

The Strong Man and the Stronger Man (Luke 11:14–28)

The Son of God Appeared for this Purpose...

This morning's text is about the triumph of one King over another, and of one kingdom over another. It is about the defeat of a strong man by a Stronger Man, who then plunders the strong man's house.

When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own palace, his goods are safe; but when one stronger than he attacks him and overcomes him, he takes away his armor in which he trusted and divides his spoil. (11:21–22)

The strong man in this short parable is Satan, and his palace is the kingdom of this world. The stronger man is Christ, who by His incarnation landed upon Satan's shores, by His ministry launched an assault upon Satan's domain, by His crucifixion toppled Satan's throne, by His resurrection raised the banner of His kingdom atop the smoldering ruins of Satan's fortress, and through the ongoing mission of His church is liberating Satan's captives. In today's passage, we see demonstrated the truth that John declared in 1 John 3:

The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. (1 Jn 3:8b)

and the author of Hebrews wrote in Hebrews 2:

Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery. (Heb 2:14–15)

The main point of this sermon may be stated as follows: *By His incarnation, ministration, crucifixion, resurrection, and the ongoing mission of His church, Jesus Christ the true King has launched an assault upon Satan's kingdom, has toppled Satan's throne, and is liberating Satan's*

captives and delivering them into His kingdom. In this battle, there is neutrality—you either receive the King or reject Him.

The Precursor to the Conflict

In preparation for our exposition of today's passage, let's begin with a brief biblical theology of Satan. Before we can appreciate the conquest of Christ, we need to understand how Satan became "the ruler of this world" (Jn 12:31; 14:30; 2 Cor 4:4; Eph 2:2). The biblical data on Satan prior to his appearance in the Garden in the form of a serpent is sparse. But from Genesis to Revelation there is a symbolic connection between Babylon and the kingdom of this world—from Genesis 11 and the Tower of Babel (*original* Babylon), to the prophets, especially Isaiah and Jeremiah and Daniel, who spoke of the historical kingdom of Babylon (*historical* Babylon) but also looked beyond Babylon's historical manifestation to an *eschatological* Babylon, to Revelation 17–19 and the fall of eschatological Babylon. Therefore, as Babylon is a well-established scriptural symbol for the kingdom of this world united in rebellion against God and in persecution of His saints, I think it appropriate to understand Isaiah's prophesy regarding the king of Babylon as a dual reference to Satan, who is the ruler of the kingdom of this world.¹ And if that is true, then it gives us insight into the original fall and ultimate defeat of Satan:

*"How you are fallen from heaven,
O Day Star, son of Dawn!
How you are cut down to the ground,
you who laid the nations low!
You said in your heart,
'I will ascend to heaven;
above the stars of God
I will set my throne on high;
I will sit on the mount of assembly
in the far reaches of the north;
I will ascend above the heights of the clouds;*

¹ For a lengthy defense of this identification of Satan with the king of Babylon, see Timothy Haupt, "The Doom of Babylon and Its Beast" (Isaiah 13:1–14:23); <https://www.fbcnixa.org/media/sermons>.

*I will make myself like the Most High.’
But you are brought down to Sheol,
to the far reaches of the pit.” (Is 14:12–15)*

Isaiah 14:12 is where we get the name “Lucifer.” *Lucifer* is the Latin translation of the Hebrew הִלֵּל [*hēlēl*], which the ESV translates as “Day Star.” Likewise, Ezekiel wrote concerning the King of Tyre words that appear to look beyond him to an ancient and sinister power behind him:

*“You were the signet of perfection,
full of wisdom and perfect in beauty.
You were in Eden, the garden of God;
every precious stone was your covering,
sardius, topaz, and diamond,
beryl, onyx, and jasper;
sapphire, emerald, and carbuncle;
and crafted in gold were your settings
and your engravings.
You were an anointed guardian cherub.
I placed you; you were on the holy mountain of God;
in the midst of the stones of fire you walked.
You were blameless in your ways
from the day you were created,
till unrighteousness was found in you.
In the abundance of your trade
you were filled with violence in your midst, and you sinned;
so I cast you as a profane thing from the mountain of God,
and I destroyed you, O guardian cherub,
from the midst of the stones of fire.
Your heart was proud because of your beauty;
you corrupted your wisdom for the sake of your splendor.
I cast you to the ground. . . . (Ezk 28:12–17)*

From these two passages, if they do refer to Satan (and I think they do), we learn that Satan is a created being, and was unmatched among the angelic beings in beauty and splendor and wisdom and might. He was created in righteousness before pride corrupted his heart. No longer content to serve the LORD God, he desired to establish a rival throne and a rival kingdom, to make himself like the Most High. But God will suffer no rivals to His majesty and sovereignty, and so He cast Satan down from his lofty position, cast him down from the mountain of God. Evidently, Satan was able to corrupt an innumerable host of angels and convince them to follow him in his rebellion, and these fell with him. In judgment, God gave Satan and his demonic host over to utter corruption, and they became completely and irremediably evil. Yet God did not destroy them... not yet. For God had ordained to use Satan's rebellion to accomplish His good and glorious purpose—namely, to demonstrate the glory of His mercy and the glory of His justice through the rebellion that Satan would incite amongst mankind, those whom God created in His image and to whom He granted dominion over the earth.

And so it was that Satan entered the Garden in the form of a serpent (a dragon [Rv 12:9; 20:2]) and filled Adam's ear with delusions of grandeur: *You will be like God, knowing good and evil*. Satan incited man to pride and rebellion, and succeeded in bringing upon mankind—the bearer of the divine image—sin and shame and death. In His just and righteous wrath, God cursed man and took from him dominion over the earth. Into this power vacuum stepped Satan, who established his kingdom upon the earth and slapped his shackles upon mankind. Thus, Satan is called in Scripture the “ruler of this world” (Jn 12:31; 14:30) and the “god of this world” (2 Cor 4:4) and the “prince of the power of the air” (Eph 2:2), and his demonic forces are called “rulers” and “authorities” and “cosmic powers over this present darkness” and “spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places” (Eph 6:12; Col 2:15; Dn 10:13, 20). Throughout history, he has continued to incite mankind to open rebellion against God, as at the Tower of Babel (Gn 11:4), and has stirred up beasts to dominate mankind (Rv 13:1–10; 17:1–18), and false prophets to deceive mankind (Rv 13:11–18), and prostitutes to seduce mankind (Rv 17:1–18).

But from the beginning, God made a promise to mankind of a coming Redeemer, born of a woman, who would crush the head of the serpent even as the serpent bruised his heel (Gn 3:15). From generation to generation, God repeated this promise to His elect, each time providing more details and more contours to the promise, until by the end of the Old Testament we are expecting a virgin-born (Is 7:14), divine-human Messiah (Is 9:6), who would fulfill in

Himself the three anointed offices of Prophet (Dt 18:15), Priest (Psalm 110:4; Is 53:1–12), and King (Ps 2:1–12; Psalm 110:1–3; Isaiah 9:7). Then, in the fullness of time, He arrived.

But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. (Gal 4:4–5)

And why did He appear? Why was He born of a woman, taking on flesh and blood?

The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. (1 Jn 3:8b)

Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery. (Heb 2:14–15)

By his first advent—His incarnation, ministration (ministry), crucifixion, and resurrection—Jesus Christ launched an assault upon Satan’s kingdom, toppled Satan’s throne, and is liberating Satan’s captives and delivering them into His kingdom. This plundering of Satan’s kingdom continues throughout this present age, as Satan is bound (Mt 12:29; Rv 20:1–3) and Christ reigns from the right hand of the Father in heaven and extends His kingdom through His Spirit in His church. When that task is complete, and all of God’s elect have been gathered into His kingdom, Satan will be released to once more incite the nations in rebellion against God, but they will be crushed by the coming of Christ in glory.

Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever.” (Rv 11:15)

And what will become of Satan and his demonic host?

... and the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever. (Rv 20:10)

My hope is that this brief, biblical theology of Satan will give us context for understanding the conflict that took place during Jesus' ministry and the pronouncements He made in today's passage.

The Point of Contention (11:14–16)

Moving then to the text of Luke 11, let's look at the point of contention between Jesus and His enemies, whom Matthew identifies as Pharisees (Mt 12:24) and Mark identifies as scribes (Mk 3:22). We will begin reading in v. 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. But some of them said, "He casts out demons by Beelzebul, the prince of demons," while others, to test him, kept seeking from him a sign from heaven. (11:14–16)

Luke provides little detail concerning the exorcism itself. Evidently, the demon rendered the man whom it inhabited "mute" (Luke actually says a "mute demon" [δαμόνιον κωφόν], but the sense is "a demon who renders a man mute").² When Jesus cast the demon out, the mute man spoke and the people marveled... at least, some of them did. Others, however, attempted to discredit Jesus. Notice that they do not attempt to deny the exorcism. In fact, throughout the Gospels, none of the eyewitnesses to Jesus' demonstrations of power in signs and wonders argued that Jesus was deceiving the crowds with some kind of smoke-and-mirrors deception. This point is often overlooked by those who dismiss the miraculous accounts found in the Gospels as either myth or illusion used to fool pre-modern people. Most of Jesus' miracles were performed in public, before massive crowds, many of whom had a vested interest in denying His

² "The wording of this verse in both the NIV and the Greek confuses the demon and the man, i.e., the demon is called dumb because it made the man dumb"; James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Luke*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 341.

miraculous power. Yet none of them denied that a miracle had occurred; they fussed about the fact that He performed the miracle on a Sabbath day (e.g. Lk 6:6–11; 13:10–17; Jn 5:1–18; 9:14–16). None of them denied that a demon had been exorcised; they claimed that Jesus cast out the demon by the powers of darkness. Nobody denied that Jesus wielded miraculous power and authority over evil spirits; they claimed that Jesus employed this power in unlawful ways and possessed this authority by insidious means.³ Luke adds that “others, to test him, kept seeking from him a sign from heaven,” which by this point in Jesus’ ministry was a manifestly absurd request. The signs Jesus had performed by this point was beyond number. Furthermore, Jesus just cast out a demon before their eyes *like five minutes ago*, the evidence of which was that the mute man now spoke; why did that not count for a sign? Jesus will deal with this request for a sign beginning in v. 29; first, however, He addressed the charge that He was casting out demons by the power of Satan.

“He casts out demons by Beelzebul, the prince of demons.” *Beelzebul* occurs only in the Gospels, and nowhere else in Scripture. A closely-related term *Baal-zebul* occurs in 2 Kgs 1:2, 6 to refer to the Syrian god of Ekron. *Baal-zebul* means “lord of the flies.” *Baal-zebul* occurs in the Ras Shamra (Ugaritic tablets) as the name of a Canaanite deity, meaning “lord of the dwelling/lord of the high place.” By the first-century, the Jews had likely taken the names of these pagan deities and applied them as a proper name for Satan, reflecting the Jewish propensity to refer to pagan gods as demons (Ps 96:5; 1 Cor 10:20).⁴ Clearly, Jesus understood “Beelzebub, the prince of demons” (βεελζεβοὺλ τῷ ἄρχοντι τῶν δαιμονίων) as a reference to Satan, for he used the two terms interchangeably (vv. 18–19).

So the point of contention was not whether an exorcism had occurred; everyone agreed that one had. The dispute was over *by what power* the exorcism had occurred, and therefore, *who* or *what* Jesus was. Was Jesus in league with the devil? Was He some kind of pagan magician? According to NT scholar David Aune, “In Greco-Roman paganism magical procedures were

³ “That he exercised power over the evil spirits does not seem to have been doubted, even by his enemies. But they did try to discredit him by ascribing the source of his power not to God but to the devil”; Leon Morris, *Luke*, TNTC (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 1988), 215. “It is significant that Jesus’ opponents do not deny his authority to expel demons, nor do they accuse him of being an imposter. They acknowledge his miracles but attempt to discredit them by attributing them to Beelzebul rather than to God”; Edwards, 342–43. “Jesus’ opponents do not dismiss his exorcisms as some kind of hoax but perversely attribute them to forces of evil, not God. . . . The church would not have invented this charge, and this accusation reveals that Jesus’ contemporaries believed that he performed works of uncommon power”; David E. Garland, *Luke*, ECNT (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2011), 481.

⁴ Edwards, 342; Morris, 215–16.

commonly used for acquiring divine revelations and for securing the aid of an ‘assistant daemon’ (*paredros daimôn*) who could mediate such revelation and enable the practitioner to perform miraculous feats.”⁵ Or was Jesus the Messiah, the promised Son of God and Son of Man who would crush Satan beneath His feet?

The Power for Conquest (11:17–22)

Though these charges were made in private (or at least not in Jesus’ hearing, Jesus nevertheless knew their thoughts. Jesus answered the charge in three ways. First, He pointed out that their accusation was *irrational*.⁶

But he knowing their thoughts, said to them, “Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and a divided household falls. And if Satan also is divided against himself, how will his kingdom stand. For you say that I cast out demons by Beelzebul.” (11:17–18)

Jesus argued from a universally-recognized proverb that no kingdom can withstand an assault from without if it is engaged in civil war within. Abraham Lincoln famously quoted Jesus’ words in June of 1858 from the Illinois statehouse when he said in perhaps his most famous campaign speech, “A house divided against itself cannot stand. I believe this government cannot endure, permanently half slave and half free.”⁷ Therefore, it is irrational and illogical to argue that Satan, who desires to maintain his grip upon the kingdom of this world, would undermine that kingdom by granting Jesus the power to expel his own demons. As David Garland comments, “Why would Satan deputize Jesus to wreak havoc in his own domain?”⁸

Second, Jesus pointed out that their accusation was *inconsistent*.

“And if I cast out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they will be your judges.” (11:19)

⁵ David E. Aune, *Prophecy in Early Christianity and the Ancient Mediterranean World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 242; quoted in Garland, 481.

⁶ Garland writes that Jesus’ response “exposes the illogic of Satan trying to undermine his own kingdom and purposes by empowering Jesus to work exorcisms”; Garland, 482. Similarly, J. C. Ryle wrote that Jesus “infers the absurdity of the idea that Satan would cast out Satan, or the devil cast out his own agents”; J. C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on Luke, Volume 2* (1858; Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2012), 14.

⁷ Quoted in Philip Ryken, *Luke, Volume 1: Luke 1–12*, REC (Phillipsburg: P&R, 2009), 594.

⁸ Garland, 482.

As we discussed back in Luke 9 when we saw that the crowds who witnessed Jesus' exorcisms "were astonished at the majesty of God" and "were all marveling at everything he was doing" (9:43), they were not astonished by the *fact* that Jesus cast out demons, but rather by the *manner* in which He cast them out. Exorcisms were not uncommon in first-century Palestine, as Jesus' own words here in v. 19 demonstrate.⁹ What astonished the crowds was that Jesus did not employ elaborate rituals or incantations; He did not apply any special root or ointment, nor did He appeal to the names of David or Solomon or Moses or the prophets. Jesus cast out demons by the power and authority of His own name. But the fact remains that others in first-century Palestine—"your sons," Jesus called them—practiced exorcism as well.¹⁰ And, as extrabiblical Jewish literature reveals, they utilized all manner of bells and whistles to make it happen. If anyone was empowered by Satan to cast out demons, it would be them. Ryken explains,

Apparently there were other people in the Jewish community who also had the power to cast out demons. It was generally acknowledged that whenever a religious leader performed such an exorcism, it was a sign that God was working through him. This is not what the critics were saying about Jesus, however. When *he* cast out demons, they said it was the work of the devil. This was inconsistent. If they said that Jesus was working for the devil, then obviously they should be saying the same thing about their own exorcists. Yet they had always believed that exorcism was the work of God. So Jesus caught them in a contradiction. In denying that his power came from God, they were denying one of their own basic principles for judging the truth.¹¹

"If casting out demons means a league with the devil," writes Morris, "then Jewish practitioners of the art are in the same case."¹² So their accusation was both irrational and inconsistent.

Third, Jesus pointed out that their accusation was *unbiblical*.

⁹ Edwards argues that exorcisms were known, but "were a rarity in both Israel and Judaism"; Edwards, 344. I'm not sure that Jesus' words in v. 19 support this claim.

¹⁰ Garland believes that "your sons" refers to "his own disciples who successfully performed exorcisms (9:1–9; 10:17–20) or to those unknown supporters who did them in his name (9:49)"; Garland, 482. His argument is inconsistent and unconvincing.

¹¹ Ryken, 599.

¹² Morris, 216.

“But if it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. (11:20)

“The finger of God” (δακτύλῳ θεοῦ) was a Hebrew expression for the sovereign authority and omnipotent power of God (Ex 31:18; Ps 8:3). It occurs in Exodus 8:19, when the Egyptian magicians, who were able to match Moses and Aaron in the first two plagues by their magic arts, were forced to admit defeat at the third plague. “This is the finger of God,” they said to Pharaoh. Thus, Jesus said, if it is evident that I am casting out demons by the sovereign authority and omnipotent power of God (and what else could it be, as Jesus did not use rituals or incantations or aids of any kind?), then it should likewise be evident that the kingdom of God has come. The reason I say their accusation was unbiblical is because the Scriptures had taught them to expect that when the kingdom of God dawned, the kingdom of Satan would topple. Think of the prophecies of Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28 that we read earlier, or what about the visions of Daniel 2 and 7? When Jesus referred to Satan as the “ruler of this world” (Jn 12:31; 14:30), that was not some new or obscure doctrine. The Pharisees expected the coming kingdom of God, and they knew that Satan presently ruled the world. What, then, did they expect to be the sign of the inbreaking of the kingdom of God if not the King casting out demons everywhere He went?

In vv. 21–22, Jesus told a parable that illustrated what was transpiring before their very eyes, though they were ignorant of it.

“When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own palace, his goods are safe; but when one stronger than he attacks him and overcomes him, he takes away his armor in which he trusted and divides his spoil.” (11:21–22)

In this parable, the strong man is Satan, who is “fully armed” (καθωπλισμένος) not only with all of the wisdom and power and cunning with which he was created, but also with his innumerable horde of fallen angels, every one of which so far exceeds the wisdom and power of man that it is like a grown man compared to a toddler. The strong man’s “palace” (αὐλήν) is the kingdom of this world, the fallen spiritual dominion that stands hidden behind all the nations of the world, invisibly bending them to Satan’s will. There may be many nations, but they are all ruled by one kingdom and one king (for all those Tolkien fans, think of Sauron, Mordor, and the One Ring).

The strong man's "goods" (τὰ ὑπάρχοντα αὐτοῦ) are the men and women under his sway (Eph 2:2; Col 1:13; 2 Tm 2:26; Heb 2:15). The "stronger man" is Jesus, and his "attack" that ends in victory is His incarnation, ministration, crucifixion, resurrection, and ongoing mission. By His incarnation Jesus landed upon Satan's shores, by His ministration He launched an assault upon Satan's domain, by His crucifixion He toppled Satan's throne, by His resurrection He raised the banner of His kingdom atop the smoldering ruins of Satan's fortress, and through the ongoing mission of His church He is liberating Satan's captives. That the stronger man takes away the "armor" (πανοπλίαν) in which the strong man trusted I take as a reference to the binding of Satan that John sees symbolically depicted in Revelation 20:1–3, when "the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil and Satan," is seized and "bound" (ἔδησεν) and thrown into the bottomless pit "that he might not deceive the nations any longer. I think this because in Matthew's parallel account of this saying, he quotes Jesus as saying,

"Or how can someone enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man? Then indeed he may plunder his house." (Mt 12:29)

"Binds" (δήσῃ) in Matthew 12:29 is the same word used in Revelation 20:2. What Matthew called "binding" in Matthew 12:29, Luke called "tak[ing] away his armor" in Luke 11:22. The effect is the same—Satan is rendered defenseless against the onslaught of the kingdom of God. Finally, the "spoil" (διαδίδωσιν) that the strong man divides in v. 22 are the "goods" of v. 21—in other words, people whom Satan holds in captivity, but who are liberated by the redeeming work of Christ and are being delivered by the ongoing mission of Christ through the church..

The point of these verses is that the kingdom of God was being inaugurated by the power of God, and that this inauguration of Christ's kingdom meant the destruction of Satan's kingdom.

The Present Choice (11:23, 27–28)

If this is true, then every person present that day, and every person present today, is faced with a choice—are you with the King, or against Him? For when it comes to the conquest of the kingdom of this world, there can be no neutrality. Look at v. 23:

Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters.
(11:23)

You will remember that Jesus made a similar, yet opposing, statement back in 9:50 when John and the disciples wanted to stop an unnamed disciple from casting out demons in Jesus' name "because he does not follow with us." To them, Jesus said, "Do not stop him, for the one who is not against you is for you." Ironically, the similarity of the contexts (casting out demons) helps to explain the difference in the two statements. The unnamed disciple in 9:50, though he was not part of the band of disciples that followed Jesus around Galilee, nevertheless was on the side of the kingdom of Christ against the kingdom of Satan, for he was casting out demons in Jesus' name. Thus, "the one who is not against you is for you." But in 11:23, the Pharisees set themselves in opposition to Christ and His kingdom. In so doing, they aligned themselves with Satan and his kingdom. Thus, "Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters." When it comes to the kingdom of Christ and Christ the King, there is no middle ground. You either swear allegiance to the king and join His assault upon Satan's kingdom, or you aid and abet the enemy of Christ and His kingdom, which makes you an enemy of Christ and His kingdom. The triumph of Christ and His kingdom is certain; do not be found on the wrong side of history, or on the wrong side of theology.

Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems, and he has a name written that no one knows but himself. He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God. And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses. From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of Lords. (Rv 19:11–16)

You do not want to be found an enemy of Christ when He returns to destroy Satan and all those aligned with him.

But what does it mean to be “with Jesus?” How does one renounce Satan and his kingdom and swear allegiance to Christ and His kingdom? I think that is the purpose of Luke’s including vv. 27–28 at the end of this passage, before Jesus addresses the request for another sign beginning in v. 29.

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!” But he said, “Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it!” (Lk 11:27–28)

Evidently, a woman in the crowd that day had been watching and listening to Jesus, and it occurred to her how wonderful it must be to have a son like Him. I don’t know how much we can read into her blessing to learn about her faith in Christ; maybe she had saving faith, maybe not.¹³ At any rate, Jesus corrects and redirects the blessing to “those who hear the word of God and keep it.” Who will be blessed by the King in the coming kingdom? Those who hear the word of God and keep it. This, then, is what it means to be “with Jesus.” This is how one renounces Satan and his kingdom and swears allegiance to Christ and His kingdom.

It would be wise for everyone in this auditorium today to examine themselves by this rubric. Are you with Christ, or against Him? Are you a citizen of Christ’s kingdom, or are you still a willing slave in Satan’s kingdom? Here is the test—do you hear the word of God and keep it? What is involved in hearing the word of God and keeping it? There are three fundamental components. The first is faith—you must believe the word of Christ to be the word of God. You must believe the word of the gospel that I have preached to you today to be true and authoritative such that it commands your obedience.

- Do you believe there is one true and living God who eternally exists as three persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit?
- Do you believe that God created all things by the word of His power and for the demonstration of His glory?

¹³ Edwards notes that “the woman’s blessing was equally a blessing of Jesus”; Edwards, 348. Ryken notes, “The woman in Luke 11 was one of the first people to make that call [i.e. to bless Mary in fulfillment of her prophecy in Lk 1:48 that ‘from now on all generations will call me blessed’], yet she was in danger of missing the message”; Ryken, 609.

- Do you believe that God created man to glorify and enjoy Him forever, and to exercise dominion upon the earth?
- Do you believe that Satan and innumerable angels were likewise created good and glorious, but rebelled against God and were cast out of heaven and condemned to judgment?
- Do you believe that Satan incited man to rebel against God, and that man in consequence has come under the curse of God's wrath?
- Do you believe that Satan has consolidated his power and constructed his kingdom upon the earth, and that he holds all men in bondage to his will?
- Do you believe that God promised a Savior, born of woman, who would destroy the works of Satan, redeem man from bondage, and reconcile them to God?
- Do you believe that throughout the OT, this Savior was revealed to be a divine/human Messiah—the anointed Prophet, Priest, and King who would triumph over Satan and establish an everlasting kingdom?
- Do you believe that Jesus Christ is that promised Messiah, that promised King, who by His incarnation, ministration, crucifixion, resurrection, and ongoing mission through His church has defeated and bound Satan, has liberated his captives, and has inaugurated His kingdom?
- Do you believe that Jesus is ascended to the right hand of the Majesty on High where He presently rules and reigns, and from which He will return to effect the salvation of His people, execute judgment upon His enemies, and consummate His kingdom?
- Do you believe that there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven by which we must be saved (Acts 4:12)?

If so, if you believe these facts to be true (and they are true, whether you believe them or not), then you must do something about that. This is the second component involved in hearing the word of God and keeping it. You must renounce Satan and all his works, and swear allegiance to Christ and submit to all His ways. How do you do that? There is a private and invisible step that must come first, and a public and visible step that must come after. The private, invisible step is to call upon the name of Christ in faith, and ask Him to forgive you of your rebellion, ask Him to give you a new heart to love and obey Him, and ask Him to grant you citizenship in His kingdom according to His mercy and merits alone. Then, when you have done that, when you have bowed

before the King, renounced Satan, and sworn allegiance to Christ alone, He commands you to signify this publicly in baptism and church membership. So I ask you again, are you with Christ, or against Him?

The Proof of Conversion (11:24–26)

I said a moment ago that there were three fundamental components to hearing the word of God and keeping it. Thus far, I have only mentioned two—faith and repentance, both invisible graces made visible through baptism and church membership. For the third component, let's go back and pick up vv. 24–26, which Jesus spoke in same context, immediately following v. 23 (there is no textual or thematic reason for the paragraph break in the ESV):

“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.” (11:24–26)

How do you know if you have genuinely believed and repented? How do you know if you have authentically renounced Satan and sworn allegiance to Christ? The proof will be in the perseverance.

These verses are a warning against a temporary and superficial conversion. The details should be familiar to most of us who have been Christians for any length of time, for we have seen this very thing happen to friends, or family members, and sadly, to church members. An “unclean spirit” goes out of a person, which need not imply that the person was demon-possessed; it has application to all who are in bondage to Satan, to whatever degree. The person, now cleansed of the evil influence, experiences a reformation; his life changes in demonstrable ways—his “house is swept and put in order.”¹⁴ But genuine conversion is not the same thing as moral reformation. In this short parable, the house, while clean, remains empty. Though the unclean spirit temporarily vacated, the home was not indwelt by the Holy Spirit. In other words, the man's life

¹⁴ “Without the evil spirit the man's life is better. He is able to order things properly. Jesus describes a moral tidying up”; Morris, 217.

was reformed, but his soul was not regenerated. Meanwhile, the spirit passes through “waterless places” (ἀνύδρων τόπων) seeking rest, and finding none. In some biblical imagery (e.g. Is 13:21; 34:14; Jer 50:39; 51:37; Rv 18:2) and in popular Jewish thought, the desolate wilderness was the abode of demons.¹⁵ The unclean spirit doesn’t find rest, and so it decides to return to “my house,” by which it rather chillingly means the person, its host. Coming back and finding it clean—but unoccupied—it goes (why, Jesus does not say) and finds seven spirits more evil than itself and they all together inhabit (κατοικεῖ — “to settle down, to live permanently”¹⁶) that person. Thus, the last state of the man is infinitely worse than the first.

Obviously, this parable reveals much about the activity of demons that could draw our attention. But that is not the point; that is not the reason Jesus told the parable. The point is that you must not be coy about conversion. You are either with Christ, or against Christ. You are either all in, or you are all out. So once you have renounced Satan and sworn allegiance to Christ, keep pressing in and keep pressing on in hearing the word of God and keeping it. Do not settle for some superficial “Christian phase,” some external moral reformation. Do not settle for anything else than a deep, thorough, complete conversion to Christ. Ask Christ to fill you with the Holy Spirit, and to transform you from the inside out. To borrow a turn of phrase from Philip Ryken, do not settle for being partially reformed; do not rest until you are totally renewed.¹⁷ And the only way to be confident that you have experienced regeneration and renewal rather than shallow regret and superficial reformation, the only way to know that you have been indwelt by the Spirit of Christ, is to continue hearing the word of God and keeping it.

This morning, I stand as an ambassador of the King; and on His authority, I offer to His terms of surrender. Renounce Satan and his kingdom, and swear allegiance to Christ and His kingdom. Do so privately and invisibly by faith and in prayer, then publicly and visibly by baptism and church membership. If you do, the King will grant you a full and complete and irrevocable pardon, and give you an everlasting inheritance in His kingdom. But you must make your choice *today*.

¹⁵ “Desert places were popularly regarded as the haunts of evil spirits and Jesus pictures this one as wandering through such waterless regions without finding rest”; Morris, 217. See also Edwards, 347. “They do not find rest in waterless places because of the absence of people”; Garland, 484.

¹⁶ Morris, 217.

¹⁷ “He was partially reformed, but not totally renewed”; Ryken, 604. Later, Ryken writes, “Moral reformation without spiritual regeneration even leads to demonic domination”; Ibid., 605.