

Commentary on Luke 11:14-36

We pick up this week with another story where Jesus is casting out demons! In Luke 11:14, we read that the demon Jesus was casting out was mute and therefore made the man he was possessing mute. After Jesus cast out the demon, the man began speaking and some of the people in the crowd began to marvel! But there are also some haters in the crowd who start to rant about two things. First, some begin to accuse Jesus of getting his authority to cast out demons from Beelzebul. Second, some test him and demand signs from heaven. Jesus addresses both camps of haters. Let's take a look at his response to the first group's accusation.

Jesus and Beelzebul (Luke 11:17-26)

Before we dig into how Jesus responds, let's look at the Ancient Near Eastern view of demons, demon possession and exorcism to help us understand what their thoughts were on this matter during Jesus' ministry.

Demons and Exorcisms

Demons were the adversaries of Jesus' ministry. They were agents of Satan and must be overcome in order for Jesus' ministry to be successful. Early Judaism taught that when the Messiah comes, he will overthrow the kingdom of Satan. We will read later in Luke 11 how Jesus has come to plunder and take back what Satan has stolen. (Remember this! We will tie it into the story we are looking at right now!)

Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible states: "According to early Christian literature, demons don't operate in a vacuum. They either 'oppress' attacking from without or outside a person or 'possess' entering an individual's body and attacking it from within. They cause diseases and sicknesses of all kind, although not all sickness and diseases may be attributed to them. Certain kinds of sicknesses were caused by demons even if the symptoms can be explained by modern medicine. The presence of a demon in a person might sometimes not be obvious to a third party unless confronted by an exorcist (Jesus driving out the demon-possessed man in Luke 4:33). Most of the time, however, demonic activity in a person's life would be obvious (Demonic in Luke 8:28, the demon-possessed son in Luke 9:37-43)."¹

In the Early Mediterranean Worldview, every significant event in a person or group's life was believed to have been caused by a person, human or non-human. Things beyond human control such as earthquakes, disease, fertility were believed to be controlled by a non-human person who operated in a cosmic social hierarchy. Each level could control the one below:

¹ Eerdmans Bible Dictionary, entry on "Demon."

1. "Our" God - the Most High God
2. "Other" gods or sons of gods or archangels, stars, or planets
3. Lower non-human persons: angels, demons, spirits
4. Humankind
5. Creatures lower than humankind.

Since demons were personified non-human forces/persons, it was believed that they had the power to control human behavior. Accusations that a person was demon-possessed were based on the assumption that forces beyond human control were causing the effect of the person's behavior. In the ancient world, the demonic was usually not regarded as an intermediate stage between human and divine but rather as a power and authority equal to the divine

Possessed persons were excluded from community. Exorcizing a demon from a person not only meant the demon needed to be removed, but the person needed to be rightfully restored back into their community.²

Eerdmans states "an exorcism is an attempt to control and cast out evil spirits believed to have entered a person to cause harm. It is traced back to Ancient Near Eastern culture. An exorcist usually called on the power of stronger, and usually good spirit, to subdue or cast out a less powerful and malevolent spirit. Methods varied from a few words of command to a full ritual ceremony and elaborate magical incantations. When necessary the exorcist would use a combination of methods to ensure success." Greek magical papyri which were discovered in Egypt show complex spells, conjugations, and catchwords that ancient exorcists employed as they sparred with demonic opponents.³

So, what are the haters accusing Jesus of? The people in the crowd are accusing Jesus of casting out demons by Beelzebub, the Prince of Demons (the Greek name for Beelzebub is "Dung God"!). The crowd is assuming that Jesus only has the power to drive out the demons with help from the highest possible power on the power hierarchy listed above. In Ancient Near East times, all people who acted contrary to their inherited social status or role were suspect and had to be evaluated.⁴

Jesus sets out to clear up any misunderstanding of where his power and authority come from by once again using parables. First, He states that if a Kingdom divided by itself, it will be ruined. Second, He states that if a house divided against itself, it will fall. Third, he asks, if Satan is divided against himself, how can he stand?

Jesus goes on to set the record straight about where His power and authority come from by asking two "if...then" questions. The first question is "If I drive out demons by Beelzebub, in

² Malina, Bruce and Richard Rohrbaugh, "Social Science Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels" 2003, Augsburg Fortress, p. 350-351

³ Edward, James, "The Pillar New Testament Commentary: The Gospel According to Luke." Eerdmans Press, 2015, p. 250.

⁴ Malina and Rohrbaugh, p. 351

what do your followers drive them out?" The use of the word "followers" is a Hebraic way of referring to people who belong to a movement of people performing exorcisms.⁵ Jesus is stating here that whatever the source and outcome of their works (e.g. casting out demons) does not signal the inbreaking of God's reign, for that belongs to the miraculous signs of Jesus.⁶ Jesus then asks his next "if...then" question "If I drive out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you." This is a reference to Exodus 8:19, where Pharaoh's magicians were unable to replicate the third plague and declared, "This is the finger of God." Referring to the finger of God may claim that Jesus' miracles are superior to rival exorcists.⁷ Subsequently, when He states that kingdom of God "has come upon you" it is a present reality. It is right here, right now among them!

Jesus then makes the illustration of a strong man, fully armed, guarding his house. No one can come in and steal his plunder unless he is stronger than the strong man and can come in, overpower him, take his armor away and then steal the plunder.

So, what is Jesus stating here by all these questions and parables? Jesus is saying:

- 1) I am not Satan.
- 2) I am against Satan.
- 3) I am stronger than Satan.
- 4) I am stealing back the plunder from Satan.

Who is the plunder? The people who are being held captive by Satan, the demon-possessed people. Jesus is fulfilling Isaiah 49:24-25:

*²⁴Can plunder be taken from warriors,
or captives be rescued from the fierce?*

²⁵ But this is what the LORD says:

*"Yes, captives will be taken from warriors,
and plunder retrieved from the fierce;
I will contend with those who contend with you,
and your children I will save.*

Every time Jesus casts out demons from a person, He is stealing them away from Satan. Think back to the hierarchy of the divine powers over human powers listed above. You can picture the stage being set between Jesus and the demons He encounters. The Gospel writers Luke and Mark establish Satan as Jesus' true adversary, Jesus' authority to cast out demons and the demons subjugating themselves to Jesus. This establishes Jesus' supremacy over satanic power in the created order. In the spiritual pecking order, we see

⁵ Edwards, p. 344.

⁶ Edwards, p. 344.

⁷ Edwards, p. 344.

listed above - rest assured - Jesus is the Strongest Man! He will beat out any other spiritual force because He is preeminent and reigns above all powers and principalities!

Jesus is also stating that in the spiritual world, there are two forces at war: Satan and the Most High God. They are fighting for the plunder which is people. Jesus, the Son of the Most High God, has come to steal back what Satan has stolen, gather them back to Himself, and restore them. Jesus concludes this section by throwing down the gauntlet. People are either for Jesus and His Upside-down Kingdom or for Satan. They must decide whether they will join Jesus in gathering His people or serve Satan by scattering it.⁸

In 11:24-26, Jesus tells another parable about His conflict with Satan. When an unclean spirit leaves a person, it seeks rest in other places. It, however, finds none, so it says it will return to where it came. When it returns, it finds the house (the person) clean and in order, so it summons seven of its friends and comes back and dwells. What is Jesus saying here? “The departure of the unclean spirit is like deleting data from a computer hard drive: the deleted data is still there and can be erased only by *overwriting* it with new data. The place in one's life once controlled by demonic forces must be ‘overwritten’ by Jesus and the gospel, or one's life is not secure from the return of a fatal virus.”⁹

Demand for Signs (Luke 11:29-32)

Jesus then addresses the crowd's demands for a sign. In verse 29, Jesus says the word “sign” three times. Jesus tells the listeners that they are an evil generation that seeks a sign. Edwards describes that the function of a sign is “to point to a deeper reality in relation to itself.”¹⁰ The crowd is seeking miracles and wonders and not the one who makes them. Jesus then declares that no sign will be given but the sign of Jonah. What is the sign of Jonah? In Matthew 12:39-40, we see it is the symbolic tying of Jonah spending three days in the belly of a whale to Jesus' spending three days in the tomb. If you look at the verb tense of Luke 11:29, Jesus is saying that His resurrection will be the sign of Jonah to this generation.

Then Jesus tells two stories. The first is the about the Queen of the South (The Queen of Sheba) who traveled a long way from the South (modern day Yemen) to hear the wisdom of King Solomon, who was known for his superior wisdom. She listened and responded to Solomon's wisdom. Jesus then states that someone greater than Solomon is here. The second story is about the men of Nineveh who repented when they heard the preaching from Jonah (Jonah 3:1). Instead of receiving God's judgment, they received His mercy. Jesus then states that someone greater than Jonah is here.

It should be noted that both the Queen of Sheba and the men of Ninevah are Gentiles. They both responded to the words of the Lord from King Solomon and Jonah, respectively. Here we see an example of God's Upside-down Kingdom expanded out to the ends of the earth to

⁸ Edwards, p. 347.

⁹ Edwards, p. 347.

¹⁰ Edwards, p. 349.

the Gentiles and their eager response to it. Jesus then brings it back to the crowd at hand and tells them that these foreigners will judge the folly of the Israelites and their blindness to the fact that Jesus (who is greater than Solomon and Jonah) is standing right before them as a sign from heaven!

The Light in You (Luke 11:33-36)

Jesus then tells a parable contrasting light and darkness using a lamp and the demand for signs from the people in the crowd (Luke 11:16). The use of lamp imagery appears in several different contexts in the Gospels (Luke 8:16, 15:8, Matthew 5:15, Mark 4:21). In this parable, the use of light and lamps is contrasting inner light and inner darkness. In Luke 11:34, the Greek word for healthy is *haplous* meaning, “singleness of purpose and sincerity, free from guile.” “The use of *haplous* conforms to Jesus’ teaching, namely that actions done with integrity and sincerity of motive...affect one’s ability to see. Such people possess an inner light that does not require, ‘signs.’”¹¹ Contrast this to the word bad which in Greek is *poneros* meaning “willful evil.” People who possess inner darkness to see the gospel will demand signs, but “signs will not be given to them because the request betrays reticence, perhaps even a willingness to believe.”¹²

True Blessedness (Luke 11:27-28)

Tucked in the middle of Jesus’ teaching, we witness a woman interrupt Jesus and pronounce blessing on His mother. This is a fulfillment of Mary’s Magnificat in Luke 1:48! Jesus acknowledges this blessing and the woman who pronounces it, but He expands it with a “yes, but...” statement. He states that true blessedness is not biologically tied to Jesus himself, but instead on people’s response to Jesus. True blessedness comes from hearing the Word of God and obeying it. Following Jesus in his Upside-down Kingdom is not just about doing the right things and avoiding the wrong things, but rather allowing ourselves to be filled with Jesus Himself. It’s allowing the sinful hard drives in our souls to be overwritten with the reality of the Gospel and the Kingdom of God.

Jesus’ Upside-Down Kingdom

So, what do we learn about Jesus’ Upside-down Kingdom in this section of Luke?

- 1) Jesus shows us His ultimate preeminence, power, and authority over all of creation- in heaven above, here on earth, and below the earth. Jesus is the Son of the Most High God, the Strongest Man. In the divine realm, there are forces at play: Satan, who seeks to steal, kill, and destroy and the Most High God, who seeks to rescue, heal, and restore. We must decide with whom we are siding. There is no middle ground.
- 2) Hearing and obeying the Word of God is the foundation to following Jesus and His Upside-down Kingdom. It is the key to a transformed life. This Word of God is

¹¹ Edwards, p. 351.

¹² Edwards, p. 351.

available to all- men and women (Jonah and the Queen of Sheba), Jews and Gentiles (Jesus' listeners in this text, and the Gentiles from Sheba and Nineveh).

- 3) The source of Light within us does not come from us- from self-revelation or actualization- but rather from the Word of God and from Upside-down Kingdom Jesus is ushering in. Without it, our hearts will continue to darken and be corrupted. We need Jesus to come and rewrite the hard drives of our darkened hearts with the truth of His Word and the reality of His Upside-down Kingdom.

Discussion Questions for Luke 11:37-12:12

Luke 11:37-52

- 1) What is happening in vs. 37-38 that provokes the interactions in this section of the text?

- 2) Look up Leviticus 15:11 and Mark 7:3-4 about washings. How does this help you understand the mindset of the Pharisees?

- 3) How does Jesus respond to the Pharisees in vs. 39-41? What does he accuse them of?

- 4) In verse 41, what does it mean when Jesus exhorts the Pharisees to give alms to the things within you. Look up Daniel 4:27 to help you.

- 5) What are the three woes Jesus pronounces over the Pharisees in vs. 42-44? What is Jesus calling them out about? Use the chart below to help you.

<u>Verse</u>	<u>Woe</u>	<u>Pharisee's Actions</u>	<u>Jesus' Truth Response</u>
42			
43			
44			

- 6) In verse 42, Jesus refers to tithing and neglecting justice. Look up Leviticus 27:30, Deuteronomy 14:22, 1 Samuel 15:22, Micah 6:8, and Isaiah 42:1 to better understand what the Pharisees were doing and not doing.

7) How does the crowd react to Jesus' words (vs. 45)?

8) How does Jesus respond (vs 46-52)? Use the chart below to help you.

<u>Vs</u>	<u>Woe</u>	<u>Lawyer's Actions</u>	<u>Jesus' Response</u>
46			
47-51			
52			

9) In vs. 53-54, how did the Pharisees respond to Jesus after the meal? How are they playing into the things Jesus is accusing them of in his list of woes?

Luke 12:1-3

10) What is the scene in verse 12:1?

11) What does Jesus warn the disciples and the crowd to avoid?

12) What is leaven/yeast? Why does Jesus use the image of leaven regarding the Pharisees and what they do? What is he warning his following to avoid?

Luke 12:4-7

13) Who does Jesus tell his disciples to fear? Who does he tell them not to fear?

14) How does Jesus comfort His disciples?

Luke 12:8-12

15) What does Jesus tell his disciples in vs. 8-9? What is the cause and affects you see here?

16) In vs. 11, who is forgiven? Who is not forgiven (look at the verb tenses!)

17) What is the role of the Holy Spirit in our life? How does He help us when we are facing persecution before the authorities?

Application:

18) What is the role of the Holy Spirit in our life? How does He help us when we are facing persecution before the authorities?

19) Jesus issues some strong woes to the Pharisees in Luke 11:39-52. ? In what ways do you see similar things playing out today in our world? Are any of these warnings a gut check for you in how you love God and people?

20) Jesus warns his disciples to beware of the leaven on the Pharisees. Why is this warning important for us today as we seek to embrace Jesus' upside-down Kingdom?

21) In Luke 11:4-7, Jesus warns his disciples that they will face judgement and possibly death. How do his words in vs. 6-7 comfort you when considering this reality?

22) How have you experienced the Holy Spirit teach you what to say in situations? Share a time you remember this happening.