

Luke 11:14-22 Jesus and Beelzebul

¹⁴ Now he was casting out a demon that was mute. When the demon had gone out, the mute man spoke, and the people marveled. ¹⁵ But some of them said, “He casts out demons by Beelzebul, the prince of demons,” ¹⁶ while others, to test him, kept seeking from him a sign from heaven. ¹⁷ But he, knowing their thoughts, said to them, “Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and a divided household falls. ¹⁸ And if Satan also is divided against himself, how will his kingdom stand? For you say that I cast out demons by Beelzebul. ¹⁹ And if I cast out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they will be your judges. ²⁰ But if it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. ²¹ When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own palace, his goods are safe; ²² but when one stronger than he attacks him and overcomes him, he takes away his armor in which he trusted and divides his spoil.

Message:

COMING TO LIFE IS PAINFUL BUSINESS!

Jesus tells us that if we want to be saved we have to be born again. He said to Nicodemus: *“I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.”* (John 3:3) So what exactly does that mean? What is it like to be born again? Well, what’s it like to be born the first time? We have a pretty good idea of what childbirth entails for the mother, but what do you suppose it’s like to be born from the infant’s point of view?

Imagine that you are suspended, weightlessly, in water and darkness. No light, no sense of heat or cold—the fluid in which you’re suspended is exactly the same temperature as your body. You are not hungry—you’re being perfectly fed. The only sound is a faint, regular soothing heartbeat. You are perfectly comfortable in a perfectly controlled environment. Then, all of a sudden, the water in which you are suspended rushes out and violent forces begin to toss you around. The walls around you move in and begin to force you into an impossibly narrow tunnel where tremendous pressure begins to build up. The compression becomes so great that your skull is actually bent out of shape. The pain is inexorable: it goes on for hours. Then, suddenly, you are thrust out into blinding light, loud noises, the leaden pull of gravity and cold air. Your chest begins to uncontrollably heave as your lungs desperately try to pull in air. Someone swats your rear end to get you breathing. You gasp and begin to cry. Congratulations! You have just experienced normal childbirth and everyone is delighted to see you!

Being born has to be a painful, frightening business. If we had the choice, I suspect we’d choose to stay in the womb and avoid the experience altogether. That’s probably why labor is induced in the mother, not the child! And it’s no different with spiritual birth. Being born again involves pain. That’s why most people would rather avoid it. They’d rather stay asleep in their sins than pass through the narrow way, be awakened to the blinding light of truth and learn the gravity of their situation.

Knowing this, Satan specializes in keeping us in peace so that we will stay asleep. He gradually dulls our conscience until we cease to feel the painful prick of guilt. He soothes us with the notion that we are less sinful than many others and that God doesn’t take our sins all that seriously. He even suggests that the idea of sin itself is outmoded—maybe

even harmful, damaging to our “self-esteem.” He comforts us with the assurance that there is no God, no devil, no sin, no consequences to sin; there is only

me and what I want and deserve to have. And bit by bit we nod off and finally fall asleep to dream that there are neither causes nor consequences to my being; that I exist only to chase happiness and moderate pain; that heaven is an illusion and hell is a myth; that there is only everlasting me. I am safe in my dream castle and the lord of the castle—a very strong man—guards the gate.

“Pleasant dreams, my darling” my lord murmurs. *“I have plans for you, but you needn’t concern yourself with them right now. Just slumber on and dream your pleasant dreams.”* As the old saying goes, *“Satan keeps his palace in peace.”*

Then—suddenly—there is a violent noise at the door! An enemy, much stronger than the strong man I was relying on, has arrived and he is battering down the gates. They cannot withstand the power of his attack and they crumble. He binds the strong man and throws open all the blinds! Light pours in and jars me awake. Suddenly I am thrust outside into new and strange territory. Glancing back, I see the horrible place I inhabited and looking at myself for the first time I am filled with self-loathing as what I am really like becomes apparent to me. Part of me longs to return to the peaceful dream out of which I have been torn, but another part of me entertains the strange new notion that I would rather be awake than asleep; that I’d rather see clearly than be blind; that I’d rather know the truth than doze in delusion; that I’d rather move ahead to wherever this strange new leader is leading me.

And then my new leader turns and says to me: *“When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own house, his possessions are safe. But when someone stronger attacks and overpowers him, he takes away the armor in which the man trusted and divides up the spoils.”*

Jesus is the stronger man who has invaded Satan’s palace and plundered his possessions. And you and I are the spoils of war—POW’s He has sprung from their prison and led into freedom. Not only has He freed us—he has cleansed us and healed us and ***made us whole again***. Where we were blind, He has given us eyes to see. Where we were deaf, He has given us ears to hear. Where we were mute He was given us tongues to speak. And where He wants to lead us is enough to scare you to death!

You see, He wants to give you knowledge that you’d rather not have: He wants to show you the truth about yourself—and it isn’t pretty. He wants you to know that you’re not only a sinner—you’re the worst of the lot. I mean, if Paul called himself “chief of sinners,” what does that make us? Your heart is so full of lust you wouldn’t dare confess it to your best friend. It may not be carnal lust for another person, but it’s lust for something because in our sin we all want MORE of something the Lord hasn’t seen fit to give us: more money, more control, more influence, more respect, more attention from our kids—more of something. Your good deeds are so encumbered with hopes of gratitude or the admiration of people who see you doing them that they’re an embarrassment. Your carefully reasoned explanations are just stratagems to prove to others that YOU are right and THEY are wrong. Your tactics have become more refined, but your goals are the same and they are obvious to everyone—except maybe you. If truth be known, at your core you are a hypercritical, pretentious, conniving, angry, spoiled child, and you think, *“If this is reality, I’ll pass. I’d rather be asleep! I’ll take the dreams I had over the stuff you’re showing me!”*

And then the scary yet strangely gratifying prospect dawns on you: you don't really have much of a choice! You can't go back! You've been bought and paid for and you now belong to the one who purchased you. You are His possession. Christ has snatched you from the jaws of Satan and now you belong to Him.

And deep down, you wouldn't have it any other way because this is what you were born for—and reborn for. This is why He brought you forth into his marvelous light: He wants to show you your sins so that you can cast them upon Him. Not just your past sins; not just your present sins; not just your future sins—but ALL your sins. He wants to show you how sinful you are so that He can show you how merciful He is. He wants to empower you to love others by showing you how much He loves you.

God wants ALL of you—the good, the bad and the ugly. The secret thoughts of your darkened heart. The resentment you feel toward your friends who have succeeded where you've failed. Your faithless self-reliance that lets you down time and time again. The niggling fear that God won't provide for you and our family if you lose your job. The anxiety that stalks you day after day.

HE WANTS IT! HE WANTS IT ALL!

And bit by bit—which is usually the way we give it to Him—bit by bit we begin to experience the freedom from sin that is God's greatest gift to mankind: *Jesus has broken the power of sin over you!* This epiphany doesn't come from knowledge of our sinfulness: it comes from knowledge of his grace. *"For sin shall not be master over you, because you are not under law, but under grace."* (Rom. 6:14)

Oh but it's hard to do, isn't it? It's so tempting to minimize the problem by comparing ourselves to others who are worse than we are. Or to dwell on our moral superiority to the majority of mankind. Or to nurse thoughts of all the good we have done: shouldn't it count for something? Or, if nothing else will do, just refuse to think about it. I believe that every Christian secretly harbors down deep in his heart a memory of his original birthplace—Satan's palace. And however much he may hate the thought of it, it still occasionally exudes a pleasant aroma—the lure of leaving the battlefield and returning to peaceful slumber. Because as everyone here knows, being reborn is a painful, lifelong affair. The battle is fierce and the warfare goes on and on. When I reach this point, there is a verse from one of our hymns that I call to mind. The hymn is *"For All the Saints,"* and the verse goes like this:

And when the strife is fierce, the warfare long,
Steals on the ear the distant triumph song;
And hearts are brave again and arms are strong:

Allelujah! Allelujah!

Amen.

Will you pray with me?

Father in Heaven, You inhabit the farthest reaches of space and time, yet you also make your home in a humble and contrite heart. You say to each of us in private: don't you know that you are a temple of My Holy Spirit? Don't you know that I want to make my dwelling in YOU? How can we believe this, Father? That you, so full of power and majesty

would want to reside in us? Yet you have promised this to us and we know that you cannot lie. So cleanse our hearts and build altars there and kindle the flames of praise, confession and dedication in us. In vain would we worship you in church unless our souls are sanctuaries too. Receive our earnest prayers and come, Lord Jesus.

In the light of our inward worship, give us grace to be honest with ourselves about our sins. We are swift to see the mistakes of others; help us regard ourselves with equally discerning eyes. Help us to see our root sins, to face them squarely, to hate them deeply, to confess them honestly and to strive to turn away from them. By your grace, deliver us from their power. Grant that we may not become so absorbed with the speck of sawdust in our brother's eye that we ignore the log in our own eye. And help us, Father, to move beyond merely admiring the problem to getting on with Your solution.

Raise up our downcast souls out of the tortures of desperation and despair into fresh hope and faith. Show us your transforming power by lifting our spirits with your Spirit. In addition to showing us what we really are, show us what, through your grace, we may become. Help us, Father, to be light-bearers rather than spawners of darkness visible.

Amen.