

Matthew 12:22-29

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/matt/matt-12/matthew-1222-29/>

Matthew narrates the third of four confrontations between Jesus and the Pharisees. Finding themselves unable to deny the miraculous power Jesus has, the Pharisees accuse Him of being a demonic agent. Jesus denies their charge and tells them that the kingdom of God has come upon them.

The parallel Gospel accounts of this teaching are Mark 3:20-27 and Luke 14:22.

Many in the *crowds* of people who followed Jesus sought healing from Him. Among them was a *demon-possessed man who was blind and mute*. It is not clear if these three afflictions were related to each other or separate. But when this *man was brought to Jesus, He was healed so that he spoke and saw*. Based on the interchange between *Jesus and the Pharisees* that immediately follows this miracle, it is apparent that *the demon(s) possessing the mute man* were also cast out.

Matthew comments that *all the crowds were amazed*, but the fact that Matthew does not elaborate further on this marvel as he did with earlier ones indicates that this has become quite routine. This miracle is but one instance of numerous others like it that are not explained. What makes this miracle noteworthy to Matthew's narrative is the discussion that followed.

Because of Jesus's miracles, including this one, *the crowds were* buzzing with hope and wonder. *They were saying, "This man cannot be the Son of David, can he?"* The phrase, *Son of David*, is a Messianic title. This prophecy originated when God promised to King *David* through His prophet Nathan that *David* will have a *son* on the throne forever.

"When your days are complete and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your descendant after you, who will come forth from you, and I will establish his kingdom forever."
(2 Samuel 7:12)

This prophecy was repeated often throughout the rest of the Old Testament (I Chronicles 22:9-10, Psalm 89:3-4, 89:35-36, Jeremiah 23:5-6).

When *all the crowds were* asking "*This man cannot be the Son of David, can he?*" they were considering the real possibility that they were in the presence of the long-awaited Messiah. The One promised to restore their nation and fortunes. *The Pharisees* refused to consider this possibility. This is another example of how the Father had "hidden these things from the wise and intelligent" and "revealed them to the infants" (Matthew 11:25).

When the Pharisees heard what all the crowds were speculating, they were frustrated. Ever since He recently humiliated some of them in the synagogue, *the Pharisees* had been conspiring how they might destroy *Jesus* (Matthew 12:14). Despite their considerable expertise in the law, *they* could not defeat *Jesus* in a debate over the scriptures. And *they* could not deny the power of His

public miracles which drew more and more people to Him by the day. So, they shifted their strategy.

Since *they* could not deny that a miracle happened, they could claim that *Jesus* was performing the miracle in the devil's name. *They* said, "This man cast out demons only by Beelzebul the ruler of the demons." The name *Beelzebul* was a Hebrew description of *Satan*. It literally meant "lord of the flies." *The Pharisees'* argument was that the *only* reason *Jesus* had power to cast out demons is not because *He* was some holy man, but rather because *He* is working for *Satan*.

The intent of *their* accusation was to cause people to conclude that *Jesus* cannot be the *Son of David*, God's promised Messiah, because he is an agent from the devil. While theoretically *their* argument could account for the casting out of the demon(s), it does not account for restoring the mute man's voice and sight. Nor is it a natural explanation for many of the other miracles *Jesus* has already performed. But this forced accusation is the best attack *the Pharisees* had at the moment.

And Jesus knowing their thoughts pointed out the flimsiness of *their* logic. He begins by stating a principle: *Any kingdom divided against itself is laid waste; and any city or house divided against itself will not stand.* The principle is that if anything is *against itself*, it will fall apart or fail. *A kingdom divided* and at war *against itself* is destined for ruin. *A city or a house* (family unit) *divided against* its own members is totally dysfunctional and *will not* remain standing. In order for a *kingdom*, community, or *house* to stand, it must have unity.

Jesus then applies this unity/division principle to *Satan* and *his kingdom*. *If Satan casts out Satan, he is* [not unified but] *divided against himself; how then will his kingdom stand?* The conclusion is that it would be pointless and counterproductive for *Satan* and *his kingdom*, if he were to cast out demons from performing his evil works. If *Satan* were to do this, as *the Pharisees* said he was doing, then *his kingdom* would fall. Therefore, *Jesus* is not casting out demons by the authority of *the ruler of demons*. His miracles are done in the power of *God*.

After refuting *the Pharisees'* accusation, *Jesus* then turns *their* argument back on *them*. He sarcastically taunts *them* and mockingly entertains *their* disproven accusation. *If I cast out demons, as you say I do by the power of Beelzebul, by whom do your sons cast them out?* Silence...is *the Pharisees'* only response. Like the prophets of Baal who were helpless and humiliated against *Elijah* calling up in *God's* awesome power, so are *the Pharisees* helpless and humiliated before *Jesus* performing miracles in the power of the Almighty.

Jesus continues, *For this reason they will be your judges.* Who is the "they" *Jesus* is referring to? Who *will be* the *Pharisees'* judges? The *they* likely refers to *your sons* (who cast out demons). By *your sons*, *Jesus* likely means those who are *your* followers. If so, perhaps *Jesus* is saying, "The fact that some of *your* followers (those whom you taught) cast out demons puts you in a place to be judged since they demonstrated what you should have been doing if you had followed your own teaching." How could the followers of *the Pharisees* be righteous, when their exemplars were corrupt? It could well be the case that the followers did what was right because *the Pharisees* actually did teach the Bible. *Jesus* will make this clear in chapter 23. *He* tells the crowd to listen to *the Pharisees* and do what they say, but not to do what they do. It could be that

Jesus has this hypocrisy in mind in making this statement. It could also be that *Jesus* was pointing out that some of the *sons* of the Pharisees had become His followers.

With the next line, *Jesus* pivots back to the reality that *He* is working in God's strength. *But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.* With this line, *Jesus* confronts *the Pharisees* with the conclusion they refuse to consider. And the conclusion is that instead of an evil madman in *your* midst, *the kingdom of God* has actually *come upon you* because the King is among you. *The kingdom of heaven* is on *your* doorstep and under *your* nose. And *you* are missing it for all *your* pride and self-righteous rules of *your* petty kingdoms.

Jesus then gives another reason refuting *the Pharisees'* accusation that *He* was casting out demons by the ruler of the demons. It is in the form of an analogy and rhetorical question. *Or how can anyone enter the strong man's house and carry off his property, unless he first binds the strong man? And then he will plunder his house.* The elements of His analogy are *the strong man*, the *strong man's house*, the *strong man's property*, and the robber. *The strong man* is *Satan* or *demons*. The *strong man's house* is the dominion, power, or influence *Satan* has on earth. The *strong man's property* are the souls of those that demons possess or those who are under the influence and direction of *Satan* (whether they know it or not). The robber in this case represents *Jesus*, who has come to plunder *Satan* of his captive *property* and rescue the souls of men.

Therefore, since *Jesus* is casting out demons, it means *He* is binding *Satan*. *Jesus* is saying, just as someone who seeks to rob *a strong man* of *his property*, he must *first bind* him and tie him up before going around plundering *his house*, so too has *Jesus* come to *first bind Satan* by *casting out his demons* before *He* redeems the once-possessed souls to His kingdom.

Biblical Text

Then a demon-possessed man who was blind and mute was brought to Jesus, and He healed him, so that the mute man spoke and saw. All the crowds were amazed, and were saying, "This man cannot be the Son of David, can he?" But when the Pharisees heard this, they said, "This man casts out demons only by Beelzebul the ruler of the demons." And knowing their thoughts Jesus said to them, "Any kingdom divided against itself is laid waste; and any city or house divided against itself will not stand. If Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself; how then will his kingdom stand? If I by Beelzebul cast out demons, by whom do your sons cast them out? For this reason they will be your judges. But if I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. Or how can anyone enter the strong man's house and carry off his property, unless he first binds the strong man? And then he will plunder his house.