8) “The kingdom of God has come”

Read Luke 11:14-23

All three Synoptic Gospels contain this important passage (Mt.12:22-30; Mk.3:22-27). Jesus casting out demons prompted speculation that he might be the Messiah (14; Mt.12:22-23) so the Pharisees tried to dismiss such thinking by claiming that his power came from Satan, not from God (15. *Beelzebul* was a name for Satan, “the prince of demons”).

Jesus answered their accusation by insisting that it is impossible for Satan to fight against himself (17-19). Rather, his authority over the demons showed that in him God’s kingdom was breaking into this world (20; Mt.12:28). The unusual idiom, “the finger of God”, emphasises that these miracles were done by the power of God (Ex.8:19; “the Spirit of God” in Matthew). Such mighty acts were indeed signs confirming that in Jesus the kingdom had arrived (Is.61:1; Mt.11:2-5).

Satan is strong (“a strong man”), but Jesus is stronger! (21). Satan has been bound and his kingdom of darkness is ready to be plundered (22). In this conflict, everyone is on one side or the other (23). When it comes to God’s kingdom and Satan’s kingdom, there can be no neutrality. So it is the Pharisees (and not Jesus) who are on the side of the devil.

9) “One greater than Jonah is here”

Read Luke 11:24-32

These three sections follow on from the Beelzebul controversy (11:14-23). Jesus has mentioned Jewish exorcists who can drive out demons (11:19), giving temporary relief. But Jesus can provide a permanent solution, through the presence of his Holy Spirit within us (24-26; 1 Cor.6:19; 1 Jn.4:4).

In Mark and Matthew that previous section leads on to Jesus’s response to the misguided intervention of his family (Mk.3:20-21,31-35; Mt.12:46-50). Luke has already used this material in conclusion to the parable of the sower – “My mother and brother are those who hear God’s word and do it” (8:21). So here he uses a different incident to illustrate the same key point (27-28; Mt.7:21,24-27; Jas.1:22-25).

The demand for a sign was also part of the previous issue (11:16). Signs are pointers, not proofs, and so faith based on signs is shallow (Jn.2:23-25) or even “wicked” (29). Faith must be in the one the signs point to – Jesus. The only miracle of convincing significance is his resurrection from the dead (“the sign of Jonah” 30; Mt.12:39-40). His hearers need to respond to his message in faith and repentance, in order to be ready for judgement day (31-32; 2 Th.1:8-10).
10) “The eye is the lamp of the body”


This saying about not hiding a lighted lamp (33) is used by Jesus with three different applications. Luke has already included it after the parable of the sower to make clear that God would not deliberately obscure the truth (8:16-17; Mk.4:21-22). Matthew omits it there, having already referred to Jesus using it to illustrate that disciples who have received God’s light must let his light shine for others to see (Mt.5:14-16).

The Sermon on the Mount also includes another use of the same saying and that’s the passage found here in Luke, about the eye being the lamp of the body (34; Mt.6:22-23). Just as physical light – received by the eye – enables us to see what we’re doing, so metaphorically we need to be sure that what goes into us spiritually is light rather than darkness (35).

If the eye is “bad” (literally evil, the same word as in “deliver us from evil” Mt.6:13) then we won’t be able to “live as children of light” (Eph.5:8-9). But by God’s light shining within us, our whole lives can be “full of light” (36; 2 Cor.4:6; Ps.18:28). So we need to keep our eyes “good”, literally single. By single-mindedly focusing on God’s good light, we’ll be kept spiritually healthy.

11) “Woe to you Pharisees”


The controversy about Jesus and Satan earlier in this chapter had been sparked by the Pharisees and the experts in the law (Mt.12:24; Mk.3:22). By their opposition to Jesus they showed that they were against God’s kingdom (11:23) and their recurring disapproval of Jesus again surfaces here (37-38; 7:36-39; 14:1).

Once again Jesus rebukes the hypocrisy that focuses on outward appearance while ignoring inner righteousness (39-41; Mk.7:1-8) – “Blind Pharisee! First clean the inside” (Mt.23:25-26). He speaks three woes against them. Those who live by the values of God’s kingdom are “blessed” (6:20-22) and “woe” stands in contrast to that (6:24-26). “The woes describe the wrong way and pronounce judgement on those who follow and teach it” (France).

They have lost sight of what matters most – “justice and the love of God” (42; Mic.6:8). They seek prestige and honour for themselves rather than for God (43; Jn.12:43). The third woe declares that they are like “unmarked graves which people walk over without knowing it” (44), making themselves ceremonially unclean. What irony that those who claimed to be religious teachers in fact defiled their listeners!
12) “Woe to you experts in the law”

Read Luke 11:45-54

The experts in the law (scribes) were professional teachers of the Old Testament scriptures. Many of them were also leading Pharisees, insisting that all their rules be strictly followed. So both groups were opposed to Jesus’s teaching (45) and share in the woes which Jesus pronounces (11:42-44,46-47,52).

The trouble with ‘religion by rules’ is that it produces either pride or guilt (Lk.18:9-14). To those who are “poor in spirit” Jesus brought a far greater righteousness than that of the Pharisees (5:3,20) – an inner righteousness of the heart, not of outward appearance (Mk.7:20; Mt.23:26). Unlike those who burdened people with their rules he is the burden-bearer who says “Come to me and rest” from religious striving (46; Mt.11:28-30).

Jesus is far greater than the prophets of old but they rejected him just as at the time their predecessors had rejected the prophets (47-51). He is God’s final and complete revelation (Heb.1:1-3), the fulfilment of the Old Testament (Mt.5:17) and the key to it all (Rev.3:7). Yet instead of letting him unlock the scriptures that they taught, they slammed the door shut for themselves and thus for their listeners too (52).

13) “Who you should fear”

Read Luke 12:1-7

From the hypocritical teaching of the Pharisees (1; Mt.16:12) Jesus next tells the disciples to share his own teaching fearlessly. In Matthew this section is part of the instructions given to the twelve when he sent them out on mission (Lk.9:1-6; Mt.10:5-31). Jesus warns his followers that opposition and persecution are inevitable but, he adds, “Do not be afraid” (Mt.10:26).

The outcome is inevitable – the truth of Christ will be made known (2-3; Jn.1:4-5). This is both a promise and a command – “What I tell you in the dark, speak in the daylight” (Mt.10:27). The fear of people must not hinder the duty of witness – the only one who deserves to be feared is Almighty God, who holds the power of a far more terrifying destruction than that of martyrdom (4-5; Pr.1:7; Rev.14:7,13).

Not only that, God cares deeply for all of his creation. Even sparrows sold as cheap food for the poor are part of the Father’s care – how much more then will he care for his children (6-7; Mt.10:29). This doesn’t mean persecution won’t happen – both sparrows and Christians “fall to the ground”. But in his loving hands we are always safe. By fearing God, we are set free from all other fears (1 Jn.4:18).
14) “Whoever acknowledges me”

Read Luke 12:8-12

Luke continues the mission instructions also found in Matt.10:5-31, with two great promises and one solemn warning. Acknowledging Jesus publicly will be costly, often opposed even by family members (Mt.10:21,35-36). But it is certainly worth it, for he promises that on the Day of Judgement those who have confessed him as Lord will be welcomed by him while those who have denied him will find the door shut (8-9; Lk.9:24-26; Rom.10:19; Ps.27:10).

This leads to a grim warning that “blasphemy against the Holy Spirit” is an unforgiveable sin (10). The saying also occurs in the context of Jesus being accused of doing his work by the devil’s power (Mt.12:32; Mk.3:28-30). Persistently calling good evil is a sin which hardens the heart against any interest in forgiveness (Is.5:20). “God’s power to forgive is not abated. But there is no longer the capacity to repent and believe” (Morris).

So no one seeking forgiveness need ever fear that they might have blasphemed against the Holy Spirit. Rather the Spirit is our welcome friend who comes alongside to help us, not least when we need the right words to say in faithful witness (11-12; Mt.10:19-20; Jn.14:26; Acts 1:8).