

How Will His Kingdom Stand?

2 Kings 1:2-16, Luke 11:14-36 (ESV)

June 5, 2005

“Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and a divided household falls. And if Satan also is divided against himself, how will his kingdom stand?” “How will his kingdom stand?” Therein lies a fascinating question. It functions on several levels at once, reaching all the way from then to now, from Jesus to us and beyond. “How will his kingdom stand?” First and most obviously, this establishes that the kingdom of Satan is not divided. That would be stupid. Satan is evil, and he is devious, but he is not stupid. So his kingdom is not divided. He does not work against himself. It is a simple law of nature, of history, and of all reality: “Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and a divided household falls.” This reality is the basis of the military strategy of divide and conquer. This is also a basic skill of parenting. If children are misbehaving, separate them, and the level of mischief drops significantly. Even Satan cannot avoid that that reality. So, “if Satan also is divided against himself, how will his kingdom stand?”

Now, while it is sobering to realize that Satan is not stupid and that his kingdom is not divided, it is not really all that important in the great scheme of things and especially not to the gospel. So this first point leads quickly to the second point, the most immediate and pressing point being made, that Jesus Christ, who casts out demons, who heals the sick, who speaks the truth, who lifts up the poor, who forgives sin, and who saves his people, Jesus Christ is not, and definition cannot be, a part of the kingdom of Satan. That would be ridiculous. That very suggestion is insulting. And most importantly, that is wrong.

Everyone is entitled to his or her opinion, but not every opinion is correct. Not every opinion is right. Not every opinion is good. The Christian faith is not open to every belief. The Bible is not open to every interpretation. The gospel cannot be bent to every whim. Jesus reacted vigorously against this wrongheaded accusation that he was Satanic. Satan has his kingdom, and his kingdom is not divided. Jesus stands and works against Satan, and therefore he is not of Satan. This confirms that, as we might say today, theology matters. It is our responsibility to seek out and learn the faith that the church has always believed. Indeed, that is the purpose of the Gospel according to Luke, and that is why it was written as a catechism, a series of questions and answers instructing us in the faith. We are not free to say anything we want about Jesus Christ. We are not free to make Jesus Christ say anything we want him to say.

This second point needs to be expanded upon a little. Satan's kingdom is not divided, and therefore Jesus Christ, his opponent, is not of Satan's kingdom. But Jesus is more than *an* opponent. He is *the* opponent, the conquering opponent, the one who takes on and defeats Satan. So, not only is Jesus not of Satan, and not only is he absolutely opposed to Satan, but also he is successfully and victoriously opposed to Satan. "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."

Yes, Satan is a strong man. He is stronger than you or I. We cannot defeat him. If we could, we would not need a savior. But Jesus is the stronger man who attacks and overcomes Satan, takes away his defenses, and takes away from him those whom he has captured. Jesus Christ is the Savior. "Behold, something greater than Solomon is here." "Behold, something greater than Jonah is here." And behold, someone even stronger than Satan is here in the person, work, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Shame on us if we do not come from the ends of the earth to hear his wisdom. Shame on us if we do not repent at his preaching. Shame on us if we do not believe his gospel, rejoice in his goodness, and live in his grace.

Do you see how Jesus wins this victory? He does not do this on his own. He does this on the basis of another kingdom, a greater power, the One to whom he does belong. "For you say that I cast out demons by Beelzebul. And if I cast out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they will be your judges. But if it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you." "If it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you." This is the third point based on the indivisibility of Satan's kingdom.

Satan's kingdom is not divided, so Jesus is not of Satan's kingdom. Instead, Jesus is both opposed to and stronger than Satan, because—and this is the third point—Jesus is of the kingdom of God. Where Jesus is, the kingdom of God is. Where Jesus is, God is. In fact, Jesus is God, with us and for us. Thanks be to God! Here is the great affirmation about Jesus Christ embedded in his observation about Satan. Where Jesus is, the kingdom of God is. Where Jesus is, God is. In fact, Jesus is God, with us and for us.

This brings me to a final point. We started with a question about Satan's kingdom. "If Satan also is divided against himself, how will his kingdom stand?" By extension, this applies to God's kingdom, also. If Jesus is divided against himself, how will his kingdom stand? If God is divided against himself, how will his kingdom stand? "How will his kingdom stand?" Therein lies a fascinating question. It functions on several levels at once, reaching all the way from then to now, from

Jesus to us and beyond. It is a simple law of nature, of history, and of all reality: “Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and a divided household falls.”

So, finally, even the kingdom of God is not, and cannot be, divided, either. The kingdom of God is one, not manifold; it is united, not divided; and it is single, not multiple. It is of single purpose and direction. Or, as Jesus said, “Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters.” The kingdom of God is not multiple. It cannot mean many different and opposing things. It cannot be going in opposite directions at once. Thus, the church of Jesus Christ cannot be divided. If the church of Jesus Christ were to be divided, it would no longer be the church. The church is, by definition and necessity, one. It can be no other. It cannot mean many different and opposing things. It cannot be going in opposite directions at once. “How will his kingdom stand?” Beware those who would tell us any differently.

Now this comes all the way down to us, to you and me. “Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters.” Are we with Jesus or are we against him? How do we know? Do we gather with him or do we scatter? Do we build up his church or do we tear it down? As I told the children, “Blessed...are those who hear the word of God and keep it!” It is imperative for us to know the gospel of our Lord. It is imperative for us to know the word of God. It is incumbent upon us to receive the Holy Spirit. It is given to us to believe. God has called us by name and gathered us into his people. Jesus Christ has won the victory. He has redeemed us as his own. And as we hear his word, as we praise his name, as we rejoice in his redemption, as we live in the Spirit, as we love and comfort each other, as we eat and drink together, as we bring others here with us, we are the church, and we do gather with him, and we are with him, and we are of his glorious kingdom.

“How will his kingdom stand?” The kingdom of God will stand by the victory of Jesus Christ. “Then the kingdom of God has come upon you.” In the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ, in the singing of his praises, in the forgiveness of our sin, in our prayers of thanksgiving, the kingdom of God has come even upon us, even upon us today. “Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters.” So let us receive this gift gladly, cherish this treasure, and live this new life. “Blessed...are those who hear the word of God and keep it!”

To God be the glory forever and ever! Amen.

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