

**The Feast of Christ's Descent into Hell, April 27, AD 2025**

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**He Comes to Deliver Us**

Luke 11:14–28

Alleluia! Christ is risen!

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Jesus said: **"If it's by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. 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"** (vv 20–22).

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Today we'll begin by thinking a little bit about prayer. Prayer is a basic spiritual practice. I assume that everyday you probably brush your teeth and wash your hands because that's good hygiene—an essential everyday habit. Prayer is like that, spiritually speaking. It's good for us. Even necessary for our life. So for your sake, and for the sake of others, don't neglect to pray! Pray every day, multiple times a day. If you don't know what to pray, you likely know the words of the Lord's Prayer, the Our Father. You can simply say that.

Why do I start like this today, when we are celebrating Christ's descent into hell? It's because prayer is one of the weapons Jesus gives us to fight against the devil and all his works and all his ways. We don't have a lot of weapons to fight the devil, but prayer is one of them. We turn from our own strength, asking for our Father in heaven and His Son, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit to defend and protect us. We see this especially in the Lord's Prayer. How does Jesus teach us to pray? He gives us the words "Deliver us from evil."

Deliver us from evil. What does that mean? Really, what we're asking is for Him to deliver us from the evil one, from the devil. We shouldn't think of evil as a "thing" in itself. Evil doesn't have its own existence. It's always parasitic on something else. Remember how it was in the beginning? God created the heavens and the earth and everything in them. He made the angels (the unseen realm) and plants, animals, and man (which we *can* see). It was all very good. But there's one thing God didn't create, because it's not a created *thing*. God didn't create evil. Evil isn't like that.

So it raises the question: Where does evil come from? I'll tell you where it comes from. It started with rebellion against God and His created order and world. Angels fell first—Satan and those who joined him. The Bible calls them demons or unclean spirits. We believe that they are real—real powers, unseen but real. They're a corruption of what God made them to be. They're a perversion of God's original plan. That's all evil is. Evil is simply rejection of the good. Think about what evil can *not* do. Evil can't build anything. Evil can't create anything. Evil can't contribute anything. Evil can't help anything. All it can do is take what is good—what God has made and given—and ruin it. It makes nothing better; it can only undo, unravel, and ruin.

This is a good litmus test to use as you think about your own life and your life in this world. When you see something or encounter something, you can ask if it's the sort of thing that leads to what is good and beautiful and true. If it's the sort of thing that leads to what is good, beautiful, and true, then it's not of the devil. It's not evil. It's of God. I say that with a warning. There are, of course, many things that pretend to be good, beautiful, and true. Even the devil disguises himself as an angel of light. But it's only a disguise. Underneath is rot and decay. Take things in our world: adultery, porn, greed, hate, and so many other things. They're all like that. Even if, on the surface, there may be appeal of some sort, all you have to do is scratch it and find the rot beneath. What's the fruit from them? What do these things *do* and *bring forth*? Nothing good. Scratch the surface and you'll only find death—but don't actually scratch the surface! No, stay far away from them. The Scriptures tell us that. FLEE FROM SEXUAL IMMORALITY (1 Corinthians 6:18). FLEE FROM IDOLATRY (1 Corinthians 10:14). But here's the interesting one: RESIST THE DEVIL, AND HE WILL FLEE FROM YOU (James 4:7).

Satan's plan, of course, has always been to get humanity to join him. As I said, the angels fell first, and then Satan's plan was to bring the rest of creation with him. Why does he want humanity to join him? It's not because he loves us. He doesn't love anything. Only God is love. The devil doesn't offer us anything or entice us because he loves us. No, he wants us because he hates God and hates everything good from God, everything God made and loves he hates and wants to ruin, and that includes us. As Satan ruined himself, so he wants to ruin every man, woman, and child forever. That's why he seduced and deceived Eve. It wasn't because he wanted to offer them something good or improve their lives. That was a lie. He wanted to destroy them. Then Adam simply came along for the ride. "YOU WILL BE LIKE GOD" (Genesis 3:5), and Adam thought, "What if it's true?" and "Why not?" and "What can it hurt?" And so "we are all conceived and born sinful and are under the power of the devil until . . . ." We'll get there. Oh, God, deliver us from evil!

I want to think for a little bit longer about the characteristics of the devil and his kingdom. So how would you describe Satan's rule? What are the characteristics that define his kingdom? Here's a little list I came up with: anarchy, chaos, disorder, lies, darkness, deception, fear, sin, hate, despair, belittling, lawlessness, and death. Like I said, that's just the start. I'm sure you could add lots of other things, including particular sins and temptations that we face. These are things that mark Satan's kingdom. Now for a follow up question: Where do you see these things at work in our world? In our nation? In your own home and life and heart? I'm not really concerned about pointing the finger at everything around us. To be sure, there's plenty of evil out there.

I'm concerned, first, about us. What are the things we take in, that we embrace, the things that we watch and listen to each day? Are they marked by anarchy, chaos, disorder, lies, darkness, deception, fear, sin, hate, despair, belittling, lawlessness, and death? Because if they are, then I can tell you where they're coming from. Have we opened ourselves to the evil one and his works and his ways? Do we cheer on things that we shouldn't just because it's "our side" doing it? It's true that sometimes things have to be torn down before they can be rebuilt. A house that's condemned doesn't just need a facelift. It needs to be taken down and rebuilt. But here's the question as we look at our world and the things around us and the things that are happening: What's being built? What's the good and the beautiful and the true that's coming out of this? Because if we can't find it, then we ought to question where it's coming from. Sometimes it seems like we—and I really mean us here—as if we get awfully excited about the tearing down, as if that's everything. It's not.

Then I'm concerned about how we think, speak, and act in our own lives. Has evil wormed its way into us, maybe without our even knowing it? Do we even hear ourselves when we speak? Do we hear how we speak to our spouse, our children, our siblings? Do we hear how we talk about our neighbors and even our friends? Do we know what our body language, facial expressions, and demeanor is saying? Deliver us from evil!

The fight is fierce. The warfare long. But God promised He would fight for us. He would fight for us against the devil and the unclean spirits and everything that is unholy and a lie. Right from the beginning He made that promise. He committed Himself to the battle against evil for the long haul—to reclaim the ground from the devil one inch at a time, soul by soul, generation after generation. God is in it for the long game. The Lord God said to the serpent (mark these words well): "I WILL PUT ENMITY BETWEEN YOU AND THE WOMAN, AND BETWEEN YOUR SEED AND

HER SEED; HE SHALL BRUISE YOUR HEAD, AND YOU SHALL BRUISE HIS HEEL” (Genesis 3:15).

God promised a “he.” A man. In the flesh, right in the thick of it, bruising and being bruised. That’s the first promise of the Savior, right there in Genesis chapter 3. A Savior from sin. A Savior from death. But today—a Savior from the devil. God always had the devil in His crosshairs, but especially when He sent His Son behind enemy lines. Jesus came to this fallen world. He came to fight for us against the devil and all his works and all his ways. He showed up and said, “You wanna see a kingdom? I’ll bring it.” Not like the devil’s fake kingdom. The real king and the true kingdom have arrived.

That’s why so much of Jesus’ ministry was devoted to conflict with the devil. He was tempted in the wilderness. On many occasions, He cast out unclean spirits and demons, even to the extent that people were accusing Him of being in league with the devil. He set free those who were oppressed and afflicted. When we think about the reality of the devil and the evil that he does, he comes across to us as a **STRONG MAN**, one who is **FULLY ARMED** with a **PALACE** that can’t be taken (v 21). That’s how he appears to us. We see and hear the evil and we find how it’s wormed its way into our own lives, and we say, “There’s a **STRONG MAN**. I can’t take him on.” But Jesus stretched out His finger and it was stronger than the devil’s thigh. **ONE STRONGER** than the devil is here (v 22). Thank God for that!

And Jesus showed His strength. He did a major flex. After His death but before He appeared alive again on earth, He descended into hell as the **STRONGER Man**. He took the fight right into Satan’s territory, and He said, “Look! See here. I’ve won. It’s over. You’re finished.” I imagine Jesus standing there and showing the devil His hands and His side. “I’ve done it. I’ve paid for it. All those accusations you want to throw against My sheep—they’re not gonna land. I paid for their sins. That death you hang over them, so frightening—I punched a hole right in its belly. They’re gonna walk right through.” The devil has lost his power. The devil can roar and rage, but he can’t have Jesus or those who belong to Jesus. And Jesus went into hell to tell him, “I have won!” Alleluia! Christ is risen!

Christ has won, and He’s come for you. He’s come to rescue from the clutches and jaws of the devil. He’s come to say to you, “You are Mine, and no one else can have you.” Jesus doesn’t share. He doesn’t share those who belong to Him. He will not share you with sin. He will not share you with death. And He will not share you with the devil, because He loves you too much. You are His, dear Christian, and His victory over the devil is your victory over the devil as well. Whenever you run into a temptation or a

struggle or you see evil around or in, you can do this: Simply turn and say, “Deliver us from evil.” Your Lord hears. And He comes. And He helps. Deliver us from evil.

The last verse we read from Luke’s Gospel, however, has a different flavor to it. A woman in the crowd cries out as Jesus is saying these things about the STRONGER ONE overcoming the STRONG MAN. She says, “BLESSED IS THE WOMB THAT BORE YOU, AND THE BREASTS AT WHICH YOU NURSED!” (v 27). Jesus says, “BLESSED RATHER ARE THOSE WHO HEAR THE WORD OF GOD AND KEEP IT” (v 28). What is it that makes the devil flee? What is it that the devil cannot stand? What is it that scares that STRONG MAN? It’s the WORD OF GOD, the Word preached to you that you hear and believe. The devil is frightened by that. Wherever God’s Word is present, he sees the kingdom of God coming.

And what are the marks of that kingdom? God’s kingdom isn’t a kingdom of chaos and anarchy. His kingdom is a kingdom of order and harmony, truth and light, freedom, life, righteousness, peace, and forgiveness—of all that is good and right and true. That’s the kingdom that Jesus is bringing—bringing to us right now and right here. That’s the kingdom Jesus is building.

But to wrap up for today: We started with prayer, the petition “Deliver us from evil.” Let’s conclude with another petition of the Lord’s Prayer: “Thy kingdom come.” We’re asking for Jesus to rule and reign in our lives, but not only in our lives. We’re asking Jesus to bring His rule and reign to those who are not yet in His kingdom. To push back the darkness. To plant His flag. To drive the devil away.

Martin Luther said this about the kingdom of God: It comes “eternally through revelation” until “the devil’s kingdom . . . is finally destroyed, sin, death, and hell consumed, that we live eternally in complete righteousness and blessedness” (*Large Catechism* III, 54). That’s what Christ brings. That’s what He’s bringing now. And that’s what He will bring finally and fully when He comes again in glory on the Last Day.

The battle may still be raging. The war is over. Christ is the victor. He lives. He reigns. And He has you forever.

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The peace that passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

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*Phil 4:7*