

## OPPOSITION TO CHRIST.

IV. QUAR., LESSON VIII., NOV. 25, MARK 3:22-35.

**Golden Text – "He came unto his own, and his own received him not." – John 1:11.**

As the fame of Jesus increased, because of his miracles and teaching (Luke 4:14,15,33-37; 5:12-15,19,25,26; 7:16,17; 8:1-4; Matt. 4:23,24; 9:18,26,35; Mark 1:27,28; 3:20), the opposition to him became more and more pronounced, especially from the Chief Priests, Scribes and Pharisees, as they were brought into competition and unfavorable comparison with him as public teachers; and the indications were that all the people would be drawn after him, and that they would soon be left out of their official positions and the accompanying honors and emoluments. For such a change they were not in heart-readiness, although the prophet had foretold that "unto him [the Messiah] shall the gathering of the people be." (Gen. 49:10.) They did not have the humble, unselfish spirit of John the Baptist, who meekly said, "There standeth one among you, whom ye know not: he it is who, coming after me, is preferred before me, whose shoe's latchet I am not worthy to unloose:...he must increase, but I must decrease." – John 1:26,27; 3:30.

Instead of manifesting such a spirit, they allowed pride, envy and malice to fill their hearts and actuate their conduct, and sought by every means in their power to obstruct and counteract the Lord's teaching. In this way they shut the door of the Kingdom [R1736 : page 366] of Heaven against themselves and against all those into whom they infused the same evil spirit. (Matt. 23:13.) They wickedly blinded their own eyes, and then, with their deluded followers – the masses of the whole Jewish nation – they stumbled into the ditch of divine disfavor, where as a nation they must remain until the fulness of the Gentiles – the elect number to constitute the bride of Christ – has come into

possession of the Kingdom and eternal glory, which they proved themselves unworthy of and therefore failed to receive, although it was offered to them first.

In the instance of this lesson, it seems probable that these caviling scribes were commissioned by the Jewish ecclesiastics at Jerusalem (verse 22) to come as spies to watch his words, withstand his teachings and if possible, find some occasion against him.

While the multitudes marvelled at the miracle which cast a devil out of a dumb man, enabling him to speak and to be clothed in his right mind, saying, "It was never so seen in Israel" (Matt. 9:32-34), these Scribes and Pharisees circulated the idea among the people that Jesus was possessed of a devil, and that he cast out devils through the power of the prince of devils.

When this report came to the Lord's notice, he called the objectors to him and made manifest the absurdity of such teaching, saying in substance, with reference not only to the miracle just performed, but to his entire work as known and opposed by the Scribes and Pharisees, "How can Satan cast out Satan?" etc. That would be suicidal. It would be equivalent to a king stirring up strife in his own kingdom and working against his own cause; or the head of a house alienating and disrupting his own family and opposing the operation of his own plans. It is not presumable that Satan would thus seek to thwart his own purposes and oppose his own plans, unless he had reached great straits and found his kingdom already falling from his grasp. – Verses 23-26.

Again our Lord reasoned with them (verse 27), that "No man can enter into a **[R1736 : page 367]** strong man's house and spoil his goods, except he first bind the strong man; and then he will spoil his house." The "strong man" here referred to is Satan, who is the powerful "prince of this world" – his dominion or house. He will surely hold his dominion and pursue his own policy as long as possible, and will diligently resist every binding influence which threatens the loss of his power. The work and teachings of Jesus were just such binding

influences; and the opposition which his word met was what might be expected as a manifestation of Satan's wrath. During the Gospel age generally the Prince of Darkness has flourished, and consequently a large portion of it is known as the "dark ages." But since the beginning of the time of the end, in 1799, God has specially let in the light, – and particularly since 1878. The more the "light" shines, the more active is this adversary to preserve his power; but God's assurance is that Christ, as the Strong Messenger, will now quickly bind Satan's power and release humanity from his dominion. (Rev. 20:1,2.) Then Christ, already the Redeemer, will be the Savior or Deliverer of all who come unto God by him. That will be salvation to the uttermost. What we now enjoy is salvation by faith and hope. (Rom. 8:24,25.)

That Satan's house is now dividing against itself is manifest in that we see those who with deep and cunning sophistries oppose the truth, teaching the doctrines of Satan, at the same time doing the good works of healing, etc. Thus, for instance, Christian Science (falsely so-called, for there is nothing either Christian or scientific in it) denies both the redemption by Christ Jesus and also the very existence of God, and yet its advocates undoubtedly perform marvels of healing. Can any one claim such healings to be of God? Not unless God's kingdom is divided against itself. Which horn of the dilemma shall we accept? Is it likely that God would thus endorse the doctrines of Satan? Is it not more probable that Satan would exert his power to imitate the works of God, thereby to support his doctrines and to deceive? Such must be our conclusions in view of the warnings given us to the effect that thus it should be in the last times.

Before Satan will submit to the binding influences of the rightful Prince of this world, who now comes to take the dominion to himself, we should, as we are forewarned, expect Satan to transform himself into a minister of "light" (2 Cor. 11:14,15), that he may preach false gospels and perform "many wonderful works," healing, etc., insomuch as to "deceive, if it were possible, the very elect." Such manifestations (and we now see them multiplying all around us – in Christian Science,

Spiritism, Theosophy and other delusions of which we were forewarned (Matt. 24:24; 2 Thes. 2:11), are evidences that Satan's kingdom is being hard pressed by the truth and is nearing its end.

Our Lord's reasoning, although clear and logical, did not change the attitude of those malicious, wilful opposers, who manifested a large measure of Satan's spirit. The Lord saw this, and hence the rebuke and solemn warning which followed. – See verses 28-30.

The sin which cannot be forgiven, and which, therefore, must be expiated or punished before the sinner's repentance can be accepted, is that of blasphemy against the holy spirit, or wilful opposition against that which is known to be holy and of divine appointment. The spirit which instigates such conduct is that of treason against God, and those who manifest it in any degree are *in danger* of eternal condemnation – eternal death; for, according to Heb. 10:26-31; 6:4-8, wilful opposition, in the face of clear, full knowledge of the divine will, incurs that penalty. Consequently, every approach to such a treasonable spirit is *dangerous*. And a manifestation of any measure of that spirit is a sin which must be punished with stripes. (Luke 12:47,48.) Every sin against light increases the danger of going into the second or eternal death.

The punishment meted out to such is, however, no part of the satisfaction to divine justice whereby deliverance from Adamic death is secured: that was done by Christ, whose sacrifice was the all-sufficient ransom which reconciles the repentant sinner to God. The "stripes" for every measure of wilful sin against the light which emanates from the spirit of God are a necessary part of the *corrective discipline* of Christ in bringing the reckonedly justified but erring ones back to full harmony with God. But if the corrective discipline does not produce reform, the increase of knowledge and experience will shortly [R1736 : page 368] make it a wilful sin against *full* knowledge, for which the *full* penalty would be inflicted – second death. Verses 20,21,31 (See *Emphatic Diaglott*), seem to indicate more of a spirit of

fear and anxiety on the part of the Lord's mother and brethren, than of opposition. His brethren did not believe in his claims and doctrines at that time, and seemingly could not understand why he was so revolutionary in his teachings and so antagonistic to all the recognized religious teachers of his day, etc., etc. (John 7:5), while his mother doubtless still pondered the mystery in her mind. Yet hearing of the attention he was attracting, and the increased murmurings of opposition and violence against him, they came from Nazareth to see and talk with him, and doubtless to urge him to greater caution for his safety and to more care for his physical necessities of rest and refreshment.

The occasion of their call upon him was an opportunity for the expression of his strong and tender affection for all that do the will of God. The heavenly relationship was the one *dearest* to him.

In the opposition which our Lord incurred and the manner in which he met it, there are valuable lessons for all who are similarly tried. Opposition and persecution are the inevitable concomitants of activity in the service of God, and they should be met with reason and candor; and when these fail of their purpose, then, with solemn warnings of the dangers of such a course, the wilful opposer should be left to pursue his own course while we turn to others with the message of salvation.

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