

Luke 11:14-36 — Jesus and Beelzebub

¹⁴ Jesus was driving out a demon that was mute. When the demon left, the man who had been mute spoke, and the crowd was amazed. ¹⁵ But some of them said, “By Beelzebub, the prince of demons, he is driving out demons.” ¹⁶ Others tested him by asking for a sign from heaven.

¹⁷ Jesus knew their thoughts and said to them: “Any kingdom divided against itself will be ruined, and a house divided against itself will fall. ¹⁸ If Satan is divided against himself, how can his kingdom stand? I say this because you claim that I drive out demons by Beelzebub. ¹⁹ Now if I drive out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your followers drive them out? So then, they will be your judges. ²⁰ But if I drive out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come to you.

²¹ “When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own house, his possessions are safe. ²² But when someone stronger attacks and overpowers him, he takes away the armor in which the man trusted and divides up the spoils.

²³ “He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me, scatters.

²⁴ “When an evil spirit comes out of a man, it goes through arid places seeking rest and does not find it. Then it says, ‘I will return to the house I left.’

²⁵ When it arrives, it finds the house swept clean and put in order. ²⁶ Then it goes and takes seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there. And the final condition of that man is worse than the first.”

²⁷ As Jesus was saying these things, a woman in the crowd called out, “Blessed is the mother who gave you birth and nursed you.”

²⁸ He replied, “Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it.”

The Sign of Jonah

²⁹ As the crowds increased, Jesus said, “This is a wicked generation. It asks for a miraculous sign, but none will be given it except the sign of Jonah. ³⁰ For as Jonah was a sign to the Ninevites, so also will the Son of Man be to this generation. ³¹ The Queen of the South will rise at the judgment with the men of this generation and condemn them; for she came from the ends of the earth to listen to Solomon's wisdom, and now one greater than Solomon is here. ³² The men of Nineveh will stand up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and now one greater than Jonah is here.”

The Lamp of the Body

³³ “No one lights a lamp and puts it in a place where it will be hidden, or under a bowl. Instead he puts it on its stand, so that those who come in may see the light.

³⁴ Your eye is the lamp of your body. When your eyes are good, your whole body also is full of light. But when they are bad, your body also is full of darkness.

³⁵ See to it, then, that the light within you is not darkness. ³⁶ Therefore, if your whole body is full of light, and no part of it dark, it will be completely lighted, as when the light of a lamp shines on you.”

Luke 11:14-36

1. Jesus performed a miracle (casting out a demon) and there were four reactions to it. What were they? Hint: Jesus responds to each reaction in verses 17-23, 24-26, 27-28, 29-32.
2. The first reaction: By whose power did some think that Jesus could drive out demons? (2 Kings 1:16-17) What did the name Beelzebub come to represent?
3. Jesus refutes the idea that he was driving out demons by Beelzebub in two ways. Summarize the first part of Jesus' first argument in Verses 17-18. (Matthew 7:22, Luke 9:49-50, and Acts 19:13-16)
4. Jesus makes his point another way in Verses 19-20. Explain.
5. In Verses 21-22, how does Jesus makes his second argument that he was not acting on behalf of Beelzebub? (Isaiah 49:24-26)
6. The second reaction: Verse 23 says that those who are negative to Jesus are his enemies. What about those who are neutral?
7. What happens to people who are neutral? Can you resist Satan on your own? (Vs 24-26)
8. The third reaction: How did Jesus respond to the woman who called out a blessing to his mother? Was the focus of the woman right or wrong? Why? What can we learn from her?
9. The fourth reaction: After a very dramatic miracle, why did some people still want a sign from heaven?
10. What was Jesus' response to those who wanted a sign? (Vs 29-32) What does that mean to you today? Would Jesus consider this generation a wicked one?
11. The belief which God commended was based upon inspired words, more than upon works.
12. Summarizing verses 14-32: The belief which God commended was based upon _____, more than upon _____.
13. Jesus came to convert men and gave plenty of clear evidence, but people came to the wrong verdict. Why? (Vs 11:34)
14. What can you do to make yourself a lamp to yourself and others?

1. (1) The crowd, Luke tells us, was amazed, which seems to inform us that they believed Jesus had done this deed through the power of God. (2) Some, however, did not see it this way. These people, admitted that a miracle had occurred, but attributed the power to Beelzebub, that is to Satan. (3) Others took a more mediating position. They were not willing to acknowledge that Jesus was the Messiah of God, nor were they willing to deny it, thus accusing Jesus of operating by Satan's power. They thought of themselves as open minded and willing to be convinced. But they also believed that they had not yet seen sufficient evidence on which to arrive at a sound conclusion, and so they requested a "sign from heaven." (4) And then there were those who just didn't get it, who totally missed the meaning of the miracle.

3. In vs 17-18, it was as if Jesus had said, "Who willingly and knowingly shoots himself in the foot?" Satan would not do harm to himself, would he? Why, then would they be so foolish as to think that Jesus was attacking Satan's kingdom (by casting out demons) with Satan's approval and power? Any kingdom that fights against itself falls. Satan would not fight himself. The opponents of Jesus were foolish to make such a charge against Him. Not only was it false; it wasn't even logical.

We see from texts like Matthew 7:22, Luke 9:49-50, and Acts 19:13-16 that a number of Jews were exorcising demons, some of them (Matthew 7:22) as unbelievers, but all seemingly in the name of Jesus. If the sons of Jesus' opponents were casting out demons in Jesus' name, were these men willing to attribute the power of their sons to Satan as well?

Jesus has probed their logic (which was faulty), and He has pressed it to a very uncomfortable conclusion (their sons are operating by Satan's power, too, for they also cast out demons). Now, He gives them one more logical thrust: If they are wrong and He is operating in the power of God, then they must admit that the kingdom of God has come and that Jesus is the King.

5. No one can take away the possessions of a powerful man without first overpowering the person. The powerful man must first be overpowered, then disarmed, and finally bound, so that his goods can be plundered.

In this analogy, Satan is the strong man and his "possessions" are those who are demon-possessed and Jesus is the One who has greater power and is taking away those he has possessed. Jesus is saying that He must overpower Satan before He can deliver those whom he had formerly possessed.

6. Jesus told yet another story. A man was exorcised of a demon. That demon wandered about in very unpleasant circumstances. The demon finally concluded that his former abode was far superior to the arid places he was now inhabiting, and so he returned to his former abode, but with additional demons. The final state was worse than the first, Jesus taught.

If Jesus is more powerful than Satan, which His last argument has shown, man is not. Man is not able, in and of himself, to resist Satan. The man who is possessed by a demon can, Jesus said, be re-possessed. The only power that can keep the demons out of a man is the power of the One who is able to deliver that man in the first place. Jesus was warning those who would attempt to remain neutral, who would not come to receive Him as their Messiah and to obey His commandments, that neutrality toward Messiah is hospitality toward the hostile forces of Satan. It is no blessing for men to be exorcised, rid of demon-possession if men do not have the person of God dwelling within. Just as man is unable to rid himself of a demonic inhabitant, neither is he able to keep an exorcised demon from returning. Jesus must not only be believed in as Messiah, He must also be received into one's life, lest Satan only return in greater force.²⁰¹

Neutrality about the person of Jesus is no virtue, it is a vice, and indeed it invites Satanic involvement, and it leads to a latter state that is worse than the former.

8. When compared to the hostility of some and the neutrality of others, these words may seem warm and welcomed to us, but Jesus' response is corrective. He gently corrects, it should be noted, but He does not allow the woman's words to stand unchallenged. The woman's focus was on the mother of Jesus, and her blessing in bearing and nursing Him. The woman's focus was wrong, however. Her praise seems to be more focused on Mary than on Messiah, seeing a greater blessing in motherhood (bearing and nursing Jesus) than in discipleship (obedience to Jesus).

What can we learn from her: She saw Jesus as great and His mother as blessed, but she did not see that Jesus was the One to receive and to follow by obeying His commands. How often we view Jesus through the grid of our own needs and desires and our own narrow view of significance.

9. The strong opposition of Israel's religious leaders to Jesus placed considerable pressure on the rest not to side with Him. For anyone to openly recognize Jesus as the Messiah and to follow Him would have been to incur the wrath of these leaders. It may well be that those who attempted to maintain some degree of neutrality were motivated, at least in part, by a desire not to oppose their leaders.

Second, many may have resisted coming to any firm conclusions about Jesus due to their understanding of the implications of such a decision. To acknowledge that Jesus was Israel's Messiah meant, as Jesus had told the exuberant mother, that His words should be listened to and obeyed. If Jesus was the Messiah then men should follow Him, and that meant "taking up a cross." Jesus was not the kind of Messiah most people were hoping for, and thus to accept Him as Messiah meant changing one's aspirations from prosperity to persecution. The price was too high, so the decision was postponed.

10. Jesus has very strong words for those who request a sign from heaven. His words inform us that this is evidence that this generation of Israelites is wicked, and so much so that the “belief” of two Old Testament peoples puts them to shame. The people of Nineveh accepted the “sign of Jonah” and repented, and the Queen of the South believed the reports about Solomon’s wisdom. For this, they will testify in the day of judgment against this generation for their unbelief.

Two things strike me about our Lord’s use of the Ninevites and the Queen of the South. The first is that both are Gentiles, and they, because of their belief, will condemn the unbelief of this generation of Israelites. The second is that both parties believed with much less evidence than that which this generation had seen. The Ninevites repented at the preaching of Jonah, which as we find it recorded in the book of Jonah may have been only one short sentence: “Yet forty days and Nineveh will perish.” That’s not a lot of evidence! And from all we know of Jonah, he spoke these words in a way that was not meant to convince or to convert these people. But the Ninevites believed. The Queen of the South also was convinced of Solomon’s wisdom when she heard his words.

13. Since Jesus had come to convert men, His evidence was both plentiful and public. The evidence was clear. Indeed, no one denied the miracles which Jesus performed. In this passage, no one denied that He had cast a demon from the dumb man. Everyone, however, failed to come to the right conclusion with this evidence. They came to the wrong verdict. The evidence did not convince or convert men. The reason why this is so is seen in the next verses. They tell us that the problem was not with the evidence Jesus produced, but with the eyes which beheld it.

The eye, Jesus said, is the gateway to the person’s entire being, his whole body. If the eye is good, if it lets in the light, the whole body is illuminated. If the eye is defective, if it lets in little light, the whole body is dark. Moving from the symbolism to the substance of this argument, Jesus is saying that everyone who failed to interpret the evidence of this miracle as they should has done so because of a defect in their ability to “see” the truth, not because of any deficiency in the evidence.