No Middle Ground

Passage: Luke 11:14-36 | From the series: Luke
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Jesus makes it clear that there is no middle ground. As the kingdom of God advances and the power of Satan crumbles, we are called to choose where our allegiance lies. The beauty and the power of the gospel invite us to the same choice every time: choose Jesus.

In the late 1970s, Rick Kuhn was playing basketball at Boston College when he was recruited by members of the American Mafia. No, Kuhn didn't become a member of the mafia. He didn't need to carry a gun or commit any acts of violence. Instead, his job was to… play basketball.

In some of the famous sports scandals throughout history, players have been paid to lose games that they were supposed to win so that people could make big money betting against them. But not in this case. Rick Kunn wasn't paid to lose games. He was just paid to win by less.

In the world of sports betting, bets are not just cast on winners and losers, but on how many points a team would win or lose by. For Kuhn, this seemed like the perfect scenario. He could still wear the Boston College jersey. He could still play on the Boston College team. In fact, he could even still win games for Boston College.

But Rick Kuhn's allegiance was not to Boston College. His allegiance was to someone else.

This morning, as we continue our study in the Gospel of Luke, we come to a passage that forces us to wrestle with this question: where is your allegiance?

Not "what jersey are you wearing?" Not "which team are you scoring points for?" But "where is your allegiance?"

Our passage for this morning is Luke 11:14-36. This is a long passage, and as we will see, Jesus covers a lot of ground. Everything that he says, however, is meant to get us to wrestle with the question of allegiance as he ultimately asks us to give our allegiance to him.

The Miracle and Response

With that, let's jump into our text. Luke 11:14-16:

> *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.*

If you have been following along in our study in Luke, you will recognize that this is not the first time that Jesus has cast a demon out of someone. In fact, this is the fourth exorcism story in the gospel. Even the disciples have been casting out demons.

But there is something different about this story. The miracle itself is almost skipped over. There was a man with a demon that made him mute. Jesus cast out the demon, and he spoke. End of story. But then we read about the reaction of the people. Here, we see three different ways that people respond to this exorcism. Some marvel. Some accuse him of casting our demons by the power of Beelzebul, or Satan. And some continue to evaluate him, looking for a sign from heaven that would prove his messianic identity.

Under New Ownership

In the next 20 verses that we are going to look at, Luke describes Jesus' interaction with each of these categories of people. Beginning with those who accuse him. Look at how Jesus responds in Luke 11:17-20:

> *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.*

The accusation is that Jesus is casting out demons by Beelzebul, which is another name for Satan. So Jesus is casting out the minions of Satan by the power of Satan? That doesn't make much sense, and that is exactly Jesus' point.

Jesus says, *Guys. Why would Satan cast out his own demons? That would be like a kingdom at war with itself. That doesn't make any sense!* Their accusation was clearly illogical.

But Jesus is making a bigger claim here than merely pointing out the illogic of their argument. He says: If I am not casting out demons by the power of Satan, then I am casting out demons by the power of God. And if I am casting out demons by the power of God, then *the kingdom of God has come upon you*.

Jesus, once again, is waking us up to the reality that we live in a world of two kingdoms: the kingdom of God, and the kingdom of Satan — the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of evil. And with every miracle that Jesus performs — making a lame man walk, cleansing a leper, raising the dead, and yes, casting out demons — with every miracle that Jesus performs, he is making it clear that ***Satan's domain is crumbling and God's kingdom is expanding.*** Satan's domain is crumbling and God's kingdom is expanding.

These miracles, these exorcisms, are not just one-off incidents. They are the sign of a turn in redemptive history. The kingdom of Satan, which had ruled the world since Genesis 3, is crumbling, and the kingdom of God is expanding.

When Jesus casts a demon out of a person, it's like he's hanging a "Foreclosed" sign on the kingdom of Satan. A foreclosed sign doesn't necessarily mean the previous owners have moved out. It certainly doesn't mean that all of the renovations have been completed and the house is in tip-top shape. Rather, the "Foreclosed" sign means that the house is *under new ownership*.

Every time Jesus casts out a demon, it's a sign that this world is under new ownership.

Every time a relationship that is on the rocks is restored, it's because this world is under new ownership. Every time someone returns an act of hatred with an act of love, it's a sign that this world is under new ownership. Every time the alcoholic finds sobriety or the pornography addict finds purity, it's a sign that this world is under new ownership.

Every time we declare the gospel or take communion (which we'll do together this morning), it's a declaration that this world is under new ownership.

Satan's domain is crumbling, and God's kingdom is expanding.

When the television was invented and people suddenly had access to the news, something changed. For the first time, people like you and me could see things happening around the world that we never would have known about before. Stories of war, violence, suffering, tragedy were now just called "the evening news."

Then came the internet, and now we had access to those stories 24 hours a day, seven days a week. And now, with social media, we're not just hearing about these things. We're seeing them in real time, often up close, as they unfold.

And there's something we need to recognize about that: *the more we're exposed to evil, the easier it can be to believe that evil is winning.* We see another war. Another shooting. Another act of injustice. And we can begin to look at the world and think that Satan has the upper hand.

But we need Scripture to remind us that what we see is not the whole story. We need God's Word to tell us what is actually true—to counter the lies of the evil one.

Because make no mistake: This world is under new ownership. Satan's domain is crumbling. And the kingdom of God is expanding.

Picking Sides

As Jesus goes on, he gives another illustration to reinforce his point: **Luke 11:21-22**

> *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.*

In this metaphor, Satan is the strong man. He has been guarding his palace, which is the world. But Jesus is the stronger man. He has come to attack Satan, to overcome him, to take away his armor, and to divide his spoils.

When Jesus casts the demon out of his mute man and restores his speech, he is demonstrating in no uncertain terms that he is the stronger man. While Satan is still allowed to roam the earth and wreak havoc – which he loves to do – his power and authority have been stripped. Jesus is the one in control. He is infinitely more powerful than Satan.

And in light of that reality, Jesus makes this statement in v. 23 **[Luke 11:23]:**

> *[23] Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters.*

Jesus is drawing a very simple dichotomy here. You have God and his kingdom, and you have Satan and his domain. You are always participating in one kingdom or the other.

Here's what Jesus is saying: In the spiritual world, **there is no middle ground.** *There is no middle ground.*

Remember Rick Kuhn from Boston College? When he started taking money from the mafia to manipulate the score of his basketball games, he was no longer playing for Boston College. He thought he was. He had convinced himself that he was. After all, he was still winning games for Boston College. But his allegiance was somewhere else – the mafia, his bank account, his own ego. But it certainly wasn't with Boston College.

Sometimes, we convince ourselves that we can give our allegiance to Jesus AND _____. I can give my allegiance to Jesus AND my job. I can give my allegiance to Jesus AND my political party of preference. I can give my allegiance to Jesus AND the financial welfare of my family.

Jesus is clear. You cannot give your allegiance to Jesus AND anything. There is no middle ground.

In a few chapters from now, we will hear Jesus make this statement: "No servant can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money." (Luke 16:13)

Jesus isn't saying, "Don't serve both God and money." This isn't a command. It's a statement of fact – a description of reality. *It can't be done.* He is not saying, "Don't choose the middle ground." He's saying, "There is no middle ground." You cannot give you allegiance to Jesus AND.

This morning, I wonder, where are you tempted to give you allegiance to Jesus AND? Maybe it's money? That's a big one. Career? Many of us moved here for our careers, after all. Or maybe family? Image? Your own reputation? There are all kinds of things that we are tempted to give our allegiance to. And Jesus just wants us to know: You can't give you allegiance to Jesus AND. It can't be done. There is no middle ground.

As Jesus continues to reinforce his point, he gives us yet another image about how things work in the spiritual world. **Luke 11:24-26**:

> *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."*

Demons don't like to wander the world aimlessly. They like to torment people. They are enemies of God, and people are God's prized possessions, so that's where demons want to be.

Here, Jesus pictures a demon that has been cast out of someone. But that person has tried to find that middle ground. When the demon has been cast out, they don't fill themselves with God. Instead, they try to stay neutral. They try to find the middle ground.

We live in a culture that tries to get us to find the middle ground. I recently heard someone tell the story of how they came to faith. They grew up in a non-believing home and found Jesus in high school. When they told their parents they became a Christian, their parents said, "That's find. Just don't get *too* into it."

A little Jesus sure. But don't become one of those crazy Jesus people. Just find the middle ground. Follow Jesus AND.

But here's what happens if you try to find the middle ground. Here's what happens if you flee from evil but don't fill yourself with God: that demon comes back with seven friends who are bigger and stronger than him, and he moves back in. .

Jesus is not trying to scare us. He is trying to prepare us. He is trying to prepare us for what the world is like. He wants us to know the reality of the situation in which we find ourselves. And the reality of this world is that you can't stay neutral. Satan would love for you to try to stay neutral. He's even happy for you to give your allegiance to Jesus AND. Because he knows that it can't be done.

And Satan would love nothing more than for you to think that you are following Jesus and building his kingdom when you are in fact just building the walls of your own castle.

We just call it a comfortable life. We call it a successful career. We call it "giving our kids the life they deserve." But all of those things can be an attempt to follow Jesus AND.

And Satan loves for us to follow Jesus AND, because he knows that's not really following Jesus at all.

Redefining Flourishing

Up until this point, Jesus has been addressing those who accused him of casting out demons by the power of Satan. Now he turns to address those who marveled at him. **Luke 11:27-28**

> *27 As he said these things, a woman in the crowd raised her voice and said to him, "Blessed is the womb that bore you, and the breasts at which you nursed!" 28 But he said, "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it!"*

This could be a whole sermon right here, but let me just make one simple observation: Jesus believed that true flourishing – "being blessed" – true flourishing doesn't come from money or status or career. It doesn't come from being from the right family or helping your kids be successful. Rather, true flourishing comes from hearing and obeying the Word of God, which means listening to and obeying Jesus – which is exactly what we are trying to do together this morning.

Be Bright

Having addressed those who think he's casting out demons by Satan and to those that marveled at him, Jesus turns to the third category of people: those looking for a sign to confirm that he is who he says he is. **Luke 11:29-32:**

> *29 When the crowds were increasing, he began to say, "This generation is an evil generation. It seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah. 30 For as Jonah became a sign to the people of Nineveh, so will the Son of Man be to this generation. 31 The queen of the South will rise up at the judgment with the men of this generation and condemn them, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and behold, something greater than Solomon is here. 32 The men of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold, something greater than Jonah is here.*

Jesus points to two Old Testament stories: one when the Queen of Sheeba comes to Solomon looking for his wisdom; another when Jonah preaching to Nineveh, and the whole city repented and turned to God. Two stories of people who looked to God for hope and salvation.

People are looking to Jesus for a sign. He says, *there are plenty of signs that have been given in the past: Solomon and his wisdom, Jonah and his message of repentance. But someone greater than Solomon is here. Someone greater than Jonah is here. And that person is me.*

Jesus is saying this *HE is a sign.* His life. His ministry. His miracles. His teaching. His ongoing presence with us today. He is enough of a sign. Because Jesus is the culmination of God's redemptive work in the world.

So what do we do with that? Jesus continues, **Luke 11:33-36:**

> *[33] "No one after lighting a lamp puts it in a cellar or under a basket, but on a stand, so that those who enter may see the light. [34] Your eye is the lamp of your body. When your eye is healthy, your whole body is full of light, but when it is bad, your body is full of darkness. [35] Therefore be careful lest the light in you be darkness. [36] If then your whole body is full of light, having no part dark, it will be wholly bright, as when a lamp with its rays gives you light."*

Jesus uses the image of light to re-enforce the point that he's been making all along. Light is not the kind of thing that invades *part* of space. When light comes in, it comes everywhere.

Jesus is saying that you are either in the light or you are in the darkness. You are either *full* of light, or you are *full* of darkness. The religious leaders of Jesus' day were full of darkness, and it was obvious because they rejected Jesus.

But anyone who receives Jesus, who lets him into their life, who gives their allegiance to him… that person is *full of light*. They are full of light because they let the Light of the World into their lives.

And do you know what happens when you let the light of the world into your life? You become *bright*. You radiate the beauty, power, and presence of Jesus. You point people to the light of the world.

Satan's domain is crumbling. God's kingdom is expanding. There is no middle ground – you are either for Jesus or against him. So here is the invitation from our text this morning: **Choose Jesus.** Choose Jesus. Give your allegiance to him.

There may be some here today who have yet to choose Jesus. Hear his invitation today. Listen to him. Follow him. Choose him.

Many of us are here today because we have already chosen Jesus. But choosing Jesus is not a one-time decision. It's not a prayer that we pray once or a decision that we make one time. Following Jesus is a day-by-day, moment-by-moment decision. We need to choose Jesus over and over again.

A Wedding Message from Prison

The great German pastor and theologian, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, spent his last day in this life in a Nazi concentration camp. While he was in prison, he missed the wedding of some of his dear friends. From prison, he wrote them a letter for their wedding. Recognizing that marriage has its ups and down, its joys and challenges, he gave them this exhortation:

"It is not your love that sustains the marriage, but from now on, the marriage that sustains your love."

This was his point: marriage is a choice – a decision. It's a decision to give your allegiance to your spouse. There will be times in any marriage when your love – that is, your emotions, your feelings,

your desires – may wane. In those moments, it is your ongoing, day-by, moment-by-moment commitment that sustains you.

So it is with our allegiance to Jesus. It is not a one-time, set it and forget it decision. It's not even something we come back to once a year, like a New Years Resolution, or even once a week. It is a day-by-day, moment-by-moment process by which we choose Jesus over and over again.

So when you leave this worship center today, choose Jesus. When you get home and interact with your family — choose Jesus. When you're tired and frustrated — choose Jesus. When you're at work this week — choose Jesus. When you're making decisions about money — choose Jesus. When you're tempted to protect your reputation — choose Jesus. When you don't know what to do — choose Jesus. Not just once, but every day, every hour, every moment.

Let's pray.