

Text: Luke 11:14-28

Title: A House Divided

Truth: Jesus exposes the ill logic of rejecting Him and calls us to hear His word and obey it.

Date/Location: Sunday July 7, 2024 at FBC

Introduction

After teaching His disciples to pray, Jesus returns to the more public teaching and mercy ministry characteristic of the earlier chapters in Luke.

I. The Miracle and Its Power Source, 14a, 20

- A. The occasioning incident was the **healing of a demon that caused muteness** in a person. When the Lord removed the demon, the mute person suddenly began to speak. This does not teach that all muteness is caused by demons. It does say that at least one case in history *was* so caused, and I suspect others have been as well.
- B. Christ has **the power to cast out demons**, and anything else that He pleases to do. What can He *not* do? Anything that is unholy, not in accord with His character, anything not good.
- C. Jesus uses the term **“the finger of God”** to indicate from whence His power came to command the demons. He only needed point with a finger, figuratively speaking, to tell a demon to get lost. Matthew 12:28 explains this metaphor by using the phrase “by the Spirit of God.” So, the metaphor “finger of God” means the same as “the Spirit of God.” It is by the power of God’s Spirit that Jesus does the miracle.¹ In only three contexts does the Bible speak of the finger of God:
 - 1. When Pharaoh’s magicians said that the lice plague was “the finger of God” because they could not replicate the miracle with their dark arts (Ex. 8:19).
 - 2. The 10 Commandments were written by “the finger of God” (Ex. 31:18, Deut. 9:10).

¹ When the Pharisees attribute Jesus’s miracles to the power of the Devil, they are speaking slanderously of the *Spirit of God*, the true source of the power.

3. This passage, where the Lord cast out demons with the same power of “the finger of God” (Luke 11:20).

If God’s finger represents this power, what about His hand, or His arm, or His Son, or the resurrection of Jesus from the dead?

II. Responses of the Crowd to the Miracle, 14b-16, 27

- A. The onlookers did not question what happened because it was obvious. **Many people marveled** at it. In Matthew 12:23, **some wondered if this was the Messiah**, David’s Son.
- B. **Some dismissed the miracle** and Jesus by questioning the authority by which He did it. They had to find another explanation because although they could not deny that something special had happened, they also could not bring themselves to admit Jesus was something special. Their hypothesis was that Jesus cast out demons by the power of Beelzebub, that is, Satan. Obviously, this would “let them off the hook” in their own mind because they would not have to listen to a partner of the demonic realm.

Beelzebub derives from the Canaanite idol Baal. In some superstitious traditions, he represents gluttony and jealousy. Remember that the Pharisees claimed that Jesus was a glutton and a winebibber (7:34). The name derives from Baal Zebul, “Lord of the house” which explains why the Lord used the divided house illustration and the strongman over his house. Another variation of this name came to be Baal Zebub, “Lord of the Flies.”

- C. **Others asked Jesus to perform a sign from heaven.** They would simply not be satisfied no matter what Jesus did! By this request, they likely meant that they wanted to see a spectacular cosmic sign in the sky or heavens, something more than a demon removal. There is no clear indication that they *wanted* to believe Jesus, for if they did, they would. Instead, this is a stall tactic, or a tactic to hedge their bets and make an excuse for themselves, like, “Well, we do not know for sure if He *is* the Messiah or not, so we need yet more evidence.”
- D. Another response is in verse 27: **misdirected praise** toward Jesus’s *mother*! In verses 27-28, a woman noted the wisdom of Jesus in His answer to the false accusation. She could not contain herself

and cried out somewhat rudely in the crowd a statement of blessing to the womb and breasts that nourished Jesus in His youth. These body parts stand for the whole—the mother who carried and nursed Jesus. (Grammarians: This is, in other words, a figure of speech called a *synecdoche*, in which a part represents the whole. It is also a type of *metonymy* in which one attribute of a thing stands in place of the whole thing, like “the suits in the C-suite” which stands for the big bosses that run the company.)

The woman asserts that Jesus is so amazing that His mother was blessed to have such an offspring, and perhaps the reverse as well, that Jesus is impressive because His mother was too.

III. Jesus Answers the Various Responses, v. 17-26, 28

We must not forget the part that Luke records that **Jesus knew their thoughts** (11:17). He not only can cast out demons by His own inherent power, and heard some of their words, but He also knew what the crowd was thinking as to their motivations and intentions. He knew if they honestly believed in Him or not. And He knows what *you* are thinking (Ps. 139:2). Convicting, is it not?

Jesus addressed the Beelzebub accusation first and that is where we must focus our attention in this message. We will revisit their desire for a miraculous sign at 11:29.

Jesus reasons with them based on a **proverbial truth**, then by exposure of a **double standard**, and then gives **two illustrations**. The first is the “strongman” illustration and the second is the “unclean spirit returns” illustration. Finally, He **responds to the woman** who blessed His mother.

A. The **proverbial truth**: a kingdom divided against itself cannot stand. Consider Rehoboam’s kingdom after Solomon; the kingdom of Satan; a present-day home in which husband and wife are fighting all the time; and the United States. What exactly is holding us together right now? Hatred is tearing at the seams.

Jesus simply asks what makes sense: is it that I cast out demons by Satan’s power, or by God’s power? He asked them to think through that. Logically it only makes sense that He could be doing it by God’s authority and power.

If they really believed Satan cast out Satan's own emissaries, their reasoning was absurd and they should be embarrassed.

- B. Exposing their **double standard**. Their own disciples ("sons") claimed to cast out demons. By what power did they do so? If you believe they can do that by God's power, why not Jesus? Not only then were they being absurd, their double standard was arbitrary. Their sons could see that, so they would judge correctly.

An implication for the kingdom of God: if indeed it is true that Jesus casts out demons by the power of God—and He does—then the kingdom in the form of its King has come into the midst of Israel. This should cause shiver down the spine of any decent Israelite or Christian. Yes, the kingdom was present in the person of its king. And when He left, it also left.

- C. The **first illustration of a strongman overcoming another man** is clear in the abstract, but the concrete meaning may elude you. Jesus is saying that since He cast out the demon, He is stronger than Beelzebub, for He commands Beelzebub's servants. The **strongman represents the Devil**. He is fully armed, guards his palace and kingdom and everything is under control. The **stronger man represents Jesus**, who comes and despoils and de-arms Satan. He can and does defeat Satan.

This feels good to us who hope for **good to win over evil**, but the Bible's storyline of good-over-evil is more complicated and nuanced. The victory of Jesus came at infinite cost, a cost which only He was able to pay. It will be in the end a "clean" victory but there is a long delay between the work of Christ that secures the victory over sin and death and the implementation of it. In the meanwhile, an ongoing battle against evil is raging in the world and in our souls.

The big point is not that a kingdom divided cannot stand. That is a proverbial truth to be sure, but it serves a *larger point, namely that since a kingdom divided cannot stand, Jesus's power is not from Satan, and thus it must come from God since He is the only one stronger than Satan. And since that is the case, you must choose whose side you are on: for Jesus or against. Those who are for Jesus hear the Word that Jesus preaches and they obey it.*

Repeatedly the Bible pronounces blessings on those who obey God and His word, and woe upon those who do not. Consider Rev. 1:3; James 1:25; Psalm 1:1-3.

D. The **second illustration** is of an **unclean spirit who leaves a person**.

Whether through a failed exorcism,² or because of an exercise of its own free will, the demon leaves its host. This leaves the host person's life in a state of improvement, but it is not permanent. After the demon wanders about the spiritual world looking for a more suitable place, but does not find one, he gathers some demons more wicked than himself and moves back into the host person. Because the person did not become a Christian, they had no indwelling Spirit to repel the demon's return.

If you try to remain in "neutral," evil will come back to control you in one form or another, and quite likely worse than before. There are no real "power" vacuums, no neutral territory.

The Jews whom Jesus had freed from demonic domination, and the nation as a whole, had an opportunity to respond properly to Jesus and avoid the worst state. The reality is that we today also can be freed from Satan's power. This is a warning for the nation of Israel and us that we will be worse off if we do not follow the Lord Jesus. You cannot keep a demon out of an unoccupied house. You must fill the house with God and with Christ and His Spirit. Then it will no longer be available to a demon, nor attractive as a target.

E. About the **blessing of Jesus's mother**: Jesus replies not by taking away from His mother, but by highlighting that *true* blessing comes to those who hear God's word and obey it. They do so not out of a superstitious reverence for a *book*, but rather for the *God* who authored the book. By no stretch of the imagination are we to think that Jesus was extolling His mother, or encouraging Mariolatry, or giving reverence or veneration for His mother above all other women. The "more than" or "rather" language clearly puts that notion away.

² "Failed" because it proved later to be temporary.

Conclusion

Jesus did the miracle, in part, to expose their illogical and empty thinking about Him, and to elicit a response to show them where their hearts were.

The correct response of a person to Jesus is not to accuse Him of being in league with the Devil; the correct response is not to ask for a sign from Heaven; the correct response is not to stand back and take a neutral position; the correct response is not to focus on another person even if that person is somehow connected to Jesus. Rather, what you need to do is recognize that if you are not with Jesus, you are not in agreement with Jesus, then you are against Him. If you are not working for Him, you are against Him.

Rather, the correct response to Jesus is to recognize Him as Lord of all (even over the demonic realm) and to hear God's word, which He preached, and to obey it.

In this message I did not address the unforgivable sin, the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit. That is because, although Jesus did address it according to Matthew 12:31-37, Luke does not focus on it. We are preaching Luke here, so we focus on his train of thought. You need not worry yourself about the unforgivable sin if you choose to be on Jesus's side and to heard and obey His word.

9:51 marked a clear shift of focus for the Lord. This section in chapter 11 shows the trend of the Jewish leaders moving toward hardened opposition, rejecting Him and His kingdom. The stage for the suffering of Jesus is now set.

You need to evaluate your own response to the Lord Jesus. Are you like any of these responses—illogical, absurd, re-directing, mis-directing, professing to be neutral, not caring about the word of God or obeying it? Or are you like a wise man who hears what Jesus says and obeys it (Luke 6:46-49, Matt. 7:24)?

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