

Martin Luther once said very colorfully that we are like a horse. We are either ridden by the devil, or we are ridden by God. There's no third ground or third option. It has to be one or the other. And what he meant by that is that we ultimately have only one master, and the question is: is our master Satan, or is our master God?

Because that's ultimately what Jesus is talking about in our reading for today, talking about the kingdom of Satan and what that means as compared to the kingdom of God. Because Jesus wasn't doing anything out of the ordinary on this day in our reading. He was casting out demons like he had done so many times before, and he was also being opposed by the Jews, the Jews who had come to heckle him and try to get him to stumble. That wasn't anything unusual either. But what was unusual on this day was the things that the Jews were saying. They saw what he was doing, and they couldn't deny it. They couldn't say that he didn't really do it. And so instead they said it's only by the power of Satan, by Beelzebul, that Jesus is able to do what he's doing.

Now, that's crazy! As Jesus himself even points out, that doesn't make any sense. Even on a logical level, it doesn't make any sense. Why would Satan fight against himself in this way? Why would he undermine his own efforts by casting out his own soldiers? His own army? It just doesn't make any sense. And so Jesus goes on to say what's really at work here is the kingdom of Satan as opposed to the kingdom of God.

And that's why he tells us a little parable, starting in verse twenty-one: "When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own palace, his goods are safe. But when one stronger than he attacks him and overcomes him, he takes away his armor in which he trusted and divides his spoil." Christians, Satan is the strong man in this parable. Satan has possession of his kingdom. And what Jesus is talking about here is the kingdom of Satan at work in the world. And what does that look like? What does that mean? It means this, that when we are a part of the devil's kingdom, we are in bondage to sin. As Paul says in the book of Romans, we are literally a slave to sin. What he means by that is that when we are enslaved to sin, when we have the devil as our master, we can't do anything else but sin. We don't even have a choice in it. Because we are apart from God in the devil's kingdom, all we are able to do at all is to go against God. And when we have opposed God in this way, we show that we are a part of Satan's domain.

But the point here also is that when we are opposed to God in this way, when we are opposed to him and part of the devil's kingdom, we are also doing the will of the devil. It's like Jesus says in John chapter 8, "You are of your father, the devil, who was a murderer from the beginning." And so when Satan becomes our father, we simply don't have any other choice. We are trapped, caught in sin, and as long as we are still caught in sin, there's nothing we can do about it. We can't separate ourselves. We can't take ourselves out of the devil's domain. We would be lost forever if that's all the hope that we had.

But Christians, Jesus is the greater man in this parable. Jesus is the stronger one, the one who has come to destroy the devil's kingdom. And in fact when we see him here going into the devil's kingdom, we see him coming as a conqueror, as someone who is victorious, someone who is crushing the devil under his feet. The ancient Christians very often presented Jesus in this light, as a warrior engaging in hand-to-hand combat with Satan, as the conqueror who had come to crush hell under his feet. And I think that's a beautiful image, one that we would do well to recover, because Jesus is victorious. Jesus is the stronger man. Satan has been crushed completely and utterly under his feet. And because Satan is under his heel, and because Jesus has won, Satan no longer has any power over us. We have been set free from sin, set free to belong to God. Because when Jesus came to destroy the kingdom of Satan, he

carried away the treasures of Satan's kingdom. And those treasures, Christians, are you and I, because we have been taken out of the bondage to sin, and we have been made a part of God, so that we are now able to fight back. We are now able to stand firm and to do what our Father in heaven wants us to do. Jesus has conquered, and he has overcome Satan in his own domain.

But Jesus also gives us a warning today, Christians, because we should pay attention. Because if we go back to the domain of Satan, if we go back to the things of darkness, to the ways of sin, that's a very deadly, dangerous thing to do. That's what he's talking about here in verses twenty-four through twenty-six when he has the spirit going out into waterless places and then coming back and finding its house in order and bringing with it seven evil spirits more evil than itself. If we know God's mercy, and if we know what God has done for us, and we turn around and we go back to the ways of sin, we turn around and go back to the devil's kingdom, that's a deadly thing. Our judgment will be worse for us than if we had never known God in the first place. To know the forgiveness which Jesus gives us and to know the freedom which Jesus gives us and to turn away from that means that we will suffer greatly in the judgment to come.

Now, are we going to stumble and fall? Yes, we will, because of sin. Are we going to fail from time to time? Yes, we will. That's part of the reality of this life. But it's all the difference between the one who is struggling against sin, between the one who is trying hard to not sin and fails, as opposed to the one who never tries at all. If we do not fight back against sin, Christians, we run the risk of being brought back under the domain of the devil, because as Jesus says, there's no middle ground here. You are either under the devils kingdom or you are under the kingdom of God.

So what is our hope in this conflict, then? How do we stand firm in the day of trial? Jesus gives us that answer too, at the very end of our reading in verse twenty-eight. He says, "Blessed rather are those who hear the Word of God and keep it!" You have a glorious weapon, Christians, the weapon of the spirit, the weapon of the Word of God. And with that weapon in your hand, and the armor of God upon you in prayer, you are able to withstand the assaults of the devil. You are able to stand firm in the day of trial. You will be able to resist all sin, because you are in Jesus, and you have his mighty living Word. That is our hope, Christians, to have that Word which helps us to stand in the in the day of trial.

So Christians, remember. Satan is not your master. Not anymore. He has been crushed, defeated by what Jesus has done for you. You have been set free, free from sin, free to follow after God, free to be holy in his sight, free to be righteous. So stand firm in Jesus, because Jesus has conquered, crushing Satan under his feet, and in Jesus and Jesus alone, you will have the victory.

To him be the glory, now and forever. Amen.