

GOD'S D-DAY

Luke 11:14–32

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“Jesus was driving out a demon that was mute. When the demon left, the man who had been mute spoke, and the crowd was amazed. But some of them said, ‘By Beelzebub, the prince of demons, he is driving out demons.’ Others tested him by asking for a sign from heaven. Jesus knew their thoughts and said to them: ‘Any kingdom divided against itself will be ruined, and a house divided against itself will fall. If Satan is divided against himself, how can his kingdom stand? I say this because you claim that I drive out demons by Beelzebub. Now if I drive out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your followers drive them out? So then, they will be your judges. But if I drive out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come to you. 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. He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me, scatters. When an evil spirit comes out of a man, it goes through arid places seeking rest and does not find it. Then it says, “I will return to the house I left.” When it arrives, it finds the house swept clean and put in order. Then it goes and takes seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there. And the final condition of that man is worse than the first.’ As Jesus was saying these things, a woman in the crowd called out, ‘Blessed is the mother who gave you birth and nursed you.’ He replied, ‘Blessed rather are those who hear the Word of God and obey it.’ As the crowds increased, Jesus said, ‘This is a wicked generation. It asks for a miraculous sign, but none will be given it except the sign of Jonah. For as Jonah was a sign to the Ninevites, so also will the Son of Man be to this generation. The Queen of the South will rise at

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the judgment with the men of this generation and condemn them; for she came from the ends of the earth to listen to Solomon's wisdom, and now one greater than Solomon is here. The men of Nineveh will stand up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and now one greater than Jonah is here'" (Luke 11:14–32, NIV).

Our Scripture today begins with Jesus casting an evil spirit out of a man and, in that event, Jesus reads the coming of the kingdom of God. Oscar Cullmann, the German theologian, told this story, which helped me understand the whole nature of Jesus' mission. Cullmann said, "As Christians, we so often talk about the kingdom of God coming and the finger of God being at work... Yet everywhere we look, we see death and suffering and sorrow." Just yesterday, I myself preached a memorial service for one of this body. We Christians talk about death and victory, and yet we see so much devastation in the world. The question might be asked of us, "Where is this victory of which you are speaking and how is it that you say the kingdom of God has come?"

Cullmann says that question may be answered in this way. In World War II, there was a moment, on June 6, 1944, which was called D-Day. It was the greatest armada that was ever assembled in the history of civilization and it gathered and assaulted the beaches of Normandy. When the beachhead was established successfully in France, on the beaches of Normandy, then the allies went on to conquer Europe. It was eleven months of fighting after D-Day, eleven months of the worst casualties of the whole war. But eleven months later, May 8th, 1945, was Victory in Europe day. And Cullmann says, in looking at World War II, "We look back and we say that the war was won at D-Day. When the allies were successful, we can say the war was won. Even though the war went on and did not end and there were more casualties than in any other period, looking back, we can say that's when the war was won."

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That is our answer as well. We realize that there are casualties. Death is still in the world. Sin is still in the world. Suffering and sorrow are still in the world. But Jesus is God's D-Day, with His invasion day and in His acts of liberating the possessed and healing the sick and going to the cross and dying for our sin and rising again from the dead. God has guaranteed to us the outcome of the war. And there is one day coming, not a Victory in Europe Day but a Victory in the Universe Day, in which we'll celebrate the victory that Christ won in the cross and in His life and in His resurrection. So we look at this message today and call it "God's D-Day," Jesus says in the healing and the exorcism of this man that the kingdom of God is breaking through.

If you're outlining today's passage of Scripture, it's rather simple to outline. Even though it may look complex and look like there are a number of Scriptures that are possibly not related. But they are all related. The Scripture we have read today breaks into three divisions. In the first, it describes a miracle and the objections raised to the miracle in verses 14,15, and 16. The second part of the Scripture today deals with Jesus' rejection of the first objection, in verses 17–28. Then, the third part of our Scripture today deals with Jesus' rejection of the second objection raised to Him. That will comprise verses 29–32.

I. First, the miracle and its objections.

There are a few times in the Gospels where a physical illness is traced to a demonic power. That is not the case in the overwhelming majority of incidents. But sometimes, the demon will manifest itself through a physical illness. Such is the case here. Jesus sets the man free. The objection to Jesus is then raised by the opposition. Mark 3:22, a parallel passage, tells us that the opposition was initiated by scribes from Jerusalem. The theologians of the day had come down to Galilee, from Jerusalem, the ninety-mile walk, and were raising the objections.

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The objection was twofold. One, the source of His power is from below. And two, if it were not from below, He would be showing us a sign from above. So their finger was pointed in both directions. They were saying His source is from below or He would show us a sign from above.

II. Jesus' rejection of the first objection.

Jesus then responds first to the charge that He did His works by the power of the devil. There are really seven responses He has if you carefully go through this Scripture.

You'll see that His first response is to simply know their thoughts. Jesus truly knows what is in men. We must never read the Scripture as though it were in the past tense. He not only knew their thoughts, He knows our thoughts. He knows the issues of our life and our heart. Before He says anything to us, we need to know that He knows what's going on in us.

Then the second thing that Jesus does is say a divided kingdom or a divided house cannot stand. This was the text that Abraham Lincoln took when the Union was split by the Civil War, to say that a house divided against itself cannot stand. Jesus said that text in reference to the charge against Him that He was doing His exorcisms by the power of the devil. Jesus says, "The devil would never cast out the devil." In fact, the word that is used by the critics of Jesus is the word "Beelzebul" or "Beelzebub." They meant it to simply refer to someone they believed to be a chief among the demons. But Jesus takes the word and makes it refer to the devil himself.

If you've got a moment, I'd like to talk about how sometimes we don't know how to say that word, "Beelzebub or Beelzebul." Which is it? We read both in the text, depending on what Bible we're using. The "Beel," which begins that name, is actually an unfortunate English translation that comes out of the Old Testament word "Baal." That word "Beelzebub" is first introduced in the Philistines. One of their gods was called "Beelzebul," which meant, "lord of the dwelling" or "lord of the high place." They used to worship on the top of hills, a vantage point, and their gods

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were gods of high places and gods of strength. So they called their Baal, “Beelzebul”—the god of the high place or the god of the dwelling. The Hebrews came along and they mocked this “god.” Instead of calling him the Philistine name “Beelzebul,” they called him “Beelzebub,” which means, “lord of the flies.” That’s the name that is given to the Philistine god of Ekron. Ekron was a Philistine city. You can read about it in 2 Kings 1. Beelzebub is mentioned some five times.

Then some other Hebrews came along and did an additional play on words and they called him “Beelzebel” which means “lord of dung.” I guess that’s appropriate because flies are around dung. And what the Hebrews were doing, indeed, was saying to the Philistines, “So your god is the god of strength and the god of the high place? He’s really the god of the outhouse.” So they ridiculed the Philistine god.

When you think about it, Satan is really all of these things. He is the god that is in a high place. The Scriptures call him the ruler of this present evil age, under whose influence the whole world lies under his power. But he’s also the god of dung and of flies. From his personality come the excrement and the filth that saturates the whole world, and the vileness and the sinfulness that is in humanity.

Jesus says, “This filthy one will not cast out filth.”

Jesus defends Himself on the basis that His critics are the ones who are impotent, let them be the judges of themselves and let their children judge them, because, He says, “By whose power then—if I’m casting out devils by Beelzebul—by whose power are your children casting them out?” What He’s really saying by that is, “You aren’t casting out any demons.” That, therefore, is a witness against you. You cooperate with those who are not repelling the works of darkness.

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Then, fourthly, Jesus says that the response of casting out of demons is proof that the kingdom of God has come (verses 20–22), “If I cast out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.” We would think of fancier ways to bring a kingdom. We would begin it with an inaugural parade and a swearing in and a display by the armed forces and the navy and the air force and the army. We would have sophisticated people that are in pageantry. But Jesus says, “Look at this man—who a few moments ago was helpless and bound and made captive—now he’s free. If you’re looking for the kingdom, that’s where it is. It’s coming in a changed life.”

We look at that and say, “How does that apply to us? We haven’t been possessed by an evil spirit.” But the whole essence of Christianity is deliverance. In the testimony from the apostle Paul’s lips in Acts 26 of when he was converted on the road to Damascus, he said the Lord spoke to him and said, “I have sent you to turn people from darkness to light and from the power of the evil one to the power of God, that you might have forgiveness of sins.” 1 John tells us that the whole world lies under the power of the evil one.

We have been under that power and we have been in the darkness and we have been in death. The Lord has brought us to the glorious light of liberty and life of the children of God. In that transformation, in that salvation of our life, the kingdom of God has come. That’s Jesus’ defense. Jesus’ defense is His people—you and me and the ones He has set free. If you’re looking for evidences of the kingdom of God, then here they are: the people that I have let loose.

Then Jesus is saying in this that He’s the stronger man, that a strong power bound us and held us in sin’s and death’s grasp, but He has set us free

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The fifth response to this charge that He's doing these works by the power of the devil is that Jesus then turns, in verse 23, and warns against neutrality. He says to His critics, "If you're not with Me you're against Me."

Then He warns against a self-help religion, in verses 24–26, tells us the story which is seemingly so difficult to understand about the man's house in which a demon dwelt. He left it and the house was swept cleaned and in order, and he came back and found it that way. He moved in and the man's last state was worse than his first.

What does Jesus mean by this? What He means is made clear by the context. The Scripture speaks for itself by the context in which it is located. The context is that Jesus has been dealing with the religious opposition, the legalists and Pharisees and scribes, who place emphasis on externalities and keeping the law. Jesus says that is the condition of the man who tries salvation on his own, who keeps a set of rules. His house gets swept and kept in order. Or as they say in my background, "I don't smoke and I don't chew and I don't go with girls that do." Somehow, we think if we don't do certain things, that that makes us holy or makes us Christlike. But a million zeros don't make a single positive. You can string zeros from here to infinity and not get a positive. Jesus is saying that a religious experience that just concentrates on obedience to rules will follow through and only leave you in a worse state than when you began.

There needs to be someone living in the house. That's His presence. He's talking about a religion that doesn't have Him in it, when the house is empty. His presence must fill our lives.

Then a seventh response that Jesus makes is that spiritual relationship is more important than a biological relationship. Someone in the crowd, hearing Him, wants to bless Him and bless the mother who gave Him birth and who nursed Him. She exclaims to the crowd this praise. Jesus

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doesn't put her down for blessing His mother, but He does her one better. He says, "Rather blessed are those who hear the Word of God and keep it."

I would have loved to have been a relative of Jesus. I'd like to have been His younger brother. I had a great older brother, but he sometimes would do things to me that weren't too good. Any of you who've had older brothers know the things they can do. It would have been neat to have had Jesus as an older brother. I'd have loved to have written a book about life growing up with Jesus. That would have been great. Nothing remains, though, of that time of Jesus' life. But Jesus says, "There's something greater than being My blood relative. That is to do My will, to keep My Word." What is Jesus' Word? "Whosoever will may come." Take His plan of salvation, take His plan for your life and Jesus says that great privilege is open for us to do that. That spiritual relationship is more important than a biological relationship.

So the first objection raised to Jesus is He's empowered by the devil. Jesus refutes it along a number of different lines.

II. Jesus' rejection of the second objection.

The second objection to Him is found in verse 16, "Some wanted a sign from heaven." Jesus in verses 29–32 proceeds to rebut this of Him. They wanted a sign. He was doing all kinds of signs. The evidence of God is His works of healing or restoration. That Jesus was doing. He was saying the words that God would say, doing the acts that God would do. But it wasn't enough. They wanted a sign from heaven. Jesus, they were saying, "Cause the constellations to change their places in the Zodiac. Cause Taurus, the bull, to catch up with Orion, the giant hunter, and pass him. Write Your name in blazing letters across the sky so we can see and we can believe."

Jesus says, "No. I'll give you no signs from heaven." Jesus had the power to give us a sign from heaven. It would have been no problem at all for Him to write His name in lights in the sky, for

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the whole universe to see. But, had He done that, all it would have done was amaze us, it would not have saved us. The Lord doesn't want us to just be amazed. He wants us to be saved. There's only one way that God's appointed for us to be saved, because a death sentence hangs upon the whole human race and upon every one of us in this room, not only physical death, but eternal separation from God. The only way to cure that death sentence is for God's Son to become a man and live a sinless life and die on the cross as a substitute and as a sacrifice for us and bear our guilt and our punishment and our blame. By doing so, He takes it all upon Himself, that we might be acquitted and go free. That, then, becomes the amazing grace of God.

Not a sign just to amaze but a salvation to change us is what God is bringing in Christ. Jesus says that the Queen of Sheba will arise in judgment on this generation, because "a greater than Solomon" is here. The men of Nineveh will rise in the judgment day against his generation because "a greater than Jonah" is here.

William Hendricks, a commentator on the Bible, notes some differences between the Queen of the South and the people of Jesus' day. He says she braved the hardships of a long journey over a difficult terrain, coming from what is probably the area of the world known as South Yemen, a journey by camel of over twelve hundred miles. In Jesus' day, they had Him right there at hand within easy reach. She came from what was considered the ends of the earth, to hear Solomon's wisdom, even though the truth of God was very imperfectly reflected in Solomon. But Jesus' generation had access to one wiser and better and far greater than Solomon. She came and she gave Solomon out of her treasures, but the people of Jesus' day, instead of giving Him something, gave Him nothing and proceeded to desire to take His life. She merely had heard reports about Solomon's wisdom, but they had seen Jesus' teaching and miracles firsthand. She hadn't even received an invitation to come to Solomon. She came on her own. But Jesus gave an

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invitation and said “Whosoever will.” That’s why Jesus is greater, and why the queen will rise up and condemn this generation.

“The Ninevites,” Jesus said, “will also condemn you because it was only a minor prophet who preached to them, but it’s the Messiah who preaches to you.” That prophet was a sinful and foolish and rebellious person. But He who they had before them was the completely sinless Lamb of God. That prophet had a message of doom and judgment. Jesus has the message of hope and salvation. Jonah did no authenticating or miraculous signs. Yet the Ninevites believed. Jesus did all kinds of signs, and they didn’t believe. Jonah’s message was addressed to people that didn’t have the advantages of Jesus’ day. The people of Jesus’ day had their religious training and background.

When you’re a member of one religious group, you don’t like to be told that people of another group are more spiritual than you. It’d be like telling a group of us that Southern Baptists are more spiritual than Assemblies of God folk. It just might make some Assemblies of God folk get their teeth set on edge. Probably the same would be true if Southern Baptists would be told that Assemblies of God people were more spiritual than they. That’s so crazy, how we often compare ourselves to one another. I found there are spiritual people all through the body of Christ. But what is happening in Jesus’ day is that the people of His day considered themselves religious, so Jesus took as His illustration of spirituality the Gentiles, the outsiders, the outcasts and said, “They’re going to rise up and judge you who are religious because you had greater privilege and you didn’t act responsibly with the greater privilege.” It’s a stern warning.

Jesus says the finger of God has broken in and if you will have eyes to see and ears to hear, you’ll recognize the kingdom has come. The finger of God brings into our life the gentle pressure of God, which is not the big wave. Not the great big kind of thing but the gentle

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presence of God, the finger of God comes into our life when we give our lives to Him. The kingdom of God comes and busts through. Maybe people looking at us don't immediately see a change. Yet the change has occurred, because Christ has become our life, we need that finger of God moment. If you haven't had it when Christ comes into your life, you need that moment in which He becomes your Lord and Savior. We need other moments in our experience as well, where the kingdom of God comes through to us in a way that is very quiet and very real. The finger of God.

I'm the kind of person who's always in a hurry. I'd like to see everything that God wants to do in my life done today. Everything that He wants done in His church, done today. I'd like it all to be complete. But He always starts His work by the finger of God demonstration, by a single work, an isolated event, which doesn't look like it's going to have much promise or much is going to come out of it. Who would guess that a guy who was wild and had been set free had in residence in him the kingdom of God? There are times in our life in which, God is putting the finger of His sensitivity and pressure upon our lives to move us and motivate us to go a particular direction; we might look at that and, because it doesn't seem like it's any great sign or wonder, not pay attention to it and walk away from it. And miss the whole kingdom that God wants to bring through that opening moment where His finger is placed upon our life.

This morning we heard Bernice share about Egypt. When I knew Bernice was coming, I wanted to refresh my memory of the founding of the Lillian Thrasher orphanage in Egypt. It's a beautiful description of this idea of the finger of God laying itself upon our life and changing us. The kingdom of God being there when the visible evidence is not all that great.

Lillian Thrasher was a young lady of 23 years of age in North Carolina. (Her mother had been a graduate of Vassar.) She felt a stirring in her heart to be a missionary. She wrestled with that call

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simultaneously with the time she was going through an engagement. Ten days before her marriage to her fiancé, whom she loved dearly, she opened her life in complete obedience and surrender to God knowing she had a call, she felt, to go to Africa as a missionary. She asked her fiancé, Tom, to meet her by little branch, out in the rural area. They sat there and talked and she told him that she was unable to marry him. He was a fine young Christian gentleman but she did not wish for him to marry her because he did not have a call and she would not try to manipulate him into going with her, but she had to obey, because she had a call on her life to be a missionary.

So ten days before the wedding, she canceled the wedding. Her family thought she was crazy. They asked her, “How are you going to get to the mission field?” She had ten dollars and nobody backing her. No denomination behind her. She set out. She got down to one dollar when she reached the east—I think in Pittsburgh or Washington D.C. A family invited her in. There was a missionary there from Egypt. He was very intrigued with this young twenty-three-year-old girl that said that she was going to Africa as a missionary. He listened to her story and encouraged her and then he asked her how much money she had. She said, “I only have a dollar.” Then he immediately turned on her and said she was crazy, that she had nobody backing her and she ought not to go. But she responded that the finger of God had touched her life and said, “Go.” He was so impressed with her response, he invited her to come to Egypt. She soon realized that Egypt was in Africa—northern Africa. So she accepted the invitation, and God miraculously provided \$100 through a series of events for the transatlantic voyage. So she left, having her fare paid and \$50. No promise of support. She gets on the boat to go overseas. And the first few hours she's on the boat, someone says to her that she ought to open the Bible and see where the Bible opens. See if God has any word for her.

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(When I do this, I always land on the wrong place.) She opened her Bible and her eyes immediately fell—her finger landed on—Acts 7:34, which says, “I have seen the affliction of my people which are in Egypt and have heard their groaning and have come down to deliver them. Now come and I will send thee into Egypt.” A finger of God moment. Within few months after arriving in Egypt, she was called out one evening to a little mud hovel, a peasant hovel. There was a young mother that was dying. She wanted Lillian to take her baby. This baby had clothes that had been sewn onto it. The baby had a horrible stench. The mother had been unable to give it milk and the baby had wasted away to practically a skeleton. There was some green rancid milk in a cup and the baby was trying to get some of that. The mother, as her dying wish, had the baby thrust into Lillian’s hands to take care of. And Lillian didn’t even know Arabic. She had to have what the mother had said translated. She takes the little baby, realizing if she didn’t it would be thrown into the Nile. Who would look at that and say anything great was going to come out of that? Who would identify the taking of that little child as the coming of the kingdom of God? But it was a finger of God moment.

She took the little baby and brought it back to the missionary house and washed it and began feeding it out of an eyedropper. For ten solid days, that baby did nothing but cry. Until the missionaries, after being unable to get any sleep, requested Lillian to give the baby back. She said, “I can’t, God gave me the care. He’s called me to build an orphanage.” They said, “You cannot have that baby here. If you’re going to keep the baby, you must leave this house.” They warned her about the perils of a single American young lady trying to live in the Arab world. But she ignored it and found a house for rent and went out with her baby and began. And God immediately began sending other children to her. Who would have believed in that little hovel, that incident of the finger of God touching her life, that over the next seventy-five years, twenty

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thousand plus children would go through the Lillian Thrasher orphanage. The woman was open to the finger of God upon her life.

A couple in the last service served with her in the 50s in Egypt. They came to me after the service. I was saying, “Sometime, we must get together and talk more about your experience with Lillian.” They said to me, “I had the joy of spending the last year, the last summer of her life with her—all that summer. She said to me, ‘When I think about Tom, my fiancé, I’m so glad I obeyed God. If I had not obeyed God we would not have had all these children.’”

Look at the things that God is doing. It’s so easy to look around and see things nearing completion, seeing things that are big. But God begins things in small ways. Ways that are so imperceptible. No signs, no flashy wonders, just the gentle presence of God, often through circumstances, putting us in a place where He wants to bust through and break into our life and create generational changes. There are young people here who will never be a missionary, but the decisions you are making this year in your life are going to have fruit thirty-five years from now in the families you have. Your decision to follow Christ and be moral and be right is going to count for years. There’s going to be a generation, not even born, if Jesus tarries, that’s going to benefit from the kingdom of God touching your life. The kingdom of God is breaking through. All of us need to be sensitive and encourage it—in ourselves and one another—when God puts His finger upon us and points us to His way.

Closing Prayer

Father, we thank You for Your D-Day. We thank You for the day You came and lived for us and died for us and rose again for us. We thank You for the day when You came into our life and delivered us from the power of the evil one and took all of our sins away and wrote our name in the Lamb’s Book of Life and made us a new creation. We thank You for that day. If that

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invasion day, Your D-Day, has not yet happened in a life here, we pray that before this service is over, it will happen to everyone. That each one of us will invite You in and confess that the source of Your authority is not from the devil and the source of Your authority is not because You're a mere mortal, but the works that You do and the words that You say are because You're God's only Son, sent to save us on a mission to save us. Our hearts become open to You so that You will live in us. And then, Lord, for others in this body today that know You, but You're in formation conceptually in moments of their own life. You're seeking to bring Your kingdom and move it in to them in directional ways for years to come. Maybe there's a young person here or an older person whom You're doing a work like You did in Lillian. Maybe it's a matter of simple obedience to what we feel to be the impression of the Lord. We fight with it and wonder, is that really the kingdom of God? Help our hearts be so sensitive to You, Lord God, that we will follow You and follow those instincts, which are from the Spirit, for You will never lead us astray. And when Your kingdom moves into us, You will always build upon what You do. You'll establish what You start. We thank You for that. We pray the power through the gospel will be released in our lives to serve You and love You and find Your highest and best will for each of us. Anoint us for Your service, we pray. In Christ's name. Amen.

There's a little plaque on Abraham Lincoln's birthplace in Kentucky and it records a scrap of a conversation: "Two villagers are talking to one another, 'Any news down at the village?' one of them says. The other replies, 'Squire McClain has gone to Washington to see Madison sworn in and old Spillman tells this Bonaparte fellow has captured most of Spain. What's new out here, neighbor?' The first man replied, 'Nothing. Nothing at all except for a new baby born to Tom Lincoln. Nothing ever happens out here.'"

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Next time you're tempted to say that about your life—"nothing's happening"—if the kingdom of God is there, everything's happening.