

## **The Gospel According to Luke**

Luke 11:14-28

Reading: Luke 11:14-28

Sermon #50

September 22, 2019

## **The Kingdom Has Come**

### **Divided Kingdoms**

People today are into vampires and zombies; the movies, TV shows and video games number in the hundreds. However, serious discussions about the spiritual realm is not one many people are at ease with. Seriously discussing the spiritual world as taught in the Bible is avoided. Today we are going to examine the spiritual world using our passage in Luke as the backdrop. What research studies are showing the number of people who believe in the supernatural is increasing, unfortunately people are not being drawn to the only source of eternal truth concerning the supernatural. So, even though the world is seeking supernatural events from aliens to superhumans to zombies to appearances of Mary hoping for a blessing, they are not from God. We, this morning, as the children of the only authentic God will seek true eternal understanding of the spiritual realm.

Let me give you some quick information as background; a survey gave interesting statistics on people's belief of the supernatural. Take into consideration that about 16% of the world's population today (projected to decline to 13% by 2050) believes in one of the major religions; Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism. In 2015 there were about 2.1 billion people who identify themselves as Christian and 1.6 billion Muslims. It is projected by 2050 there will be 2.9 billion Christians and 2.7 billion Muslims, and the other religions will keep about their same numbers. With this in mind, let me ask a few questions.

1. How many people, on average, believe in the supernatural? Would you think it is greater and lesser than 50%? The actual number is 85%.
2. What was the percentage of people who said they personally experienced a supernatural event? I am one who has experienced supernatural events of God, especially in the mission field. Do you think the number is higher or lower than 50%? The answer is 68%.
3. What percentage of people claim they have seen or felt a spirit's presence? I am again am one who believes I have felt the presence of God's protection when men were sent to kill me in the mission field. What do you think was the percentage; higher or lower than 50%? It was lower, the answer is 31%.

To be honest, this was not the most comfortable concept. But I am committed to teach through the Bible and that means as the Lord inspired and the writers wrote under God's direction, we will deal with it all – the good, bad and ugly of mankind and of good versus evil.

We began this morning with **Garth** reading to us the Word of God out of Luke. The passage begins with Jesus expelling a demon out of the mute man. Reading from the middle of verse 14, “When the demon had gone out, the mute man spoke, and the people marveled. <sup>15</sup> But some of them said, “He casts out demons by Beelzebul, the prince of demons,” <sup>16</sup> while others, to test him, kept seeking from him a sign from heaven.” No matter how many signs and miracles Jesus did, it was never enough.

The story is pretty straight forward, but some background may help. We know that this Beelzebul is Satan because Jesus relates the two names together in

verses 18 and 19. Why did those who were speaking use the name Beelzebul? First of all, there are indications from Matthew and Mark that those speaking are Pharisees, who are the educated and religious elite and desired to keep Jesus from gaining acceptance with the people of Israel. Beelzebub found in 2 Kings chapter 1, was the name of the pagan god of the Philistine city of Ekron and means “lord of flies” and here in our Luke passage the slight name change to Beelzebul gives it a meaning; “lord of dung” and in Luke’s passage it is the name attached to Satan, the prince of demons. The Pharisees used this name to insult Satan and by relationship, try to show Jesus is a servant of Satan. In Luke 12 and Mark 3, one learns there is an unpardonable sin, **“everyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but the one who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven.”** (Luke 12:10) The Pharisees do not commit the unpardonable sin by maligning Jesus, but when one attributes the works of God the Holy Spirit, are really the works of Satan; then they are blaspheming. The question is, did they blaspheme the Holy Spirit and cross the line of no return and therefore, they will not be forgiven? So, is **“the finger of God”** in verse 20 referring to the Holy Spirit? If the Pharisees blasphemed the Holy Spirit this would explain their unrelenting march to destroy Jesus for, they would be beyond being reconciled back to God.

### **The Power of Authority**

If you have watched any movies about exorcisms, and for the record, I do not recommend one watching this sort of movie, from what I have read and the short clips I have seen, the exorcism is always imagined as a terribly involved process, as a struggle which requires lots of special paraphernalia and incantations and drama. If there is no spinning around on the ceiling, no candles or pentagrams, no exhaustive fight with the demon, it would hardly be an exorcism worthy of a movie! Typically, there is a bit of an extended wrestling match between the

possessed with the demon, which is exhausting and once the demon leaves, the person collapses. That is our society's modern picture, given by media and it seems likely that human efforts to exorcise demons may have been similar back at the time we are examining because of the way people respond to Jesus. Christ on the other hand, had a no-nonsense, no-fuss approach to exorcism and this was out of the ordinary and was extraordinary. But the process was simple, straight forward and extraordinarily effective too. The crowd is amazed.

So, although it is perhaps a bit of a disappointment for some, the passage we are studying is not about giving tips on how to do an exorcism. It really does not show us anything in terms of how Jesus went about this – he is just busy, he does it and then it is done. That is all we know. As far as we can tell it seems the process of exorcism was unremarkable, but very effective - hardly the stuff of movies. The point of this section is not to teach us how to do exorcisms – there is just the bare minimum of information concerning the exorcism.

So, if that is not the point, what should we be learning? Well Jesus' exorcism leads to some questions - and in answering those questions, Jesus pulls back the curtain and explains more of what is going on behind the scenes. This is where the focus is in this text. It is about the power and authority of God as given and demonstrated through the Son of God, Jesus!

The starting point is a question raised by Jesus' manifest power, how come he can so easily and reliably succeed in exorcism? That is what some of the crowd are wondering, as they watch in verse 15. Is it, perhaps, that he is in league with evil forces? Wielding the power of this prince of demons? Jesus points out two logical flaws in that line of thinking.

First, it makes no sense for Jesus to be working in league with Satan as he acts decisively to deliver people from Satan. Why would Satan give his power to be used against his own kingdom? Jesus makes the point that any and every divided kingdom will fall... As I thought about this it also came to my mind - here is a truth our politicians should be paying more attention to.

Second, should not that sort of critique apply equally to their own exorcists? You see, it seems there are other people, Jewish contemporaries of Jesus, working to deliver people from demons also - perhaps we caught a glimpse of them a few weeks back, when John said to Jesus, **“Master, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he does not follow with us.”** (Luke 9:49) This is why Jesus says in verse 19, **“by whom do your sons cast them out?”** Jesus is referring to the Jewish exorcists. Exorcism is a ritual of power performed in order to drive out an evil spirit, from a possessed person or even a location or object. Josephus recounts incidents of possession and exorcism in his Antiquities of the Jews in volumes 2, 5, 8 and 45 to 48. In his description, exorcism involved burning herbs and immersing the possessed person in water. The Dead Sea Scrolls include several exorcism incantations and formulas. The Psalms collection found in the Dead Sea Scrolls and in particular (11Q5) has “four songs for the charming of demons with music.” Sounds a little like the movies we talked about. People who fell under the influence of false prophets and mediums were thought to also require the exorcism of possessing evil spirits. God reveals through his prophet Zechariah in chapter 13 the seriousness of this problem of false prophets and mediums, God says he will cleanse the land of the false, and **“if anyone again prophesies, his father and mother who bore him will say to him, ‘You shall not live, for you speak lies in the name of the LORD.’”** (Zechariah 3:13) So, there were others both using Jesus’ names and possibly those using many other

forms exorcism. You will remember Jesus specifically gave the 12 disciples the power over demons back in the first verse in chapter 9. Either way, there are other people out exorcising demons and spirits. If the Pharisees are questioning Jesus, should not these others be questioned? It is like Jesus is saying, “You know, if I am doing this unarguably good thing and it requires evil powers to obey my command. The question I put to you is, then just how do you think anyone is able to do an exorcism without the power and authority of God?”

### **Jesus’ Supremacy**

What is the alternative? Where is it that Jesus gets his undeniable powers from? In verse 20 Jesus gives the answer, “**it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons**” The first thing when I read this that came to mind is the Sistine Chapel ceiling where Michelangelo painted the creation of Adam with God reaching out and his finger touching Adam’s finger. But that is not the meaning that this phrase would have had for the original audience. For them, it would more likely connect back to Israel’s very beginning, to captivity in Egypt and a contest of power, between Moses and Pharaoh leading to the Hebrew Exodus, where God delivered his people from Egypt and brought them out into freedom. The Lord told Moses to bring the 3<sup>rd</sup> plague upon Egypt, the plague of gnats. The magicians of Pharaoh could not duplicate it. “**Then the magicians said to Pharaoh, ‘This is the finger of God.’ But Pharaoh’s heart was hardened, and he would not listen to them, as the LORD had said**” would happen. (Exodus 8:19) Normally Luke attributes Jesus’ authority and power to coming from God, just as God had given Moses authority and power. Even if one did not believe Jesus was the Messiah, they would have to admit that God had given him authority and power because of the signs and wonders he did. Jesus is pointing his critics to the only other real source for his power, if his power cannot come from Satan it had to come from God himself.

If even the pagan magicians of their ancient enemy, Egypt, could identify the power of God at work, how is it that these Jewish people, the descendants of Abraham could not recognize God's power and authority? How could they possibly doubt it? This is obviously God's power at work! But Jesus does not stop there, he goes on to draw a conclusion from this truth. Jesus is saying in verse 20, "if I drive out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you." That is, the kingdom of God has arrived. It has broken into the world. God's kingdom will now begin the battle to overthrow Satan. God has begun the time in history where the prince of this world is being overtaken and when Christ returns and Satan will be defeated and be thrown into the Lake of Fire for eternity.

The crowds should not be worrying about Jesus' background, but where his power comes from and marveling at what it signifies - In Jesus, God is returning to reclaim what is rightfully his. The battle has begun and God's kingdom is beginning to overrun Satan's.

Jesus picks up this conflict as he continues in the parable - he goes on to tell the people, that the strong man is fully armed, guarding his house and possessions and they are safe in verse 21. That appears to be a positive picture; sounds reasonable and right. But actually, the strong man is an impostor; he is speaking of Satan who is being pictured as strong, well-armed and guarding what he claims belongs to him. Satan thinks his possessions are secure – until, until someone stronger attacks him and overpowers him. Jesus is picturing himself here as the victorious conqueror, for he is God come for mankind's salvation and is stronger than Satan. When he talks about taking away armor and dividing plunder in verse 22, those are typical acts of a victorious conqueror, the way one would show their complete victory over the enemy.

We might initially think this picture refers specifically to demon possession since that is where the conversation began in verse 14 - but I think Jesus is talking about something much bigger; he is talking about the kingdom of God coming. Glance back and notice how many times Jesus mentioned kingdoms in this passage - kingdoms divided against themselves; Satan's kingdom; and then, where he finishes verse 20 - speaking about the kingdom of God, so 3 times in 6 verses.

What is Jesus giving us a picture here? Satan's kingdom will not fall because there is now some dividing. Alas the kingdom of evil is far from being terminally divided. It will fall because it comes up against another king, a stronger king, a king who can overpower him. Although Satan's kingdom is established, although he has a measure of strength and a range of weapons at his disposal, and although he thinks his place is secure, when Jesus comes, with all the power of God; Satan, the impostor, is utterly defeated and Jesus, the true king, is utterly victorious. The contest and battle is lived out in human history, but when Jesus returns the battles come to an end and the war is won, Satan is defeated and God reigns triumphant for all eternity.

The answer to the question is, yes, God's kingdom has come. Jesus, the stronger one, he can exorcise demons at will, overpowering Satan, taking ground back from Satan's kingdom, but this also plays out more generally. You see there is a sense in which this world has been surrendered to Satan - in John's gospel, Jesus repeatedly calls Satan "**the prince of this world**" (John 12:31; 14:30 and 16:11). Satan does not just hold sway where someone is possessed by one of his minions - he has broader control than that. However, also remember God is omnipresent and Satan or one of his demons is not.



Luke, the author of the gospel we are reading from, will later report the risen Jesus telling Paul that his mission is; **“to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, for when this happens they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.”** (Acts 26:18) The implication is Satan’s rule is much more widespread - not dependent just on demon possession and does this **not** make sense as we see what is happening in the world and our everyday experience? We see the effects of Satan’s rule played out in countless evil acts round the world, day by day - not just acts of demon-possession.

When we humans turn away from God’s right to rule over us and one claims that leaves them free to do whatever they want, the truth is a total illusion. The Bible tells us we are not taking back control – we have just blindly surrendered to another’s control. Think about the story of the Garden of Eden, when Adam and Eve turn their back on God’s rule and believe the serpent’s lies, they end up eating the forbidden fruit. Does this make them free? Are they free to rule themselves? The answers are, “no”. All they have done is allowed the serpent to rule over them instead of God. God loved them without reservation and desired good for them. On the other hand, Satan’s desire is for control and he has little regard for what is best for them, he manipulates with the sole purpose of people no longer knowing God. This is why the world sees evil as normal. They reap the reward for their decisions. Sins can be forgiven but the consequences may last for a long time and we are still dealing with the consequences that began with Adam and Eve.

### **The Eternal Choice**

This is the point Jesus goes on to make next. After this picture of conflict and victory, he warns, in verse 23, **“Whoever is not with me is against me.”** Here

Jesus is not just thinking of demon possession; he's thinking of this epic conflict between God and Satan, the one which began there in the garden, the one which is playing out still in our world. The point Jesus is making is that everyone is involved, there are no sanctuary cities or states, there is no neutral countries, like Switzerland was in World War II. There is no neutral place to stand, no demilitarized zone, no one is an impassive observer and there is no such thing as an unaligned state free from battle or consequences. Every single person in the whole world is either for Jesus or against him. The clock is ticking, Jesus has come with the power of God to begin the next phase of the battle and the conflict is unfolding around us. Whether we like it or not, we are either working for and with Jesus as he overthrows the kingdom of the enemy and brings in the kingdom of God or, or, we are against him.

I think that is what Jesus is showing us with the story he finishes with about the exorcised spirit who returns with seven more. His point is the house cannot be empty. Someone's going to make themselves at home. It is an illusion to think people can be independent; we are not made like that. We all belong to someone - the only question is – who?

It might not seem like every person in the world around us has taken sides in this conflict. It might look like there are lots of neutral people who are NOT caught up in the conflict and they are just minding their own business, trying to get on with life, and they are decent, ordinary people. But that is part of the cunning of God's enemy, Satan glosses over the evil, from the outside there does not seem to be much wrong, the surface is shiny, it is not until we dig that we find how rotten it is. Although it does not take much digging with what I see happening all around me in the Rio Grande Valley, State of New Mexico and throughout the United States and onto the world at large. You would think that one of the results of

instant world-wide news and media is the exposure of evil and like the Pharisees of old and the evil strongmen of today, but most people have not only turned a blind eye, but they actively begin to participate in an attempt to help glossy over the evil and make evil shiny. They want to justify their own behavior and call evil – “good.”

What really matters though, what truly makes someone a servant of the light or a servant of darkness is what is going on in the heart. That is where the kingdom of Satan, the kingdom of darkness, holds its terrain and the only deliverance from this corruption, the only means of escape, is to have someone else, someone stronger, come and take possession. Who is in possession of your heart, mind and soul? This is why Jesus says, “Whoever is not with me is against me.”

Jesus now gives us another level of detail on what it means to be for him or against him here - “**whoever does not gather with me scatters**”. Again, this pulls us away from simply thinking about demons and possession. Jesus is thinking bigger.

We can look at the story of the Exodus as a paradigm of scattering, - 40 years and the return to the promised land as the gathering. Jesus here is talking about the greatest exile and return of all: the scattering of all people away from God’s presence as a consequence of turning away from God by sin, ignoring God’s ways and sin abounding, and then God through Jesus regathering them back into his presence again.

Think of Adam and Eve, scattered from the garden where they had been together with God from their beginning, think of the people scattered at the Tower of Babel when they sought to exalt themselves rather than God and think of the Israelites scattered in Exile in response to their disobedience to God.

Well finally, there is a time for gathering again. Jesus is bringing those who have turned away from God back. He is overrunning Satan's kingdom, overpowering the strong man, taking back what is rightfully his and as he makes clear there are only two options; to be with him or against him, he equates those options with gathering and scattering.

Do you see your mission - is to share Jesus with others? Jesus says what it means to be "with him" is to gather. Being with Jesus is being active in his mission for he is your Lord. You cannot be with him and not engaged in gathering. If you are not gathering with him, you are scattering. Those are Jesus' words, not mine.

### **No Neutrality**

Well, first I have to ask you: which side are you on? Because there really are only two sides. No passive option. No middle ground. If one thing is clear from this passage, it is this – you are with Jesus or against Jesus.

Jesus is victorious now – Satan's kingdom is being pushed back and Jesus will be victorious – when he returns the war will be won. The Bible points us to the cross as the center-point of his victory, where the battle was ultimately won against Satan. Paul teaches that Jesus "[Disarming the rulers and authorities \(he is referring to the supernatural powers\), he has made a public disgrace of them, triumphing over them by the cross.](#)" (Colossians 2:15) Jesus triumphs over Satan and his evil forces. How? By giving up his life for us, in our place, on the cross – by taking the punishment that should be rightfully have been ours.

How is that a triumph? We were captive to Satan on account of the wrong things we do, the ways we turn away from God. Our sin is what made us the

subjects of his evil kingdom, under his rule. But Jesus takes that sin, and nails it to the cross, so we can be finished with it forever, freed from Satan's rule.

So which side are you on? Have you accepted Jesus' offer of forgiveness?

Remember the thrust of this passage - have you bowed your knee to him as king? My beloved, it is a package deal. You cannot enjoy his forgiveness and grace without also taking him as your king - otherwise you are still in the evil kingdom, with the false king, the prince of this world. You still belong to him.

So which side are you on? No middle ground.

Secondly, if Jesus has set you free from sin and drawn you into his Kingdom, how could you not want to join him in working to share that same freedom with others? With Jesus as your Lord, it becomes one's desire to see more people delivered from Satan's kingdom and gathered in to Jesus' kingdom to enjoy his wonderful grace? Ordinary people like you and me are given the privilege and blessing to join Jesus' great mission, to join the victor. Jesus said, "**Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it**" *and live it and share it!* So which side are you on? No middle ground. Rise to battle for your King! Amen!