, you scatter. Go forth and gather.