

June 10, 2018

Mark 3:20-35:

“Jesus - The Stronger One!”

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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

In his book, "The Screwtape Letters," author C. S. Lewis imaginatively relates a series of letters from a senior devil, Screwtape, to his nephew, a junior devil named Wormwood. Screwtape is giving Wormwood advice on how best to deceive and lead astray the human that has been assigned to him as his "patient." He writes:

I do not think you will have much difficulty in keeping the patient in the dark. The fact that "devils" are predominantly comic figures in the modern imagination will help you. If any faint suspicion of your existence begins to arise in his mind, suggest to him a picture of something in red tights, and persuade him that since he cannot believe in that . . . he therefore cannot believe in you.

When we minimize the devil and his demons we do so to our own peril. The devil and his demons are real, and he is "the old evil foe . . . [who] means deadly woe . . . on earth is not his equal." However, Luther goes on to add these words in his hymn [*A Mighty Fortress Is Our God*]: "though devils all the world should fill, all eager to devour us, we tremble not, we fear no ill; they shall not overpower us. This world's prince may still scowl fierce as he will, he can harm us none. He's judged the deed is done; one little word can fell him." Luther actually identified the "one little word" that cuts down (or throws down) the devil. The word that he had in mind was "liar." Yeah, I know, most all of us assume that the one little word is "Jesus" - and that is true indirectly. But the word that Luther had in mind was "liar!"

In an article written by Bryce Young titled - *What "One Little Word" Will Fell Satan?* - he ties it all together rather nicely:

The text Luther most likely had in mind was Revelation 12:10, where John writes that "the accuser of our brothers [who is Satan; 12:9] has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God." So there is an accusation, a lie - Satan speaks "guilty" against the ones God has redeemed. It's the same lie that Satan always speaks to God's people (Zechariah 3:1) . . . The one, little word against Satan - "Liar!" - is the word of faith. When we take all of Satan's lies, his accusations, his reminders of our sins and place them in the blood-sealed file marked "Lies," it is a profession of our faith in Christ's promises over against Satan's accusations. This word is "the victory that has overcome" not only the world, but Satan himself (1 John 5:4).

There is nothing more that the devil and his demons want to do other than to devour your faith with lies and accusations - calling God a liar. The devil and his demons would have you become overwhelmed with guilt and despair. They would have you forget your Baptismal identity with Jesus - the fact that his saving name has been given to you. Again and again, the Scriptures warn us not to play games with the liar. We must confront the liar with the one who is truth - Jesus. We will not be able to endure the strength of the liar if we do not have **Jesus - The Stronger One!** Luther's hymn goes on to say, "But for us fights the valiant One . . . Jesus Christ it is . . . and there's none other God; he holds the field forever."

Before our Gospel lesson for this morning we are told that “a great crowd followed Jesus . . . and whenever the unclean spirits saw him, they fell down before him and cried out, ‘You are the Son of God.’ And he strictly ordered them not to make him known (Mark 3:7-12).” This sets the stage for what’s next:

And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem were saying, “He is possessed by Beelzebul,” and “by the prince of demons he casts out the demons.” And he called them to him and said to them in parables, “How can Satan cast out Satan? If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. And if a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand. And if Satan has risen up against himself and is divided, he cannot stand, but is coming to an end. But no one can enter a strong man’s house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man. Then indeed he may plunder his house.”

Jesus - The Stronger One is able to bind up the strong man, he is able to enter his house and plunder his goods. In fact, this is exactly what Jesus has done. You and I were at one time captives of the devil and his demons - prisoners in his house of death and hell - unable to free ourselves and escape. But **Jesus - the Stronger One** came into the flesh - became one of us - in order to rescue us. By experiencing our death and hell on the cross, in what appeared to be nothing but weakness and defeat, the cross was proven to be the strength of our Savior - a strength that was so strong that he rose from the dead that we might be lifted out of the house of hell into the house of heaven.

Since Jesus took upon himself the curse laid upon sinners, the accusations of the devil and his demons have become nothing but lies. They no longer can play “the sin card” against us. Like Luther we say “Liar! All of our sins have been forgiven by the blood of Jesus Christ our Savior! Forever victory is ours through him! You have been stripped of your power, for when Jesus said ‘It is finished!’ we now have his irrefutable word - his truth that overturns everything that you and all your demons have to say!”

Make no mistake about it, Jesus speaks good words for us so that all the taunts and threats of the devil and his demons become lies. Our sinless brother has bodily descended into hell, declared victory, and has bodily walked out of hell so that hell has no hold on us. Jesus has ascended into heaven to speak to the Father in our defense, and furthermore rules everything for our salvation. He speaks to us by saying: “Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hell (Revelation 1:17-18).”

Indeed! Jesus has bound the strong man because he is The Stronger One. He has entered his house and has claimed us as his own. No longer are we the goods of the devil, for Jesus holds the keys of death and hell and has stripped the devil bare, and will one day lock him up. In the meantime, no matter how much the devil and his demons rage they cannot overpower us. Jesus “holds the field forever!”

The Stronger One draws near to us this morning. The question that our Gospel lesson raises for us is what do you have to say about **Jesus - The Stronger One**? The response of the scribes who came down from Jerusalem was to say, “He has an unclean spirit.” They were saying that the power behind Jesus’ casting out demons was none other than the devil himself, and so they looked at the work of Jesus as the

work of evil. This is why Jesus says to them, “Truly, I say to you, all sins will be forgiven the children of man, and whatever blasphemies they utter, but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin’ - for they were saying, ‘He has an unclean spirit.’” This is certainly a frightening thing for Jesus to say and raises the natural question: What is the sin against the Holy Spirit? If you are upset and wondering if you have committed the sin against the Holy Spirit, I can assure you that you have not. You wouldn’t care.

The sin against the Holy Spirit is directed against the faith that the Holy Spirit is creating in the heart of a person. It consists in this: A person - from nothing but absolute sheer spite and malice - rejects and blasphemes those truths of which the Holy Spirit is convincing or has convinced him or her. When a person, at the “pull” of the Holy Spirit in his or her heart, has no other motive to resist other than from sheer spite and malice and then to outwardly blaspheme the Holy Spirit, it becomes impossible for the person to be converted. We cannot charge anyone with this sin. We cannot look into the heart. We do not know whether or not a person is really convinced of the truth he blasphemes, nor can we tell whether he or she is doing it from spite and malice (*A Summary of Christian Doctrine* by Edward W. A. Koehler). In the words of Edward W. A. Koehler:

Those who might be disturbed in their minds that they might have committed the sin have definitely not committed it because their fear proves that there is no spite or malice in their hearts. Those who have committed this sin are not in the least disturbed about it . . . It is unforgivable because it makes repentance impossible. It is directed against every effort of the Holy Spirit to convert a person. We should be careful not to resist the Holy Spirit when He touches our hearts.

Christ has plundered us out of the house of the devil. He broke in and has bound the strong one because he is the stronger one! Now that we are in his house, we are his goods. We gather around him in the means of grace. We have the living Christ in our midst no less than the crowds did long ago. Let us be careful to listen to him since he has the words of eternal life. **Jesus - the Stronger One** is speaking to us by his Holy Spirit. And when the Holy Spirit is speaking to us about Jesus in the means of grace, we do not say “liar!” That is what we say to the devil and his demons!

Amen.

Pastor Brock Abbott