

LUKE

Part 45: “The Spiritual Attack of Doubt”

Luke 11:14-26

By David A. Ritchie

Sunday, January 6, 2019 (The Feast of Epiphany)

Scripture Reading

¹⁴ Now he was casting out a demon that was mute. When the demon had gone out, the mute man spoke, and the people marveled. ¹⁵ But some of them said, “He casts out demons by Beelzebul, the prince of demons,” ¹⁶ while others, to test him, kept seeking from him a sign from heaven. ¹⁷ But he, knowing their thoughts, said to them, “Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and a divided household falls. ¹⁸ And if Satan also is divided against himself, how will his kingdom stand? For you say that I cast out demons by Beelzebul. ¹⁹ And if I cast out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they will be your judges. ²⁰ But if it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. ²¹ When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own palace, his goods are safe; ²² but when one stronger than he attacks him and overcomes him, he takes away his armor in which he trusted and divides his spoil. ²³ Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters.

²⁴ “When the unclean spirit has gone out of a person, it passes through waterless places seeking rest, and finding none it says, ‘I will return to my house from which I came.’ ²⁵ And when it comes, it finds the house swept and put in order. ²⁶ Then it goes and brings seven other spirits more evil than itself, and they enter and dwell there. And the last state of that person is worse than the first.” ¹

Heavenly Father, I thank you that you are good, powerful, and true. As we gather in worship before you on this first Sunday of 2019, I pray your Holy Spirit would stir our hearts toward an unflinching devotion to you, so that we may serve you faithfully in the coming year. We pray this in Jesus’s mighty name. AMEN.

Introduction

- After taking a break over the fall, we are diving back into our study of the gospel according to Luke.
- To catch you up on the story, very recently Jesus has been going out of his way to demonstrate who he is and what he is about.
- Initially, people begin to realize that a great prophet has arisen among them.
- The 12 disciples begin to suspect more. Recently, they have confessed that Jesus is none other than the Messiah, the Christ, and the Son of the living God.
- With that now known and understood, Jesus begins his fateful and final journey to the city of Jerusalem.

- If you were a Jew living at this time you and the Messiah finally came, you would expect the

¹ [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Lk 11:14–26.

Messiah to march on Jerusalem. That's what you thought a Messiah would do. The Jews during Jesus's age, by and large, expected the Messiah to be a liberator king. Most of them saw the mission of the Messiah as a political and military mission. In other words, they thought the Messiah would come and fight Israel's military leaders and political oppressors and establish and renewed earthly kingdom.

- And so if you thought Jesus was the Messiah, you would think he was going to raise an army, invade Jerusalem, kick out Rome, and establish a his kingdom.
- You were expecting a military advance and a counter attack.
- You were expecting Aragorn charging the Black Gate of Mordor, with Orc armies counterattacking. Instead, you got a simple rabbi who preached the word of God and healed people who were sick and afflicted, and a few really cranky scribes and Pharisees.

- But make no mistake. A type of spiritual conquest is taking place for those that have the eyes to see. With every step that Jesus takes toward Jerusalem, he is advancing the kingdom of God. With every healing that takes place, he is restoring the brokenness caused by sin. With every demon cast out, he is humiliating the kingdom of darkness. Jesus has been taking ground away from the enemy for some time now.
- And as Jesus's kingdom advances, the kingdom of darkness will now begin counterattack with furious anger. As Jesus ministers, there are voices of opposition that attempt to distract, discourage, and cast doubt upon Jesus's ministry. The gospel of Mark refers to them as scribes who come down from the city of Jerusalem (Mk. 3:22).
- Just as the advance of Jesus's kingdom is a spiritual advance, the opposition that he faces is spiritual. But the stakes of this spiritual war are enormous.
- As Dr. Darrell Bock writes, *"What is at stake in Jesus' ministry is a cosmic battle displaying the right to rule. Like a great war, the combatants are facing off with everything at stake."*²
- That is what is taking place in the text that is before us. And as we prepare to dive deeper, I want us to consider how when God moves in our lives; there is almost always a significant spiritual counterattack that we face.

- Paul tells us later in the New Testament that we should not be ignorant of the designs of Satan, so as to not be outwitted by him (cf. 2 Cor. 2:11).
- So with that in mind, I want to take some time to talk about one of Satan's favorite tactics of spiritual attack. It is the type of subtle attack that we find in our text today – *"The Spiritual Attack of Doubt."*

Exposition

1.) Casting Doubt on the Goodness of Jesus.

- The passage begins with a declarative statement about the healing of a mute boy, which is still amazing.
- Jesus has done so many things like this that there is little fanfare that surrounds this incident.
- The reason it is included is not because of the event itself, but what the event triggered.
- That Jesus is moving with supernatural power is now undeniable, even to his enemies.
- So if they cannot deny his power, they will question his goodness, in hopes that they will lead others to question Jesus's goodness as well.
- They attribute Jesus's spiritual power, not to God, but to Beelzebub, the prince of demons. Beelzebub might refer to an ancient pagan God. It might mean something like "Lord of the

² Darrell L. Bock, *Luke*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1996), 318.

Flies” or “Lord of the Idols.”³ But it is clear from the context, they Jesus enemies are accusing him of being in league with Satan.

- They cannot deny or ignore his ministry. So they refuse to see his ministry as being legitimately from God. They view everything he does as evil and suspect, and even the things he does that would seem to be undeniably good, they attribute to demonic power and nefarious motives.
- They call ultimate good, evil. They call the one who is truth a lie.
- Even today, the gospel is setting people free, but there are those that would call Christianity evil that poisons everything.
- On a more personal level, there are times when it feels like God might be powerful, but he might not be good. Maybe he has a plan for us, but it is not a good plan. We look to the evil of the world and the suffering we have endured, and we allow the enemy to think that God is the one who has made this happen.
- How has the enemy tempted you to doubt God’s goodness?
- How might the enemy tempt you to doubt God’s goodness right now?
- This is a smart, spiritual attack. If you can compromise someone’s character, you can compromise that person’s ability to be trusted.
- So how do we build trust in the goodness of God? Firstly, we remember. We look to what Jesus has done in our lives, and we purposefully remind ourselves of his goodness. Too often we have very poor spiritual memories. To remember the goodness of God is a spiritual discipline.
- Secondly, we allow Jesus to reveal himself on his own terms. We look to the word of God. Challenge yourself to read the Bible this year. And ask the question, who is Jesus? What is he like? Why can I trust a God like this?
- What you will find is that he is more powerful and kind and wise than you could ever imagine. You can trust him.

2.) Casting Doubt on the Truth of Jesus.

- Apart from those that accuse Jesus casting out demons in the name of Satan, there are those that demand a sign.
- Now if we are just looking at Luke 11 in isolation, it might be an acceptable and even reasonable request for some people to want to test Jesus’s credibility before accepting him.
- In ancient times, just like today, there were false teachers and false prophets. Such false teachers were not sent by God, but rather they used the name of God to promote their own prosperity and popularity.
- But by this point in the book of Luke, the evidence is more than ample. Jesus hasn’t just taught the word of God with power. He has healed the sick multiple times. He has cast out demons multiple times. He has miraculously fed thousands of hungry people in the wilderness. He has even raised the dead.

³ “The word occurs nowhere else in N.T. and nowhere all in O.T. With the form Βεελζεβούλ Comp. βᾶαλ μύαν (2 Kings 1:2, 3, 6) and Μύαν (Jos *Ant.* ix. 2, 1) for Beelzebub= “Lord of flies.” But Βεελζεβούλ, is found in no “Greek MS. of N.T., and the form *Beelzebub* owes its prevalence to the Vulgate; but even there some MSS. have *beelzebub*. With the termination βουβ the connexion with the Ekronite god of flies must be abandoned. Βεελζεβούλ may mean either, “Lord of the dwelling,” *i.e.* of the heavenly habitation, or, “Lord of idols,” *i.e.* of idolatrous abomination. “Lord of idols,” “Prince of false gods,” comes close to “Prince of the demons.” *D. B.*² art. “Beelzebub.” It is uncertain whether the Jews identified Beelzebub with Satan, or believed him to be a subordinate evil power.” Alfred Plummer, [*A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to S. Luke*](#), International Critical Commentary (London: T&T Clark International, 1896), 301.

- I have heard it said, for those who believe, they see the evidence of God all around them. For those who do not believe, no amount of evidence could ever be enough.
- That is what is happening at this point in the ministry of Jesus. The evidence is ample. But still, these religious leaders want to cast doubt on the truth of Jesus.
- Doubt itself is not a bad thing
- Tim Keller compares healthy doubt to a healthy immune system.
- But unhealthy doubt is a spiritual immune disorder, which if held consistently, would not allow someone to believe anything.
- Why do we get addicted to such doubt? I have a theory.
- Part of us is viscerally opposed to the lordship of Jesus.
- The scribes of Luke 11:17 feel more comfortable with a version of reality that they can control and predict, instead of a reality where Jesus can demand their allegiance.
- I once was an agnostic who felt that if God existed, he needed to prove himself to me. I thought I needed an airtight philosophical argument or piece of evidence that proved God's existence. But when I began to read the Bible, I became convinced that deep in my heart, I already knew that God existed. But I suppressed that truth because I knew if I believed it, I would have to submit my life to him (cf. Rom. 1:18-25).
- Once I was able to see the uncomfortable truth about myself, I was able to humble myself to receive from the word God truly. I learned that Jesus is true, and he is good.
- Learn to approach God with a heart that is teachable and humble. We cannot stand over Jesus in skeptical evaluation. We must honor him as God and Lord. Learn to doubt your doubts.

3.) Casting Doubt on the Sufficiency of Jesus.

- Jesus responds to these accusations and demand with the mini-parable of the strong man.
- He states the obvious. If he were in league with Satan, why would he hurt himself? A divided house cannot stand.
- Here is what he is saying. Spiritual war is real. Jesus is infinitely stronger than our spiritual enemy. This is good news. We fight out our spiritual battles by clinging to Jesus and letting him fight for us (listen to my recent sermon on "Spiritual War" if you want to learn more about this).
- But if this real. If there is a spiritual enemy, and Jesus is Messiah and God, we must not play in the middle. If we are not for him, we are against him. As Robert Stein rightly says, **"Neutrality with respect to Jesus is impossible."**⁴
- This statement is followed up with a lesson about spirituality that might strike some of you as very odd: **"When the unclean spirit has gone out of a person, it passes through waterless places seeking rest, and finding none it says, 'I will return to my house from which I came.' And when it comes, it finds the house swept and put in order. Then it goes and brings seven other spirits more evil than itself, and they enter and dwell there. And the last state of that person is worse than the first"** (Luke 11:24–26, ESV)
- What is this getting at? I think that Jesus is getting at the doubts beneath all other doubts – doubt that he is enough that he is sufficient.
- Many people will cry out to Jesus to deliver them from trouble or pain in an emergency. But once he sets them free, they will decide that they need to ration their devotion to him.
- They fear that a life all about Jesus is just too much. They don't want to fall headlong into sin

⁴ Robert H. Stein, *Luke*, vol. 24, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 332.

and evil, but they don't really want to get serious about following God either.

- Our sin problem is a worship problem, and unless that problem is dealt with, we will always have problems.
- An empty house invites robbers. An empty heart invites idols.
- As R. Kent Hughes has said about this passage: *"Jesus is saying to his religious hearers that self-reformation without regeneration and the indwelling of God the Holy Spirit is fatal. Temporary moral reformation is inadequate. Anyone who purges evil but puts nothing in its place is in grave moral danger."*⁵
- I think this is actually a really good topic to consider at the first of the New Year when many people consider their lives and make resolutions about how to better themselves and see changes in their lives.
- Consider seeing your need for change from a spiritual angle.
- Consider that the perhaps the greatest need in your life might be not to sin less, but to love Jesus more.
- Thomas Chalmers taught that the only way to rid the heart of an old affection was by the expulsive power of a new one.
- Maybe this is a year in which you don't simply seek to rid yourself of bad habits, but instead replace bad habits with spiritual habits, habits that will increase your love and devotion to Jesus.

Conclusion

- The scribes and Pharisees don't know it yet, the disciples might not fully realize it yet, but Jesus is fully aware the kingdom of God is advancing.
- He knows the true battle that needs to be won is a spiritual battle.
- This is why he marches toward Jerusalem.
- But in Jerusalem, he will not conquer by conquest.
- Instead, he will die on a cross. By the expectations of all around him, he would have failed as a Messiah. But what few realized is that by his life, death, and resurrection, Jesus dealt a fatal blow to the kingdom of darkness.
- The cross is the most unexpected, but also the most powerful act of spiritual war that could ever take place.
- And consequently, the cross of Jesus is the greatest defeater of all our doubts.
- When we look to the cross, we see a savior who dies for his enemies.
- When we look to the cross, we see a God who is serious enough to destroy the power of evil but is merciful enough to destroy evil in a way that doesn't destroy us.
- When we look to the cross, we see that God has paid our debt in full.
- When we look at the cross, we see that Jesus is good, Jesus is true, and Jesus is sufficient.
- Redeemer Christian Church, at the beginning of this New Year, the true change we need is a spiritual change.
- As seek the kingdom of God, we will endure spiritual attack. But Jesus is stronger.
- Let us trust him: he is good, he is true, and he is enough. AMEN.

⁵ R. Kent Hughes, [*Luke: That You May Know the Truth*](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1998), 430.

Community Group Discussion Starters

- 1.) *As Jesus draws near to the city of Jerusalem, his enemies come down to disrupt his ministry and advance. One way they tried to combat Jesus was by accusing him of using demonic power in his ministry, so as to cast doubt upon his character. Have there been times when you have doubted the goodness and truth of Jesus? What are some important ways to remind yourself of the goodness and truth of God?*
- 2.) *Concerning Luke 11:24-26, Dr. Kent Hughes says, "Jesus is saying to his religious hearers that self-reformation without regeneration and the indwelling of God the Holy Spirit is fatal. Temporary moral reformation is inadequate. Anyone who purges evil but puts nothing in its place is in grave moral danger." In light of this, what are the things in your life that need to be replaced with a greater devotion to Jesus?*
- 3.) *How is the cross of Jesus the ultimate proof of the goodness, truth, and sufficiency of Jesus?*

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