

There Is No Neutrality When It Comes to Christ

Luke 11:14-28

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Hymn: ELH #261 – “Who Trusts in God, a Strong Abode”

Let us pray: “Come, Holy Ghost, Creator blest, Vouchsafe within our souls to rest; Come with Thy grace and heav’nly aid, And fill the hearts which Thou hast made” (ELH #10). Lord, your Son has overcome even sin, death, and the devil for us. Lead us to abide in him steadfastly to the end. Help me not only to hear your Word, but also to keep it in a pure heart and thereby to produce a fruitful life of service. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

Luke 11:14-28

¹⁴Jesus drove out a demon, which was mute. After the demon had gone out, the man who had been mute spoke, and the crowds were amazed. ¹⁵But some of them said, “He drives out demons by Beelzebul, the ruler of the demons.” ¹⁶Others were testing him by demanding of him a sign from heaven. ¹⁷But he knew their thoughts and said to them, “Every kingdom divided against itself is destroyed. And a house divided against itself falls. ¹⁸If Satan is divided against himself, how will his kingdom stand? You say that I drive out demons by Beelzebul. ¹⁹But if I drive out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your sons drive them out? So they will be your judges. ²⁰Yet if I drive out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.

²¹“When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own house, his possessions are safe. ²²But when someone stronger attacks him and defeats him, he

takes away that man’s full armor, in which he had trusted, and divides up his plunder.

²³“The one who is not with me is against me. The one who does not gather with me scatters. ²⁴When an unclean spirit goes out of a man, it passes through waterless places, seeking rest, but does not find any. Then it says, ‘I will return to my house, the one I left.’ ²⁵When it returns, it finds the house swept and put in order. ²⁶Then it goes and brings seven other spirits more evil than itself, and they go in and dwell there. The last condition of that man becomes worse than the first.”

²⁷While he was saying these things, a woman from the crowd raised her voice and said to him, “Blessed is the womb that carried you, and the breasts at which you nursed!”

²⁸But he said, “Even more blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it.”

Dear members of Christ’s kingdom,

It's often easier to be nonconfrontational. When our family gathers and the discussion turns to politics or to religion, with countless different perspectives and opinions represented among them, many of us would prefer to stay out of it. But when it comes to Christ, Jesus says, "The one who is not with me is against me." Or as he said to the church in Laodicea in the book of Revelation: "So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth" (Rev. 3:16, ESV).

There is no neutrality when it comes to Christ. Understand, therefore, that there are two options: **we are in Jesus' kingdom, or in Satan's;** and understand how it is we enter Jesus' kingdom: **through the Word alone we are brought into his kingdom.**

I. We Are in His Kingdom, or in Satan's

When we come to this account, we are confronted with a miracle: Jesus drives out a demon, and as testimony to his power, the man whom the demon had rendered mute spoke aloud in the hearing of all the people! But this great and powerful demonstration has the rug ripped out from under it: "But some of them said, 'He drives out demons by Beelzebul, the ruler of the demons.'" Jesus was a divisive figure. Many followed him excitedly, eager to see his miracles and to hear him preach. But many, like these who heard the formerly mute man speak, were strongly opposed to him. Jesus' intent is to prove the truth of his identity: He is the promised Messiah, the champion of God who would save his people.

Following a strong train of argument, Jesus proves to these people that he is in fact the embodiment of the opposite of Satan's kingdom, and that in this war between Satan's kingdom and Jesus' kingdom, each person is on one side or the other. Implied

is the warning to be sure that you are a part of Jesus' kingdom, or else you will be overcome in Satan's kingdom.

Jesus introduces the idea of two sides to the fight, when the people are envisioning only one: demons are being cast out, and we don't like this Jesus, so he's probably using demonic power to do it! But Jesus says, "Every kingdom divided against itself is destroyed. And a house divided against itself falls. If Satan is divided against himself, how will his kingdom stand?" Besides this, there were other Jewish exorcists at the time, and Jesus mentions them: "But if I drive out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your sons drive them out? So they will be your judges." So the people were exercising a double-standard, reading the situations how *they* wanted to read them. In a pointed way, Jesus is proving to these people that *their* houses are divided against themselves, because the Lord is not their true God.

The whole nation of Israel was a "kingdom divided against itself," because early in their history they were split in their worship, worshiping the true God, but also false gods. And the kingdom was literally divided in two around 900 B.C., and each kingdom, Israel and Judah, was conquered and fell numerous times. Finally, Jesus' words were prophetic, because approximately 40 years after these words of Jesus, Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans. Let this serve as a warning, therefore, against hypocrisy and neutrality: should you claim to worship the true God, but behave in the worship of other gods (be they your family, your political party, your job, your material comforts, your tastes in music, the Packers, or anything else), then you are "a house divided against itself," and therefore will fall.

But Jesus is not a part of Satan's kingdom. Therefore, if Jesus is not casting out demons by Beelzebul, there is only one other option – there is no neutrality. "If I drive out demons by the finger of God," he says, "then the kingdom of God has come upon you."

"The kingdom of God" is a phrase that carries great weight in the Gospels. When Jesus speaks of the kingdom "coming" or moving, these are to be understood in militaristic terms. When kingdoms move, they move to conquer. "The kingdom of God has come upon you," says Jesus, so his hearers must understand that it has come to conquer its enemies, and to take the spoils. In the path of this kingdom, the choice is simple: either join or die. As Jesus puts it: "The one who is not with me is against me. The one who does not gather with me scatters."

In his specific claim to cast out the demons "by the finger of God," Jesus seems to be referring to an incident in the life of Moses, when the kingdom of God was moving in to conquer another and to take the spoils:

Then the LORD said to Moses, 'Say to Aaron, "Stretch out your staff and strike the dust of the earth, so that it may become gnats in all the land of Egypt.'" And they did so. Aaron stretched out his hand with his staff and struck the dust of the earth, and there were gnats on man and beast. All the dust of the earth became gnats in all the land of Egypt. The magicians tried by their secret arts to produce gnats, but they could not. So there were gnats on man and beast. Then the magicians said to Pharaoh, '*This is the finger of God.*' (Ex. 8:16-19, ESV)

The finger of God at the time of Moses could do things that demonic forces could not, as the magicians could not replicate the power of God in the plague of gnats. The same is true in Jesus' day. The demonic forces cannot measure up. This also marks Jesus as one

who has the same power Moses had. In the minds of these Jews, there would have been Moses' prophecy: "The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers – it is to him you shall listen" (Deut. 18:15, ESV). Jesus was telling these crowds, not only is he granted divine power, not only is he part of God's kingdom, he is the *bringer* of God's kingdom, because he is the greater Moses.

Jesus is the herald of the kingdom of God. You should *want* to be a part of the kingdom of God. And no one should *want* to be a part of the kingdom of Satan. But there is no neutrality. In order *not* to be a part of the kingdom of Satan, one must be a member of the kingdom of God. That comes through Jesus: "The one who is not with me is against me. The one who does not gather with me scatters." And as he says, too, at the end of this text: "blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it." It is, therefore:

II. Through the Word Alone We Are Brought into His Kingdom

The kingdom is moving to conquer and to take the spoils: in Moses' day, the spoils were the people of Israel, rescued from bondage in Egypt by a preacher of God's Word. In Jesus' day, the spoils are the people of mankind, rescued from bondage to sin by the Word incarnate. It's not so much a question of choice as it is of merely being saved.

But again, there is no neutrality: Jesus describes the state of one who is captive to demons. "When an unclean spirit goes out of a man, it passes through waterless places, seeking rest, but does not find any. Then it says, 'I will return to my house, the one I left.' When it returns, it finds the house swept and put in order. Then it goes and brings

seven other spirits more evil than itself, and they go in and dwell there. The last condition of that man becomes worse than the first.” Examine this, piece by piece, and we see Jesus teaching the same moral.

For a demon to “go out of a man” means for the man to be exorcised of his demon-possession. He has been saved! But, when the demon returns, everything is “swept and put in order.” No one is presently occupying the place, no one is defending it from being taken over again. The only thing missing is the welcome mat for the returning demon. But the demon has learned that he can be cast out, so he returns with seven others, so the “last condition of that man becomes worse than the first.”

“Jesus implies that when Satan is cast out, the void must be filled with the Messiah, the stronger one, or else Satan will return with even more force and vehemence.”¹ He warns that Christians must remain in the faith, and be sustained in the faith – there is no neutrality! – or else Satan will conquer us anew. Now, not all unbelievers are, strictly speaking, demon-possessed, but everyone who is outside the kingdom of God belongs to the kingdom of Satan (because there is no neutrality). This is why, in our baptismal liturgy, the baptized person is asked to vow: “do you renounce the devil, and all his works, and all his ways?”² At Baptism, there is in a literal sense, an exorcism: although the person is not, strictly speaking, demon-possessed, he is in the realm of Satan. But at Baptism, we put on Christ (Gal. 3:27). Satan is driven out, and Jesus takes his place.

¹ Just, 479.

² *Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary* (Mankato, MN: Evangelical Lutheran Synod, 1996), 134.

At conversion through the Word, too, the result is the same: for “faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ” (Rom. 10:17, ESV). All people are in the kingdom of Satan until they are born into the kingdom of God. You might have in your mind the picture of broken, sinful nature, which means that all people have in themselves a God-shaped void. Because Adam and Eve expelled God from themselves, God is not present to fill that void, but Satan and his demons have stepped in to take it. Of course, he does not fit it perfectly, but God and Satan will not take residence together. Therefore God seeks to remove Satan and take his rightful place in our hearts.

This he does through the Word. And he likewise sustains us in the Word. It is not enough for us to hear the Word of God, have the Devil cast out, and then to go on from there without a care in the world. It is not even enough for us to merely hear the Word once in a while, to think that we get enough from a biblical radio program or T.V. preacher, or to think we get enough from Sunday worship. The Devil is working constantly to bring us back into his realm: he “prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour” (1 Pet. 5:8, ESV). For this reason St. Peter includes the strong warning: “Be sober-minded; be watchful.... Resist him, firm in your faith” (1 Pet. 5:8, 9, ESV). For this reason, too, Jesus declares, “Even more blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it.”

Hear the Word of God. Listen when it comes to you on Sundays, in daily family devotions, in Bible Studies, in your private reading. Keep the Word of God. This means do what it says, yes, but more, it means to do what Mary did: “Mary treasured

spent your days busy with distractions of the world, and spent your nights dreaming, and both day and night, haven't you been occupied in things that are contrary to the Law of the Lord? No, Psalm 1 does not speak about you.

It does speak about Christ. He is the only one who has kept God's Law perfectly, who has obeyed it day and night, who has delighted in it, and who has never found his way into the counsel of the wicked, the way of sinners, or the seat of scoffers.

Ah, but that last bit is not true in a sense, isn't it? In a sense, Jesus deliberately reversed the beginning of that Psalm in how it applies to him. Jesus walked, bound, with the mob who arrested him and went before Caiaphas the high priest, and in that counsel he accepted their verdict, as in the counsel of Herod, the wicked tetrarch, and in the counsel of Pilate, the wicked Roman governor. Jesus took on his back the instrument of execution for criminals and walked on the way of sinners to his death—but he also paused and stood in that way, when "they found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name. They compelled this man to carry his cross" (Matt. 27:32, ESV). Finally, Jesus was set up on that cross, next to two men on other crosses, one of whom "railed at him, saying, 'Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!'" (Luke 23:39, ESV). Jesus was in that seat of the cross, a seat shared by a scoffer.

Put briefly: "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Cor. 5:21, ESV). Jesus took everything we are, our sin, our wickedness, our commitment to Satan's kingdom, and put it all on himself, so that we might take everything he is, his righteousness, his blessedness, his

life, his rulership in the kingdom of God, and have it put on us. This comes, as I have shown, through the Word and Sacraments.

Jesus pulls us by these means of grace out of Satan's kingdom and into the kingdom of God, and he preserves us in it. He feeds us with the Word, offering it to us always. He nourishes us with the Lord's Supper, which we eat and by eating "proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" (1 Cor. 11:26, ESV). It is through this gift, rescuing us lost and miserable sinners, that we are moved from one side of the fight to the other. The kingdom of God has come upon us, has *rescued us* from Satan's clutches, in the manner Jesus describes: "When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own house, his possessions are safe. But when someone stronger attacks him and defeats him, he takes away that man's full armor, in which he had trusted, and divides up his plunder." Jesus is that stronger man, who defeats Satan and removes him from our hearts. He wishes to stay there in our hearts, and as he is there, he preserves us and our salvation.

Amen.

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