

Sermon Transcript for Third Sunday in Lent, Oculi, March 7, 2021

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

We have a lot of things going on here, so we're going to try and tie it all together. The whole idea is turn your hearts and your minds to the Lord. That really is a theme in both the Old Testament and New Testament and the Gospel itself. So in the Gospel lesson, we have this man who is possessed by a demon and he's mute, and Jesus casts out the demon. Now, this is not a huge struggle. Sometimes we see in movies where they cast out demons and they have this big exorcism. But Jesus doesn't do that, nor do we have to. He says, "Be gone, Satan," and Satan himself leaves. So He certainly doesn't have to wrestle with these demons. He has absolute and utter authority over them. And so He says, "Get out," and they get out, and we by extension have His authority within us and so we need not be afraid of any demons in this world. They do not have any control or effect on us, because we no longer live in their kingdom. We live in the kingdom of God. However, as He was casting out this demon, He got accused of casting out demons in the name of Beelzebub, like He was creating some sort of sideshow that would entertain people and would draw people to the dark side or the occultic side of things, into witchcraft and sorcery and all that other stuff. But He says very clearly, "Look, I'm not doing it by the power of Beelzebub," who is lord of the flies, basically. "I'm not doing it by Satan's name, because if Satan's divided against himself, how can his kingdom stand?" Now, it's ironic, Satan's kingdom does not stand. It falls because it is divided. It is divisive. Evil spirits cannot be at peace with one another nor with anyone else, and so they're always fighting and they destroy themselves. But we who are in the kingdom of heaven because of our baptism, no longer need fear. In fact, in our baptism, we have a mini-exorcism in that, "Do you deny Satan and all his powers and all his works?" And we say, "Yes," or our sponsors or our godparents do for us. And so that's a rejection and a denial of Satan. And now we are guarded in Christ and by His power through the Holy Spirit, and He has sent His angels to watch over us. Psalm 34 speaks of the angels that camped around us. And so we need not be afraid of Satan or his demons or a disease or war or famine or persecution or jail, or even death, because God is protecting us. Because we know those things are not eternal. This world is temporary, so whatever happens in this world is only temporary. It's not going to last. So we don't need to hold on to it with a last grasp of everything that we have.

That's what Paul is talking about in Ephesians about the sexually impure, but also the covetous one, which is an idolater. That covetous, that wanting what we do not have, that wanting of the good life, that desiring of whatever it is out there that you finally make me happy, that is idolatry because we put our trust in something rather than our trust in God. And so to covet something and to say, "I cannot be happy," or, "I will finally be happy when I get the new truck or I get the better house or I get a million dollars in my bank account, or finally beat this cancer, then I can be happy." All sorts of things, "My kids finally get jobs or I get grandkids," or whatever it is, "then I will be happy." That covetousness is placing my trust in something other than God and it is idolatry, which is abhorrent to God. And it's interesting that that is right up there with sexual immorality. We think very clearly of sexual morality as being evil and against God. I mean, it's very clear and right now we see examples of the difference between a Godly relationship and a non-Godly relationship. But we're not here to stamp our foot or get onto a soap box about preaching the ills of what is a very hot topic today, homosexuality, sexual impurity. While I will say that sexual impurity is a sin and homosexuality falls into that and therefore is a sin. But so is living together without the benefit of marriage, having marital relations without being married, husband and wife, one man, one woman, as God designed it. Pornography, looking at

pornography, reading magazines, watching television shows, having sensuous thoughts. All of those things fall under this term of sexually immoral or impure. It's not just that one favorite soapbox issue that we have, because I doubt that many of us are struggling with that particular issue. But we all struggle with sexual impurity in our lives, especially the men, I think. And so we all have to address this and we all have to recognize that we have turned our eyes away from the Lord. As the Psalmist says, "My eyes are ever towards the Lord." I wish, I wish my eyes were ever towards the Lord, but I readily turn them away to other things. And so I confess my sin before God.

For the man who is mute, the demon got cast out and Jesus said, "Okay, now, there's only two choices. You're either for me or against me." The demon's been cast out. Now, the choice is continue in the gift that God has given to you, and follow Christ or else when the demon comes back, he's going to bring people even more worse. You can't have it both ways. You can't be a servant of God and ask for His miracles and His will and His trust in your life and still seek to do those things which you find enjoyable that you know are wrong. You can't have it both ways, and the one endangers the other. And so we are called to keep our minds and our thoughts and our eyes on the Lord.

Because when we fail to do that, like the House of Judah in the time of Jeremiah, they had failed to keep their eyes on God and so they were falling away. And God promised finally, "Enough, I will judge you and I will send destruction upon you." But even there He says, "But preach these things to them. Preach the Law, tell them that they are condemned, that even though society looks like it's healthy and wealthy and everything's going smoothly," because that's what was going on in Jeremiah's day. The nation was doing well, it was prospering. The economics were great. There was little unemployment, if any. There was "peace" amongst the nations. They didn't have any foreign rulers. They had a king over them. Everything was good. But it was rotten at the core. It was like whitewashed tombs is how it's often described elsewhere, because they had ceased to worship God properly. I mean, just one generation before with Josiah they had rediscovered the Law of God and Josiah re-established the temple and reinvigorated the study of the Word of God. And yet one king later, the people had fallen away again. They could not maintain it because they kept their eyes covetously on other nations and what they had. They wanted to be rich and prosperous like these other nations. God sent His prophet to warn them, to tell them, "Unless you turn from your ways, this will happen. I would love to relent from my judgment," is what God says, because God's judgment is what we call His alien work. It's not natural to Him to judge. His natural character is to love and to forgive. But if those whom He loves and those who He forgives refuse to accept that and continue to live wanton lives and reject that love and reject that forgiveness, then ultimately, finally, He will bring His wrath upon them, even then in the hopes of finally bringing them back to a true faith in God.

This should sound very familiar to our American ears. America was founded on Judeo-Christian principles. You can argue whether or not that was a solid choice or not, or whether they did it right. But it gave freedom to worship God truly and rightly and it was founded on allowing people to worship God. But we are rich and prosperous now and more and more people are falling away from the church. More and more people do not even know the church. In fact, many people even think that the church is the problem, that the church is what is corrupting our nation. We are getting to the point, if we have not already gotten there, where we are like this nation of Judah and we have turned our eyes away from the Lord. And He would be just if He brought a

nation against us, if He brought war or persecution. But we also can hear the words of Jeremiah and repent, and we should.

Even if we are not the ones who are participating in it, we should pray for our nation and pray for the repentance of our nation that we might not fall into the error, any further into the error, that Jeremiah is preaching against. And we as a church need to recall that we are called to be salt and light to this world, that we are to act in love to one another. Not in deceitful talk, or foolish or idle talk, or crude joking or anything, but to speak in love, to care for one another, and to proclaim the good news, to stand firm with what is right and what is wrong, to say that this is sin and it is not pleasing to God, but to say that in a way that is loving and caring so that people know we are not judging them any differently than we are judging anybody else for all sin and fall short of the glory of God. And all of us are redeemed by Christ, not by works, but by the grace of God.

And that's what Jesus is talking about. He cast out this demon from the mute man. The mute man did nothing. The demon-possessed man did nothing to gain his freedom from the demon. God gave it to him as a gift freely. Now he has a choice, continue following the gift and learning more about this Man who could cast out demons and serving Him and praising Him or rejecting that and going back to his old ways. If he goes back to his old ways, he's in very big danger of making it worse than it ever was to begin with. We also are the same. We need to examine our lives during this Lenten season especially, examine our own personal walk with Christ, and see where we have fallen short and repent of our ways and turn from doing evil and do good and relent from that which is not pleasing to God, to keep our eyes ever toward the Lord.

May you be strengthened by the Holy Spirit so that you might be enabled to walk in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and keep your eyes on Him by studying the Word, by praying and allowing the Holy Spirit to work in your life, and not rejecting His promises, so that you might not be afraid, so that you might be confident that God will protect you, because you are part of the blessed who hear the Word of God and keep it. Hear the Word and keep it, that is my charge to you today because Christ has already kept His Word for you. He has saved you. He has forgiven your sins. He has adopted you as His child. Therefore, hear the Word, keep it in your heart, and follow it in your words, in your thoughts, and in your actions. May Christ bring you the strength to live in His grace each and every day.

May that grace and mercy and peace be and abide with you always, now and forever more unto life everlasting. Amen.