

The Kingdom Has Come Upon You

Sister Scott made a second trip to the coffee machine. More women were coming in the fellowship hall. She and Sister Mosby would be leading the meeting today.

St. John's Church had recently seen two churches mix. When St. John's pastor died, the church hired Elder Scott. At the time, Elder Scott was pastor of Tabernacle Fellowship, a church of about 60 people which was struggling financially. When Elder Scott was selected as senior pastor of St. John's, about 40 members followed him.

That was three years ago, and while St. John's had a membership of more than 150 people, the additional new members created a sense of a church within a church.

One recent example was when the women's group, led by an original "St. John's" member, held a special meeting last week. However, "Tabernacle Fellowship" member, Jarrika, had infused real life into a prayer ministry at St. John's. Jarrika had held a special prayer activity on the same date and time as the women's ministry event.

This example could be cited in various forms throughout church life at St. John's, and Pastor Scott had been on a campaign to bridge the "two churches into one."

"You ready, sister?" asked Sister Mosby.

"Yes," replied Sister Scott. "We have some work to do, but we are stronger and more effective as one."

"Amen," said Sister Mosby. "God doesn't want us divided."

1. *What good things have you seen happen when people have been unified?*

2. *Describe what you've seen happen when division is present among any organization, family, or any form of relationship.*

3. *Why do you think God is so concerned about unity in His kingdom?*

Responses to a Miracle

Matthew 12:22-24, KJV

22 Then was brought unto him one possessed with a devil, blind, and dumb: and he healed him, insomuch that the blind and dumb both spake and saw.

23 And all the people were amazed, and said, Is not this the son of David?

24 But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, This fellow doth not cast out devils, but by Beelzebub the prince of the devils.

Matthew 12:22-24, NIV

²²Then they brought him a demon-possessed man who was blind and mute, and Jesus healed him, so that he could both talk and see. ²³All the people were astonished and said, "Could this be the Son of David?"

²⁴But when the Pharisees heard this, they said, "It is only by Beelzebul, the prince of demons, that this fellow drives out demons."

In His earthly ministry, Jesus demonstrated His authority over nature and the powers of darkness. But the religious leaders, whose power was threatened by Jesus' following, still questioned the integrity of the supernatural power He demonstrated through His miracles.

In some cases of demonic possession in the New Testament, the possessed person was suffering with some sort of physical malady. In the case of the man Jesus healed here, he could not see or speak, probably the result of the demon's activity and presence in his body.

One of the purposes of Jesus' miracles, apart from delivering people from their tribulations, was to establish that He did these things by God's authority. And so, once people witnessed these miracles, they would ask themselves if Jesus was the Messiah, "the Son of David" (vs. 23).

This was quite threatening to the religious leaders who thus sought to discredit the origin of Jesus' miracles by saying they were done by the power of Beelzebub, the prince of demons.

4. *What did the miracle of Jesus cause the people to*

wonder about?

5. How did the Pharisees explain away the miracles?

A House Divided

Matthew 12:25-29, KJV

25 And Jesus knew their thoughts, and said unto them, Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand:

26 And if Satan cast out Satan, he is divided against himself; how shall then his kingdom stand?

27 And if I by Beelzebub cast out devils, by whom do your children cast them out? therefore they shall be your judges.

28 But if I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you.

29 Or else how can one enter into a strong man's house, and spoil his goods, except he first bind the strong man? and then he will spoil his house.

Matthew 12:25-29, NIV

²⁵Jesus knew their thoughts and said to them, "Every kingdom divided against itself will be ruined, and every city or household divided against itself will not stand. ²⁶If Satan drives out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then can his kingdom stand? ²⁷And if I drive out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your people drive them out? So then, they will be your judges. ²⁸But if it is by the Spirit of God that I drive out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.

²⁹"Or again, how can anyone enter a strong man's house and carry off his possessions unless he first ties up the strong man? Then he can plunder his house."

Nothing is more devastating to a nation than civil war. Jesus used civil war as an analogy when He said, "Every kingdom divided against itself will be ruined, and every city or household divided against itself will not stand" (vs. 25). The Lord made it very clear that to cast out a demon was to weaken Satan's power over the world. Why would Satan do that? And if the religious leaders themselves cast

out demons, were they in league with the devil?

Jesus elaborated on this point by describing the necessity to cripple an enemy to defeat him. Using another metaphor, Jesus described the need to “bind” (vs. 29, KJV) a strong man to plunder his home. By casting out demons, Jesus was demonstrating to the world, and to all the heavenly hosts, that the Lord has the powers of darkness on a leash. For all their pontifications to the contrary, the powers of darkness cannot make a move toward anyone without the Lord’s permission.

The binding of Satan means that he is limited (by God) in regard to the amount and type of damage he is able to cause. The powers of darkness are bent on attacking and destroying the kingdom of God—and those who have been saved by the atoning work of Christ. However, the Lord protects His own.

6. *Why did Jesus say that it made no sense for the devil to cast out demons?*

7. *If the demonic origin of the miracle was eliminated, what must be true?*

The Unforgiveable Sin

Matthew 12:30-32, KJV

30 He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad.

31 Wherefore I say unto you, All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men.

32 And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but whosoever speaketh against the Holy

Matthew 12:30-32, NIV

³⁰“Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters.” ³¹And so I tell you, every kind of sin and slander can be forgiven, but blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven.

³²Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but anyone who speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be

Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come.

forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come.”

You cannot remain neutral with Jesus—you’re either fully devoted to His values and mission, or you’re passively or actively His hostile opponent. Jesus makes it clear that you have to choose one side or the other.

And so, Jesus amplifies His point further by saying that there are clearly-drawn lines between the kingdom of God and the powers of darkness. One of these lines is the evidence of “blasphemy against the Spirit” (vs. 31), otherwise known as the “unforgiveable sin.”

“Blaspheming against the Spirit” means to deliberately and decisively reject the convicting work of God’s Spirit in your heart. Therefore, the presence of a guilty conscience means you have *not* committed this sin. Those who have blasphemed against God’s Spirit feel no compunction at all about what they’ve done.

Of course, God only knows when a person has crossed this line. Many people once hostile to the faith and anything related to the kingdom of God are now some of the Lord’s fiercest champions for the Gospel. But those who have committed the unforgiveable sin, they are incapable of experiencing genuine repentance (and therefore, saving faith) because they have rejected the source of anyone’s ability to own up to their sin.

For this reason, one who is indwelt by the Holy Spirit does not commit blasphemy against God’s Spirit. There is no room in a person’s heart for the Holy Spirit and demonic presence. As Jesus said in verse 25, “Every kingdom divided against itself . . . will not stand.” And so, the presence of the Holy Spirit will prevent a genuine believer from crossing this point of no return.

8. *What are the only two options when it comes to responding to Jesus?*

9. *What type of blasphemy will not be forgiven?*

Unity, for Good or Bad

Unity, no matter what the cause, is a force to be reckoned with. Amazing things can happen when a group is unified. This is why God wants a unified kingdom. God understands that a kingdom divided has no power.

However, unity for an ungodly cause provided the strength for the tower of Babel: "Then they said, 'Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves' (Gen. 11:4). Although this is an example of "unity in error," the perseverance it took to build this structure got God's attention; He knew nothing would be impossible for these united people. God then weakened the people with division, the confusion of their languages (Gen. 11:5-9).

But unity may also bring great good. Close to 40,000 African Americans unified and boycotted the Montgomery, Alabama, bus system because of segregated seating. This successful boycott lasted for a year, from December 5, 1955, to December 20, 1956. African Americans were 75% of the bus ridership, and they had the power to finally cripple the bus service.

Unity prevailed. Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was appointed the leader of the protest; he would later lead more protests against segregation. Rev. King told an audience, "I want to say that in all of our actions we must stick together. Unity is the great need of the hour, and if we are united, we can get many of the things that we not only desire but which we justly deserve."

When we serve only the Lord, and resist the devil, we bring that kind of unity to our churches and our society.

10. *Why do we need to be careful what unified ideas we support?*

11. *How does our personal sin contribute to disunity?*

12. *What could you accomplish in your church and community with a godly unity?*

The War of the Two Kingdoms

There are two kingdoms on the earth: the kingdom of light (God's kingdom) and the kingdom of darkness (the devil's kingdom). A kingdom is defined as a territory or group of people ruled by the same monarch. Those two kingdoms are warring for our souls. You cannot serve both kingdoms—either you are for God or against Him. There is no in-between, middle ground, or shades of gray.

► *Look at your life and church to identify ways you may be trying to straddle the fence and serve in two kingdoms. Pray every morning and evening this week that the Holy Spirit will guide and direct you and your church in the way you should go and how you can stop any fence straddling.*

KEY VERSE

But if I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you. —Matthew 12:28, KJV

“But if it is by the Spirit of God that I drive out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.” —Matthew 12:28, NIV

DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Week of July 10 through July 16

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross* devotionals on these passages.)

Mon. Mark 4:21-32—The Kingdom's Small Beginnings.

Tues. Mark 4:33-41—The Wind and Sea Obey Jesus.

Wed. Psalm 95—Listen to God's Voice.

Thurs. 1 Corinthians 2:1-8—God's Wisdom Is Unconventional.

Fri. 1 Corinthians 2:9-16—The Spirit Reveals God's Ways.

Sat. Isaiah 61—God's Harvest of Righteousness.

Sun. Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23—Receiving and Understanding the Word.