

September 28, 2003 by Steve Brandon



Satan's Activity

Matthew 12:22-30

Jesus accuses the accusers ...

1. By principle (verses 25-26) -- Satan's kingdom is organized.
2. By practice (verse 27) -- Satan's strategy is deception.
3. By parable (verses 28-30) -- Satan's strength is limited.

Of any week that I have ever prepared to preach, without a doubt this week I have been the most distracted. The activities of the church were quite consuming. I had more meetings with people of this church than I normally have. I had more administrative duties this week than I normally have. I spent more time on the phone than I normally do. I spent more hours praying for and thinking about Rock Valley Bible Church than I normally do. Just to get everything done, I worked late into the majority of evenings this week. So, this week has been a difficult week as I have looked to prepare my message for Sunday morning. Much of my distraction was with good things, not bad. Then, as I thought about my message this morning, it occurred to me what I was going to preach about today. I am preaching this morning on Satan and his activity. The title of my message this morning is "Satan's Activity." I want for us to use Jesus' encounter with the Pharisees as an opportunity for us to think about the reality and extent of Satan's involvement in this world. I spoke with Yvonne and said, "Do you think that it is an accident that I have been so greatly distracted and thrown behind in my preparation this week?" We agreed that it probably wasn't an accident.

Now, when you talk about Satan, there are two extremes that you can fall into. One extreme is to be so interested in Satan and his plans and his warfare, that you become convinced that Satan is in every corner, and on every doorknob, and causing every difficulty in your life. I have spoken with people who have this mindset. They think that this world is made up of "Satan Substance" in different forms. And this substance comes in many different forms. It may come in the form of people: if someone speaks against them for some reason, they say, "Get Thee behind me, Satan." It may come in the form of a temptation: if someone is coveting the purchase of a brand new sports car, it is the devil's car. It may come in the form of a thought: if they are sinning in their thoughts and attitudes, they blame it on the devil. As Flip Wilson is famous for saying, "The devil made me do it."

There is also another extreme. It is the extreme that says that Satan was bound by Christ on the cross, and therefore Satan no longer has power and dominion over us. These people think that this world is pretty free from Satan's influence. The only source of sin is your own wicked hearts.

The former extreme sees Satan everywhere; The latter extreme sees Satan nowhere. Church family, we must have a Biblical balance in these things. If there is any danger for Rock Valley Bible Church, I believe that the danger is for us to fall on the extreme of ignoring Satan and his activity in the world. I know that it is my tendency. My tendency is to ignore the reality of Satan's involvement in our lives. My tendency is to miss the spiritual warfare that takes place. I say that because the reality of Satan's activity was one of the last things on my mind when I thought about the real struggle that I faced this week in my life trying to accomplish all that needs to be accomplished. We need to realize that Peter told us, after the cross, that "Your adversary, the devil, prowls about like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour" (1 Pet. 5:8).

I have thought as well of our time together in the word of God. Perhaps this morning, as I preach to you from God's word, Satan may attempt to distract you as well. I know that all of you come each Sunday with burdens of your own. Some of you are facing financial difficulties. Some of you are facing relational difficulties with your family. Some of you are facing pressures at your job. Some of you are facing pressures at home. Some of you are so busy and have so many things spinning that you can't stop thinking about all of them. Some of you are concerned about your children. Some of you are concerned about your parents. Whatever your burdens are, Satan would love for you to be distracted when I open God's Word this morning. Satan doesn't like to be exposed for who he really is. He doesn't like for his plans to be revealed. Today, we will expose him. Today, we will reveal his plans. He doesn't like this.

Perhaps you might even take a moment of time right now and quiet your heart to the distractions that you may have. Pray that as you read this sermon, God would give you clear focus and direction upon the matters addressed here.

We will continue our exposition of Matthew 12. If you have picked up anything from the past several weeks from Matthew, I trust that you have picked up that Jesus Christ was not well-liked by the religious establishment. When the kid on the playground constantly gets into fights, you know that he isn't well liked. Likewise, we have seen the mounting opposition to Jesus' ministry, which is the theme of chapter 12. At the beginning of Matthew 12, we saw the Pharisees come and accuse Jesus' disciples of eating grain on the Sabbath. They were so focused on the issue of the Sabbath, that they had failed to understand that the Lord desires "compassion and not a sacrifice" (Matt. 12:7). Next, we saw the Pharisees accusing Jesus of healing on the Sabbath. They were so focused on the issue of the Sabbath, that they had prohibited the doing of good on the Sabbath. Last week, we read Matthew's explanation of how this was in the plan of God for the servant of God. This week, we will again deal with the Pharisees as they try to cope with the extraordinary power of Jesus Christ to cast out demons.

Let's pick up the context of our story in verse 22.

"Then there was brought to Him a demon-possessed man [who was] blind and dumb, and He healed him, so that the dumb man spoke and saw." (Matt. 12:22)

Jesus was going about doing his regular ministry. Verse 15 tells us that "many followed Him, and He healed them all." One such person who came to Jesus was a demon-possessed man, who was blind and dumb. He couldn't see. He couldn't speak. Jesus healed Him so that, he spoke, and he saw. Often, we can become numb to how powerful Jesus Christ was. A miracle here and a miracle there and it all becomes pretty commonplace. But I want you to catch the significance of how powerful Jesus was. This man was like Helen Keller, unable to see or hear.

This miracle was so tremendous that it created a buzz. Some were seeing and believing. Some were seeing and denying. The "multitudes were amazed" (verse 23). I believe that this is giving testimony to the extent of this miracle. The healing ministry of Jesus was miraculous. The healing ministry of Jesus was undeniable.

The multitudes said, "This man cannot be the Son of David, can he?" (verse 23).

"The Son of David" is a clear reference to "Messiah!" (1:1; 9:27; 15:22). It was a question of astonishment. It was a question of possibility. They were wondering if this Jesus really was the Messiah after all! They were beginning to believe that Jesus was the one! But, the Pharisees, in the continued hardness of their hearts, denied that Jesus was the Messiah.

They are a bit like the sports columnist, Mike Nadel, in today's Rockford Register Star, who commented on the fact that the Chicago Cubs made the playoffs this year. They clinched a spot in the playoffs yesterday with a double-header victory and a loss by the Houston Astros. He wrote, "Repeat after me, folks: It was not a miracle ... it was not a miracle ... it was NOT a miracle" (Rockford Register Star, Sunday, Sept. 28, 2003). Church family, it was a miracle!

Rather than admitting that Jesus was endowed with great, miraculous power from God, they said the exact opposite. They said that Jesus was empowered by Satan, himself. Look at verse 24,

"This man casts out demons only by Beelzebul the ruler of the demons." (Matt. 12:24)

They used the same trumped up charge against Jesus that they had used previously, when the crowd was being wooed by His great miracles. The multitudes were saying, "Nothing like this was ever seen in Israel!" (9:33). The Pharisees responded, "He casts out the demons by the ruler of the demons." But this time, they added a bit more to the equation. They called Him, "Beelzebul." (Some texts read, "Beelzebub. "). There is debate and discussion as to exactly what this means. Each of these words begin with the same word, *Beel*, or as we often spell it, *Baal*. It is a common Hebrew word that means "Lord." People in the OT often worshiped the "Baals," which were essentially false gods. If the best reading is Beelzebub, then this is best translated, "Lord of the flies." *Zebub* is a Hebrew word that means, "flies." If the best reading is Beelzebul, then this is best translated, "Lord of the dung." *Zebul* is a Hebrew word that means, "dung, excrement," you know, the stuff we flush down our toilets. Most people put these thoughts together. Think about it. When a dog does a number in your back yard, if you would go and look at it a day later, you would observe all kinds of flies buzzing around over it. Essentially, the Pharisees were calling Jesus, "The Lord of the manure pile." Do you think that this is a term of endearment? No! This was a term of intense hatred. I have gone into that detail because I want you to sense how great the antagonism was between these Pharisees and Jesus.

In verse 25, Jesus responded to the Pharisees. In his response, He was "knowing their thoughts." How I have longed in my counseling of people to know their thoughts! If I could know the thoughts of people, I would really know what was going on with them, and could counsel them accordingly. Some can read into this statement a supernatural ability of Jesus. But, I'm not so sure that this is a reference to his supernatural ability of Jesus to "judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart" (Heb. 4:12). When someone calls you a four-letter word, it doesn't take a Phi Beta Kappa to realize that they have a hatred towards you. It was obvious to Jesus. It ought to be obvious to us as well. For the rest of the morning, we are going to look at Jesus' response to the Pharisees. The accused will become the accuser. He will show them how ridiculous their accusations against Jesus really are. They make no sense whatsoever. But, they do show how far a hardened heart will go to justify their hatred toward another person.

I spoke about this a few weeks ago, but I bring it up again. When your heart is hard against another individual, you will think and think hard about that individual. You will come up with some of the most off-the-wall reasons to hate them. Their every action will be distorted in your mind for the worse. Their every word will be taken and twisted to justify yourself and to condemn another person. Even when your arguments are absurd and they hold no water and they contain faulty logic, you will cling to them, thinking that you are in the right, when in fact, you are absolutely wrong. Such was the case with the Pharisees. When we see Jesus' response, we will see how ridiculous their thoughts were. But a hard heart will even go further than simply reasoning within itself. It will seek friends. It will seek others to join it in its mischief and hatred toward others. A hard heart will confide in others and will seek support, wherever support can be found. Perhaps you will find support in your spouse or in other friends. The Pharisees found support in their own little group. Verse 14 said that the Pharisees "counseled together against Him, as to how they might destroy Him."

Let's look at Jesus' response. As Jesus responds, He will teach us about Satan's activity.

Jesus accuses the accusers ...

1. By principle (verses 25-26)

Look at what Jesus says in verses 25-26. He says,

"Any kingdom divided against itself is laid waste; and any city or house divided against itself shall not stand. And if Satan casts out Satan, he is divided against himself; how then shall his kingdom stand?" (Matt. 12:25-26)

Jesus is simply putting forth the case that division in the ranks means disaster to the organization. Jesus takes his illustration from largest to smallest: from a kingdom, to a city, to a house. A divided kingdom can't stand. This has been true time and time again throughout all of history. When our nation faced the issue of slavery, we could not agree on whether states had the right to determine their own position on it. As a result, our nation was divided between the north and south. It couldn't stand divided like that. The south pulled away from the union. Civil War erupted. It was only when the south was defeated that the nation was again united, although there are certainly residual effects of the war remaining to this day. Ancient Rome fell, not because of impending invasion, but from division within. A divided city can't stand. In the days of Jesus, cities had walls to protect themselves from the invader. In defense of that city, it would take a united effort to defend it against attack. Those in the city can't be fighting within the city when the real war is taking place outside the city. A divided home can't stand. When mother and father are divided against each other, the home will crumble. Divorces do more than split a husband and a wife. They split families. They ruin homes. They bring financial disaster.

Let me also add that a divided church can't stand. When there is dissension in the ranks, the focus quickly turns to each other, rather than upon Jesus and upon our purpose in the world. We lose purpose. We lose our focus. C. S. Lewis, in his writings *The Screwtape Letters* describes how easy it is to spark disunity in the church by how you think about one another. The demon, Screwtape is writing to his younger demon, Wormwood with the following advice.

One of our great allies at present is the Church itself. Do not misunderstand me. I do not mean the Church as we see her spread out through all time and space and rooted in eternity, terrible as an army with banners. That, I confess, is a spectacle which makes our boldest tempters uneasy. But fortunately it is quite invisible to these humans. All your patient sees is the half-finished, sham Gothic erection on the new building estate. When he goes inside, he sees the local grocer with rather an oily expression on his face bustling up to offer him one shiny little book containing a liturgy which neither of them understands, and one shabby little book containing corrupt texts of a number of religious lyrics, mostly bad, and in very small print. When he gets to his pew and looks round him he sees just that selection of his neighbours. Make his mind flit to and fro between expressions like "the body of Christ" and the actual faces in the next pew. It matters very little, of course, what kind of people that next pew really contains. You may know one of them to be a great warrior on the Enemy's side. No matter. Your patient, thanks to Our Father Below, is a fool. Provided that any of those neighbours sing out of tune, or have boots that squeak, or double chins, or odd clothes, the patient will quite easily believe that their religion must therefore be somehow ridiculous. ... I have been writing hitherto on the assumption that the people in the next pew afford no rational ground for disappointment. Of course, if they do--if the patient knows that the woman with the absurd hat is a fanatical bridgeplayer or the man with the squeaky boots a miser and an extortioner--then your task is so much easier. All you then have to do is to keep out of his mind the question "If I, being what I am, can consider that I am in some sense a Christian, why should the different vices of those people in the next pew prove that their religion is mere hypocrisy and convention? ... Your affectionate uncle, Screwtape" (C.S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters*, pp. 4-6).

The secret to unity in the church is for you to walk worthy of the gospel "with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing forbearance to one another in love" (Eph. 4:2). This is a simple principle. You can't be divided and stand. It is a truism.

Now, we ask, "What does this teach us about Satan?" It teaches us that **Satan's kingdom is organized** and united. Satan is the ruler of his demons. He sends his demons to accomplish his purposes on the earth. Satan's army isn't a bunch of do-your-own thing, maverick demons all running around trying to create havoc in the lives of people. On the contrary, Satan's forces are well-trained and strategically attacking those in this world. You might liken them to a football team that works together in trying to win a game. Or, you might think of how General Franks organized the military for Operation Iraqi Freedom. Or, you could consider the organization of a terrorist network and how it works to accomplish acts of terrorism in the world. I trust that many of you have seen videos of terrorist training camps, where the men are training like they do in any army. Jesus spoke of how the devil has "his angels" (Matt. 25:41; Rev. 12:9). At Satan's disposal are the rulers, powers, and world forces that are all working together to destroy people through sin (Eph. 6:10-12). The devil schemes against those in the world. He has a game plan.

Satan's organized power is illustrated for us in the book of Daniel. In chapter 10, Daniel received a message of conflict (Dan. 10:1-9). He mourned and fasted for three weeks in seeking divine help. But none came. Yet, finally, Gabriel came to comfort him (Dan. 10:10). He was told that he was dispatched when Daniel had begun mourning and fasting. Yet, he had been intercepted and detained for these 21 days by the "prince of Persia," who was probably a Satanic angel. Gabriel was detained by this prince until Michael the archangel came and helped release him, so that he could come to speak with Daniel. This demonstrates a bit of organization on Satan's part. Gabriel had appeared to Daniel on two other occasions (see Dan. 8:16; 9:21). So, when Satan had figured out what was going on between Daniel and Gabriel, he sought to prevent him from getting to Daniel, by dispatching this "prince of Persia" to prevent him. This shows you a little bit of the organized power that Satan has.

Satan is "the god of this world" (2 Cor. 4:4). He rules this world's system (John 12:31; 16:11). So extensive is his rule and reign that the Bible says "the whole world lies in the power of the evil one" (1 John 5:19). Remember when Jesus was tempted by the devil? He took Jesus "to a very high mountain, and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world, and their glory; and he said to Him, 'all these things will I give You, if You fall down and worship me'" (Matt. 4:8-9). Jesus didn't dispute with the devil whether or not this was true. He simply refused the offer because the plan was faulty, not because Satan didn't have the authority over the nations and kingdoms of the world, but because "You shall worship the Lord your God, and serve Him only" (Matt. 4:10). Satan has some measure of control among the nations of the world. We are told in 2 Thessalonians 2:9, of a man that will come "in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power and sign and false wonders." In the Revelation

to John, we see Satan delegating some of his authority to the beast (Rev. 13:4) who rules and reigns over ten kings (Rev. 17:12).

Satan is alive and well today. He has a complete arsenal of demons carrying out his battle plans. We need to learn from this that there is a war going on. It is between God's kingdom and Satan's kingdom. It is very real. We need to realize that "our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places" (Eph. 6:12). He shoots "flaming missiles" at us (Eph. 6:16). Suppose this morning, I pulled out a squirt gun and started shooting it at you. Pretty soon, you would naturally begin to start blinking your eyes in anticipation of getting a bit of water in them. Suppose this morning, I pulled a real gun out of my pocket and aimed it at you, and said, "I don't like you. You are my enemy. I am going to kill you." What would you do? You would probably crouch down and make yourself small. For those of you at tables, you might overturn the tables to form a shield to protect you. You might take some other kind of action. Here's the point. You will take some sort of action. You won't say, "This too will pass." When the threat is very real, you will seek for cover. I am telling you this morning, that the threat of Satan is very real. He is coming against us with organized forces of demons, ready to do his battle. How are you going to fight such a tremendous battle? The way to fight is to take up your armor of regular, Christian living. Take Paul's advice:

Put on the **full armor of God**, that you may be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore, take up the full armor of God, that you may be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. Stand firm therefore, **HAVING GIRDED YOUR LOINS WITH TRUTH**, and **HAVING PUT ON THE BREASTPLATE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS**, and having **shod YOUR FEET WITH THE PREPARATION OF THE GOSPEL OF PEACE**; in addition to all, taking up the **shield of faith** with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming missiles of the evil one. And take **THE HELMET OF SALVATION**, and the **sword of the Spirit**, which is the **word of God**. With all **prayer and petition** pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints. (Ephesians 6:11-18).

It isn't technique that will help you against the schemes of the devil. It isn't a seminar on spiritual warfare. It is taking the simple, fundamental things that you are used to using in your Christian walk: truth, righteousness, the gospel, faith, the word of God, and prayer. These are the things that will help us against Satan and his demons.

Let's get back to our narrative. Jesus accuses the accusers. He accuses them by principle (verses 25-26), showing that Satan's kingdom is organized. He also accuses them ...

2. By practice (verse 27)

"And if I by Beelzebul cast out demons, by whom do your sons cast them out? Consequently they shall be your judges."
(Matt. 12:27)

Jesus points out that there are these people known as the "sons of the Pharisees." These were probably the "disciples of the Pharisees." Jesus is simply pointing out the fact that the sons of the Pharisees also cast out demons. There is nothing in the Bible that tells exactly what the sons of the Pharisees did. But there is a bit of historical documentation talking about this. Josephus mentions something about Solomon learning "that skill that expels demons" (Josephus Antiquities 8.2.5). Josephus also mentions a root from a certain kind of fig tree that when it is "brought to sick persons, it quickly drives away those called demons" (Josephus Wars, 8.6.3). The apocrypha in the book of Tobit mentions how some burning fish "distressed the demon, who fled through the air to Egypt" (Tobit 8:3). Justin Martyr spoke about those who exorcising demons in a name other than Jesus, "But though you exorcise any demon in the name of any of those who were amongst you-either kings, or righteous men, or prophets, or patriarchs-it will not be subject to you" (Justin Martyr Dialogue 85). In Acts 19:13, we see some Jewish exorcists casting out demons.

Our knowledge regarding what exactly the "sons of the Pharisees" were doing is relatively scarce. But Jesus indicates that some of the Pharisees were indeed casting out demons. He demonstrates to them how foolish the Pharisees were in this accusation. "You stand condemned on your own terms. You say that the practice of casting out demons can only be done by the ruler of the demons. Look at the actions of your sons. Would you say that they are casting out demons by Satan? Of course you wouldn't. Your argument is ridiculous." It was their hardness that caused them to reason so ineffectively.

The question that has come to my mind is this: If the sons of the Pharisees were anything like the Pharisees, they were a group of legalistic, judgmental, proud, arrogant hypocrites. If they were like this, how were they able to cast out demons? Were the demons obliged to leave whomever they possessed when these Pharisees spoke? As I thought about this, I thought about how, **Satan's strategy is deception**. He will purposefully make himself look weak, so that he doesn't attract too much attention to himself. By their apparent successes at casting out demons, they think themselves to be on the right track in their obedience to God. If they couldn't ever cast these demons out, they would naturally question themselves and perhaps come to the realization that their religious exercises are a sham, that they aren't working.

Deception is a great military tactic. When Israel went to attack Ai (for the second time), they sent 30,000 valiant warriors by night around to the back side of the city. Then, in the morning, Joshua came against the city with 5,000 men. When the people of Ai saw Joshua, he summoned his people to fight. Then "Joshua and all Israel pretended to be beaten before them, and fled by the way of the wilderness" (Joshua 8:15). The people in the city were all called together to go after them and pursue them, "so not a man was left in Ai" (Joshua 8:17) and they "left the city unguarded." Then, the 30,000 men ambushed the city and set it on fire (Joshua 8:19). These are the tactics that Satan will use. He will act defeated in one place to gain a greater victory in another. I believe that this took place with the sons of the Pharisees.

Here is the lesson that we ought to learn: Satan's strategy is deception. I remember speaking to a friend of mine who was a Navy Seal, who fought in the first Gulf war. He said that one of their missions was to deceive the Iraqi army. He was part of a special mission called Operation

Michael Jordan. The operation was designed to make it look like the beginning of an amphibious landing by showing a predawn reconnaissance and obstacle removal on the beach. The operation was successfully completed by planting six haversacks full of C-4 explosives, which would be detonated by electronic timers. After they dropped the explosives off they planted large, inflatable, orange buoys, one on the right and on the left, about a 100 yards offshore. One-half hour before the explosives detonated, high-speed boats would spray the beach with 7.62 mm and .50-caliber machine-gun fire along with 40-millimeter grenades. This faked out the Iraqi forces and drew them away from the actual landing assault. This is Satan's strategy: deception.

When Satan and his host of demons attack, he does it through deception and trickery. 2 Cor. 11:14 says that "Satan disguises himself as an angel of light." "Therefore, it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness" (2 Cor. 11:15). This is how Satan will attack! What would happen if I would say to you this morning, "Hey, everybody, tonight, I invite you over to our house for a séance. I have borrowed a Ouija board, and have studied a bit about witchcraft. We are going to call up the dead and speak with them. Will you come?" You should instantly resist me. I wouldn't be standing here next Sunday. Or, what would happen if I would say to you married folks, "I think that your marriage is a bit too dull. Forget purity in your marriage. Try new things. Sleep around. Spice things up!" I wouldn't be pastor of this church for very long; you would strongly resist me. But, what if I would put these thoughts into a song with a catchy tune. Maybe then, you would listen to it. What if I made a movie about adultery? Perhaps then, you would pay money to see it. What if I made a movie about a cute little boy. This boy was very well liked by his parents, his teachers, and his friends. Then, I taught this little boy the ability to do witchcraft. He used his witchcraft to do amazing things. Would you watch this movie? Perhaps you would find the little boy too cute to resist. What if I offered a science class called, "The Science of Harry Potter" like the class offered this fall at Frostburg State University in Maryland (source: *Rockford Register Star*, 9/26/03). When your walls of defense are broken down, and it doesn't seem too bad, the attacks will come. It is all deception of the enemy to think that all of this isn't so bad after all. Look at that cute little boy, it can't be too bad, can it?

You might remember the story of Eli Cohn ("Our Man in Damascus"), the Israeli spy to Syria. In Syria he was known as Kamel Amin Tabet, a successful Egyptian businessman. He infiltrated Syria with lots of money and became a spy, radioing valuable information back to Israel. He became great friends with the military in Syria. He was often taken to the Israeli border, to see how Syria could attack. At one point, he gave some advice to the Syrian army. He told them to shade the military sites that covered the desert with Eucalyptus trees. He told them how these trees are hearty in the desert and provide good shade for the troops. I believe that it was in the Six Day War, that Israel used this information and bombed all the Eucalyptus trees! Since they weren't indigenous to the desert, so they were easy to spot. They were easy targets for the Israeli air force. Eli Cohn had deceived Syria by appearing harmless.

This was Satan's first tactic in the garden, "You surely shall not die" (Gen. 3:2). Look at how beautiful the fruit is. Look at how tasty the fruit looks. You will love it. It's not so bad! Satan is the master of deception. He will seek to deceive. He will make sin seem less terrible than it really is. The good news is that there will be a day when Jesus comes and binds him for a thousand years and throws him into the abyss, and shuts it and seals it over him, "so that he should not *deceive* the nations any longer" (Rev. 20:3).

The way to combat deception is to be prepared. It is to be alert and on guard. To do this, you should saturate your mind with the word of God. You should be with the people of God. You should practice the Christian disciplines of Ephesians 6. You should love the truth, love righteousness, and love the gospel. This will protect you against deception.

Getting back to our narrative, Jesus accuses the accusers by principle and by practice. He also accuses the accusers...

3. By parable (verses 28-30).

Look at verse 29, "Or how can anyone enter the strong man's house and carry off his property, unless he first binds the strong man? And then he will plunder his house." Picture a big, strong macho guy. His biceps are like pipes. His legs are like tree trunks. His abdomen resembles a six pack. You don't just enter into his house and start taking his stereo and his telephone, couch, and lawnmower. He won't let you do that. In order to plunder this man's goods, you need to bring a bigger guy, who can beat him up first and then render him as weak and unable to guard his stuff.

Jesus uses this simple illustration to indicate that it isn't about Satan casting out Satan. It is about a man who is stronger than Satan coming and taking what is in the house. As Jesus cast out these demons from these people, He was demonstrating that He was stronger than Satan. Satan can only do what God allows him to do. His power is limited. There are several illustrations of this in the Bible. Perhaps the most prominent is that of Job. Job was prospering. The LORD said to Satan, "Have you considered My servant Job? For there is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, fearing God and turning away from evil" (Job. 1:8). Then Satan answered the LORD, "Does Job fear God for nothing? Have You not made a hedge about him and his house and all that he has on every side?" (Job. 1:9-10). God, then, gave Satan some parameters whereby he could afflict Job. The first time, he was prohibited from hurting Job. The second time, he was allowed to hurt Job, but couldn't take his life. It shows clearly the relationship between Satan and God. Satan can run around and do his thing, but only within the limits that God sets forth. Another illustration is that of Peter. Satan "demanded permission to sift [him] like wheat" (Luke 22:31). Peter was off limits to Satan, unless God allowed it. Within this fence, Satan can do as he pleases, but he can't go outside the fence without God's permission.

The lesson for us this morning is that **Satan's strength is limited**. He isn't the all-powerful being in the universe. It isn't God vs. Satan, as if it is a boxing match where Satan might win. It is like a full grown man vs. an eight year old. I'm coaching this soccer team with Elroy Hilbert. There are times that I play with and against the kids. I don't always exert myself 100%. If so, I would squash the kids. Rather, I allow them to make certain passes and get open in certain areas to teach them. (In a few years I will begin going 100% to try to keep up). Satan can only do what God allows! This is why Jesus was able to pray for His disciples in the upper room, "I do not ask You to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil one" (John 17:15). God has the power and ability to limit Satan. Satan's power is limited by boundaries established by God.

But don't ever get arrogant. Satan's power is not to be messed with. Like my father, I enjoy doing woodwork and projects. When he taught me how to do these things, he always taught me, "Tools are not toys." Tools are always to be used carefully. An electrician always has a

healthy fear of voltage, but knows that if he does things right, always being insulated, he will be fine. A carpenter has a healthy fear of the circular saw, but knows that if he uses it right, he will be fine. You are to have a healthy fear of Satan and his powers. When Moses died, there was a battle for his body. Satan and Michael the archangel disputed and argued over his body. Yet, even Michael, "did not dare pronounce against [the devil] a railing judgment, but said, 'The Lord rebuke you'" (Jude 9). If Michael, the archangel has a healthy fear of Satan, you ought to as well. Those who go around saying things like they are "Binding Satan" have often lost their healthy fear of Satan and his power.

As a powerful being, Satan will exploit our weaknesses. The following excerpt documents this fact well:

Whatever sin the heart of man is most inclined to do, that the devil will help forward.

- If David be proud of his people, Satan will provoke him to number them, that he may be yet prouder (2 Sam. 24).

- If Peter be slavishly fearful, Satan will put him upon rebuking and denying of Christ, to save his own skin (Matt. 16:22; 26:69-75).

- If Ahab's prophets be given to flatter, the devil will straightway become a lying spirit in the mouths of four hundred of them, and they shall flatter Ahab to his ruin (1 Kings 22).

- If Judas will be a traitor, Satan will quickly enter into his heart and make him sell his master for money, which some heathens would never have done (John 13:2).

- If Ananias will lie for advantage, Satan will fill his heart that he may lie, with a witness to the Holy Ghost (Acts 5:3).

- Satan loves to sail with the wind, and to suit men's temptations to their conditions and inclinations. If they be in prosperity, he will tempt them to deny God (Prov. 30:9); if they be in adversity, he will tempt them to distrust God; if their knowledge be weak, he will tempt them to have low thoughts of God; if their conscience be tender, he will tempt to scrupulosity; if large, to carnal security; if bold-spirited, he will tempt to presumption; if timorous, to desperation; if flexible, to inconstancy; if stiff, to impenitency.

(Thomas Brooks, Precious Remedies against Satan's Devices, p. 16).

Satan is a strong man to be feared! But the hope and trust of the Christian is that he has a stronger man Jesus to come and overpower the strong man Satan. This isn't pie in the sky; this is very real. Verse 28 says, "If I cast out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you." This is the space/time reality. The kingdom came upon the Pharisees because the king was there, exerting His authority and casting out these demons! The Pharisees had to deal with how they were going to respond to Jesus.

The core of the response comes in verse 30, "He who is not with me is against me; and he who does not gather with me scatters." There are only two types of people in the world: those with Jesus, and those against Jesus. Every single one of you lie in one camp or another. You are either with Jesus or against Jesus. There is no neutral ground! When my wife and I traveled to Israel, we spent one night in Jordan. In order to get there, we had to pass through the DMZ (demilitarized zone). It was territory between Israel and Jordan that was controlled by neither. Israel had their military on one side; Jordan had their military on the other side. When you were in the DMZ, you were neither in Israel, nor Jordan. There is no DMZ in the kingdom of Christ. "He who is not with me is against me," Jesus said. We are talking about Satan and his kingdom. We are talking about Jesus and his kingdom. You are either with Jesus or against him.

I have spoken with many people over the years about Christ, his glory, and his kingdom. I have heard many say, "I'm a Christian. After all, I was born into the church. But I'm not real involved. We sometimes go to church. I like the things about church. I like the message. I like the music. I'm not against the church and organized religion. I just have so many other things in my life taking priority right now." How does that explanation, self-justified as it really is, measure up to Jesus' words here: "He who is not with Me is against Me" (Matt. 12:30)? It doesn't measure up very well. Jesus doesn't say, "If you aren't against me, you are with me." He said, "He who is not with Me is against Me."

Many people think there are many roads to God. These people aren't antagonistic to Christianity; they tolerate it. They also tolerate all other religions. They don't realize how against Jesus they really are.

When you think of "Satan's Activity," you need to think Christ and His kingdom. You need to think Satan and his kingdom. Don't think of some third category, because there isn't one. Either you love, worship, and adore Jesus and His gospel of freely-given forgiveness by faith and trust in Him, or you are on the side of the enemy! If you are on the side of the enemy, you need to repent of your sin and come to Jesus.

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on September 28, 2003 by Steve Brandon.
For more information see www.rvbc.cc.
