



“Choosing Sides”
Luke 11:14-26

Idea: Neutrality is a self-deceiving and dangerous ruse.

Intro: Over the last two weeks, I have driven up on a few car accidents at the corner of Judes Ferry and Highway 60. Those of us who live in Powhatan know that this intersection can be dangerous, and it is often the site of crashes. On each occasion, I was heading to the high school to pick up my daughter from lacrosse practice. Setting there on the highway in a long line of traffic, you begin to contemplate a different route. There are only a few ways to get to the high school from Highway 60, but there are options.

One of the primary objections people have to the Christian gospel is that of its narrowness and lack of options. Jesus said in John 14:6, *“I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”* In this statement, Jesus plainly spells out the narrowness of the gospel message. It is exclusively found in and through Him. There are no other paths or options. The people who object to this claim would ask, “What about the billions of people on earth who are not Christians and who are good people? Will they fail to reach heaven just because they do not believe in Jesus or have never heard of Him?”

Many people believe that all roads lead to God. Regardless of the spiritual path a person may travel, he or she will inevitably come to God. In this understanding what matters is one’s sincerity. The one who sincerely believes, whatever the belief, will be received because his or her religious approach is as good as any other. This pluralistic understanding of the gospel rejects the exclusive claims of the Bible, but what if there is only one way? What if Jesus’ claim of exclusivity is correct?

My family and I live in the Mill Quarter area. If a person wants to visit us or anyone else in Mill Quarter, then there is only one road to take. Mill Quarter Road is the way into this area, and it is the way out of this area. It is an exclusive entrance. Sincerity will not get you into Mill Quarter. You can believe all you want that there are other ways. In fact, you are free to travel down those supposed and sincere paths, but you will only reach a dead-end. The person who wants to visit the Taylor’s house must get on Mill Quarter Road because there are no other options.

As we move into the next passage in Luke 11, the gospel writer presents to us a simple but profound call to choose a side or a path. We discover that neutrality is a self-deceiving and dangerous ruse.

[Read Luke 11:14-26.](#)

Inquiry: Verse 14 opens with Jesus casting out a demon. In many ways this scene is like other exorcisms presented in Luke. Jesus casting out demons has been a common theme in the first ten chapters of this gospel.

One major difference is that the demon in this scene forced muteness upon his host. Therefore, it is important for us to imagine how awful the man's situation was. It is very likely that this man had been unable to speak for several years. Just like for us today, the ability to verbally communicate with others was part of normal everyday life. Not having that, if the poor man in this story could not read or write, his needs and his feelings could only be conveyed by a frustrating combination of facial expressions, body language, gestures, and sounds that probably only he could understand. There were times when he might have felt like a prisoner within his own body. This feeling would have been a true reality because his tongue was chained by a demonic spirit that satisfied its perverse pleasure by keeping him inarticulate. To be tongueless was one thing, but to have one's tongue chained by palpable evil was much worse.

In these verses, we again are reminded that demons are real, that they sometimes afflict people, and that Jesus rules over and casts them out. Luke's purpose, however, in sharing this story and the discussion that follows is to display the imperativeness of choosing a side. There can be no wavering of opinions when it comes to what one believes about Jesus.

Let's examine these verses. There are three parts to it that I want you to see. Then I will offer three takeaways.

1. Questions about Jesus' Identity

Like the other exorcisms Jesus had performed, the crowd here that observed the mute man speaking "*marveled*" (θαυμάζω). They stood in astonishment and wonder of him being able to speak. It is highly probable that the man was praising the Lord for the miracle that had just taken place in his life. He felt it. His tongue, which had been bound, was now free. So, he loudly voiced his praise and gratitude to Jesus for delivering him. I imagine him saying, "Thank you, Master! Hallelujah! I can speak! Praise God! Thank you, Jesus! Hosanna!"

Everyone knew this was a miracle, yet Jesus' critics found a way to explain it away. These critics had two lines of thought. One group responded with slander. They accused Jesus of casting out "*demons by Beelzebul, the prince of demons*" (vs. 15).

During the days of Jesus' life and ministry, "Beelzebul" was an alternative name for Satan in Hebrew culture. In Ugaritic texts the name Beezeboul meant "Baal the prince," but in the Old Testament (2 Kings 1:2-3, 6, 16) the name is rendered "Baal-zebul," meaning "Lord of flies." It was a deliberate distortion to deprecate the pagan god. The Septuagint translates this, "Baal, the fly-god. Therefore, "Beelzebul" was and is a fitting name for Satan, but it was and is a colossal slander when used for Jesus.

This first group of critics sought to slander Jesus by equating him with Satan. The second group was not as inflammatory in their rejection of the miracle. They moderated it through skepticism. Verse 16 says that they sought to "*test him*" and "*kept seeking from him a sign from heaven.*" This group of people discredited the miracle before their eyes. Instead, they wanted a cosmic miracle like the turning back of the sun (2 Kings 20:8-11) or manna from heaven (Ex 16:4). These skeptics gave the impression of being on the fence in their belief and acceptance of Jesus, while continuing to reject Him.

Just as in those days, today people question the identity of Jesus. They see the miracle of redemption and the transformation that takes place in a person's life when the gospel is believed. They observe the man who was once consumed with self and the pleasures of this world now living to please only the Lord and to serve others. They have no explanation for the hope that overflows from the person who was once hopeless. They are baffled by the love that pervades those who are now in Christ. In their perplexity and unwillingness to believe the Bible's teaching of Jesus, they slander His name. They refer to Jesus as a teacher, religious leader, miracle worker, and in more extreme settings another version of Satan himself. Others proclaim they will believe in Jesus when there is more evidence that He is who the Bible says He is. Regardless of how a person rejects the identity of Jesus, we discern from these

verses that we must choose a side, preferably the side that believes what Jesus says of Himself. This leads us to a second part to consider.

2. Answers for Jesus' Critics

The people's rejection of Christ was insulting and outrageous. What was black, they were denying and calling white. Humanly speaking, who would fault Jesus if He had turned away from them without saying a word? Answering fools is no easy task. Those people, however, were standing on the edge of the Abyss, and Jesus cared about their eternity. For this reason, He answered His critics.

His answer is presented in two parts. The first rebuttal is that a divided kingdom cannot stand (vs. 17-19). In essence, Jesus makes the case that no group will last long if it is fighting itself. Division is the great implosioner. Consequently, the idea that Jesus casts out Satan by satanic power makes no logical sense at all. Think about it! Why would Beelzebul fight against Beelzebul? If he did, then he would be destroying his own kingdom.

Jesus makes this point more emphatic by asking, *"And if I cast out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your sons cast them out?"* (vs. 19). Obviously, there were Jewish exorcists at the time who were casting demons out. He was asking, "Were they too under Beelzebul's power?" The answer was clearly, "no," which highlighted the slanders' hypocrisy. The exorcists were operating under the power of God, which is more fully presented in the second rebuttal.

Jesus pushes back in verse 20-22 by declaring that the Kingdom of God is here. He says, *"But if it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you."* This allusion to *"the finger of God"* calls to mind the story of Moses delivering Egypt to repeated displays of supernatural power (Ex 8:19). The phrase is also used to describe how Moses received the two stones tablets that contained the ten commandments. The phrase shows up in the Bible when God's power and revelation in redemption advances in a new way.

Jesus closes his case for the arrival of the Kingdom of God by describing Himself as the stronger man who attacks and overwhelms the strong man. The picture here is not so much of a palace as it is a well-armed castle. The word translated "palace" (αὐλή) also can refer to a courtyard. This strong lord is concerned with maintaining the security of his estate, and being a strong man with substantial power, his possessions are secure until someone stronger attacks. The strong man is Satan. His palace is the mute man. The stronger man who attacks is Jesus. Therefore, the fact that the mute man is no longer mute means that Jesus, as the stronger one, has attacked and ripped the man from the clutches of Satan. Jesus defeated the powers of Satan in order to deliver the mute man. The Kingdom has arrived.

Just as in those days, today Jesus answers His critics. The stories of the Gospels and the greater narrative of the Bible explain that Jesus is in fact the Son of God. He is not another expression of fallen supernatural power. He is not working along with Satan to confuse humanity and further seal their condemnation. No, Jesus is the personification of the Kingdom of God. His work of redemption in the lives of sinful people declare that God's Kingdom has come. There is a third part for us to see.

3. Warnings about Reformation without Regeneration

While many people in the crowd that day sought to slander Jesus, there were those who were not so brash. These skeptics were against spiritual oppression and demon possession. They also probably did not care much for the slanders' inflammatory accusations against Jesus. Nevertheless, they were not compelled to align their lives with Jesus, preferring to remain neutral. Jesus, however, made it clear there can be no middle ground (vs. 23).

The skeptics were well-intentioned. They wanted good to overcome evil. They would have wanted every demon-possessed person to be freed from spiritual bondage. This was the ministry of the Jewish exorcists. Jesus' parable-like words in verses 24-26, however, warn against reformation without regeneration. His point is that anyone who purges evil from his or her life but fails to replace it with God and His truth is in serious moral danger. Please hear me today. Temporary moral reformation is inadequate. It is inadequate because no one is good or true (Rom 3:10-18). All people have turned aside from God and rejected Him. It is also inadequate because every person's life is a vacuum that will be filled with something. If it is not filled with the God who created life, then it will be filled with something that is in opposition to God. This reality emphasizes the terrible danger present in today's post-modern world, with its profound inwardness and focus upon self, employing techniques and technologies that leave a house swept clean and in apparent order, yet empty. Here is a truth we must hear and head: "If a man or woman is empty and without God, any sin and any perversion is possible."

Just as in those days, today we must not seek for our lives to simply be reformed from a lesser condition to a better one. We must instead seek for our lives to be regenerated and born again through Jesus Christ. We must desire for our sins and the evil within our hearts to be forgiven and eradicated through the blood of Jesus. We must desire for God's Spirit to take up residence and for God's Kingdom to be enthroned in our lives. For this reason, let us desire relationship with Christ over religious experience because no one gets better by rejecting the gospel.

Conclusion: In this passage we see that the crowd questioned Jesus' identity. We see how Jesus answered His critics. And we see His warning against reformation without regeneration. Let me add three takeaways.

3 Takeaways

- 1) Jesus believed in a real Satan with a strong and united kingdom.
There is real evil in this world, and it is led by a powerful fallen creature who is referred to as Satan in the Bible.
- 2) Jesus proved Himself to be morally and spiritually superior to Satan and his kingdom.
While Satan and his kingdom is powerful and influential, Jesus is greater in every way.
- 3) Jesus did not permit any middle ground for faith.
Neutrality is a self-deceiving and dangerous ruse. Every person must make a decision about Jesus Christ. To not decide is to decide.

If you are attempting to go to the high school this week but drive up on an accident that is blocking the intersection at Judes Ferry, then thankfully there are a few other options for you. If, however, you are headed to the Mill Quarter Plantation, then there is only one road to take. If there is an accident blocking the intersection at Mill Quarter and Route 13, then you will have to wait for someone to come and clear the wreck and make a way for you.

According to the Bible, there is one way to God, and this way is blocked by the wreckage of sin. Each person's sin lies across the path, blocking the way to God. There is no way around this obstacle that brings condemnation and separation to us. All our efforts to remove the sin that blocks the path fail. In fact, they work to add to the pile of rubble. There is hope though. The Bible tells us that while humanity is helpless to fix their condition, God is able and willing to clear the path.

But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. – Romans 5:8

The death of Jesus Christ, God the Son, fully satisfied the wrath of God the Father against our individual sin. Jesus experienced the righteous judgment against our sin so that we might be forgiven and made righteous through Him.

Read Colossians 2:13-15.

Today, like in Jesus' day, there is a wreckage lying across the path that leads to God in each of our lives. Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection provides the redemption price and the removal of that wreckage. This gracious gift is offered to each of us, but it must be received. Have you received it for yourself? If not, will you receive it today?