

No Switzerlands... pick a side

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Date: 11 March 2012

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[0 : 00] The reading of God's Word today comes from the Gospel of Luke, chapter 11, verses 14 to 36. Please follow along in your bulletin. And he was casting out a demon, but it was mute.

When the demon had gone out, the mute man spoke, and the crowds were... But when some of them said, he cast out demons by Bezabal, the ruler of the demons, others to test him, were demanding of him a sign from heaven.

But he knew their thoughts and said to them, Any kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and a house divided against itself falls. If Satan also is divided against himself, how will his kingdom stand?

For you say that I cast out demons by Bezabal, and if I, by Bezabal, cast out demons, by whom do your sons cast them out? So they will be your judges.

But if I cast out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own house, his possessions are undisturbed.

[1 : 12] But when someone stronger than he attacks him and overpowers him, he takes away from him all his armor on which he had relied, and distributes his plunder. He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me scatters.

When the unclean spirit goes out of a man, it passes through waterless places seeking rest, and not finding any, it says, I will return to my house from which I came.

And when it comes, it finds it swept and put in order. Then it goes and takes along seven other spirits, more evil than itself, and they go in and live there.

And the last state of that man becomes worse than the first. While Jesus was saying these things, one of the women in the crowd raised her voice and said to him, Blessed is the womb that bore you and the breast at which you nursed.

But he said, On the contrary, blessed are those who hear the word of God and observe it. As the crowds were increasing, he began to say, This generation is a wicked generation.

[2 : 23] It seeks for a sign, and yet no sign will be given to it but the sign of Jonah. For just as Jonah became a sign to the Ninevites, so will the Son of Man be this generation.

The Queen of the South will rise up with the men of this generation at the judgment and condemn them because she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon. And behold, something greater than Solomon is here.

The men of Nineveh will stand up with this generation at the judgment and condemn it because they repented at the preaching of Jonah. And behold, something greater than Jonah is here.

No one, after lighting a lamp, puts it away in a cellar nor under a basket, but on the lampstand, so that those who enter may see the light. The eye is the lamp of your body.

When your eye is clear, your whole body is also full of light. But when it is bad, your body also is full of darkness. Then watch out that the light in you is not darkness.

[3 : 27] If therefore your whole body is full of light, with no dark part in it, it will be wholly illumined. And when the lamp illumines you with its rays.

This is the reading of God's word. The following is a letter documenting the correspondence between two demons in our world.

My dear Wormwood, I was quite disappointed to learn of your patience' conversion to the enemy's side. While your incompetence in preventing this from happening will not go unpunished, all is not yet lost.

Though he is now a Christian, and you have lost that battle, our war is still on, and requires new tactics for which we have an entire specialized arsenal.

Do not try with arguments to persuade him to leave the enemy. That will only embolden him all the more. No, make him comfortable now. Put his mind at ease.

[4 : 37] Convince him our battle is either over, or that it never happened. You must not let him learn, or feel in any way that he is in the vanguard of our war.

Now, busyness is one of our Father Below's greatest tactics. If he can be made so busy with practical, ordinary, daily concerns of work, relationships, and even church activities, he won't have time to spend with the enemy, or to think about eternal matters.

Trust me, once he's been secluded from the enemy by busyness, you can begin to show him so many other humans around him who unknowingly serve our cause, who have more money, who are more attractive, powerful, and even nicer than him.

He can then become convinced that others are happier than he is, and therefore they have no need of God. You see, over the course of thousands of years, our Father Below has conditioned the human mind to subconsciously think that it has all the time in the world, and he can straddle the fence in this war of souls and eternity.

Make him forget that he is now an important part of our enemy's army, and that his home is heaven, and not really earth. Lull him into comfort and security in this world, and he will quickly forget his duty to the next world, and those around him who are trapped in our plans, and destined for a well-deserved destruction and habitation with us down below.

[6 : 28] Before too long, he will become convinced that as long as he doesn't stray too far into being too bad or too good, that he can remain neutral and comfortable.

When he has the fantasy of being neutral, firmly plant in his mind, he becomes a valuable weapon for our cause, since he will have no idea he's been following our orders.

Keep him in this state of numbness as long as possible, as the damage we can do by these simple lies in his life and those around him will be great.

Your affectionate uncle, Screwtape. Wow. I don't know if I can get my voice that deep. God has equipped people in the body with many talents, huh?

How you guys doing? Good? Good? Good, good. Okay, well, you know, as I am a pastor and a dad and a husband, I wear a lot of different hats.

[7 : 45] As a pastor, I have a couple burdens that weigh on me. One of the burdens is that sometimes we would forget or somehow that we would forget why we are here as a church.

We've said from the very beginning, you see it in documents, you see it in the website, that we are here for the glory of God and for those not in church on Sunday. The idea of that is that we're missional, we're outwardly focused, we're about talking to people wherever God has us at our workplace or wherever we're traveling, and we're about sharing our lives and the gospel with them there and also bringing them here.

But meeting them where they're at, my fear is that sometimes we forget that or I forget that. Another thing that I have a burden for as I think about my life is I forget why we're here.

If you read the documents and see on the website, we say that Watermark, we believe, exists for the glory of God and to allow people to take their next step in their spiritual journey.

I think sometimes we forget that also. When I teach a sermon, I have this incredible burden that you're going to hear it and you're going to go, this is where I need to be right now.

[9 : 09] And you're going to walk away just, that's just impossible. But we're here on a journey and a journey consists of many steps, taking them and changing.

So our hope is after you hear a sermon, you come to worship and you experience community and you eat great food and you have the Lord speak to you in this time, you start thinking, okay, what is the next step for me?

Now we don't want anybody to stay where they are. If you stay where you are the same place this year as you are next year, then we feel like something's gone wrong. But it's a journey that we take little steps and so all along we're saying, okay, God, what is the next step in my life and how can I honor you and please you as I walk in this direction?

When I was looking at this passage for quite a while, I was reminded of this story of this missionary doctor in Africa and the story, which is true, said that this doctor was reaching out to this tribe in Africa and one day the princess of the tribe came to meet him and as she walked up to his house, she saw a mirror hanging by his door.

Well, it was just a normal mirror. It was a mirror that he used to shave and brush his teeth and get ready every day, but this lady had never seen a mirror. And so she's attracted by the glinting of it and she went up to the glinting of it and she saw it and she grabbed it and she looked at it and she pulled it up to her face and she saw the most ugly and hideous face she'd ever seen.

[10:44] Well, she pushed it back and she looked on the back side of it to see what was back there, but there was nothing. And she asked the doctor, what is this? This is a mirror.

Well, what do you use this for? Why, I use this to look at myself and to understand what I look like. And asked her, she was convinced that there wasn't a trick behind it. She said, I want this. I must have this. And the doctor goes, well, this is my only mirror. I need this to shave and brush my teeth and there's not another mirror. I need this. She goes, I'll pay you vast amounts of money for this. I'll give you all these elephant tusks of ivory and anything you want, I'll give this to you. Well, the doctor thought about it for a while and he said, I need this. It's going to be months before I can get another one, but for the sake of the relationship with this lady, I'm going to give her this mirror. And so he gives the princess this mirror and she takes this mirror and she looks at it very intently and stares.

And then all of a sudden with just a violent movement, she throws it to the ground and shatters it in a thousand pieces. And the doctor looks at her like, and she goes, there.

[11:56] You're never going to tell on me again. Now the reason I tell that story is because that is how I feel sometimes when I come to God's word.

We come down and we open God's word and it's a mirror to our souls. It shows us what we're really like and what we really are and you can't hide from a mirror because a mirror always tells the truth and sometimes we just want to throw it away because it's too hard.

But when we come to God's word, we see that there's two things working. There's his holiness and his character and there's our incredible need for him and our brokenness.

And as we grow on this journey, in between there is the cross and grace and forgiveness and mercy.

And if we forget mercy and grace and we just see judgment and hard things, we just become we become not good.

[13:07] We walk in fear. And if we just see grace and we don't see truth and holiness and God's character, then we forget why we have grace and we just start doing whatever we want to do because we forget who we are.

But when we come to God's word, my prayer is that we'll see all of these things brought together and we'll fall in love with Christ. Today's passage is an interesting passage.

Last week, we talked about prayer and you're going to understand why we talked about prayer because today, we're going to talk about choices we need to make. And in this passage, I think we're going to see three choices.

We're going to see choices that we have to make in what side we're on. We're going to see choices we're going to have to make in what power we choose from.

And we're going to see choices that we have to make in how we're going to live our life every day. If you look in your bulletin, we're looking at Luke chapter 11 verses 14 through 36.

[14:13] I think that I'll probably only get to 28 today. And this is what we're talking about is we look at the choice of what side we're going to be on. Now remember, Jesus had just taught this lesson on prayer and he said that we, this is how you pray.

It's the only time his disciples ever taught him how to do anything. And he said, you pray knowing who God is. You pray knowing how to pray to him. You come to him as a father in a child's relationship.

And you know why you come to him because he's good. And today we look at why we need to come to him. Why we need to pray. Verse 14 says, and he was casting out a demon and it was mute and the demon had gone out and the mute man spoke and the crowds were amazed.

The word in Greek is like they were like, oh my gosh. But some of them in verse 15 and we know who these are because of Matthew and Mark's account, they're the religious leaders. The religious leaders have been finding, trying to find a way to crucify Christ.

They've been trying to find a way to label him as a blasphemer, a guy who hates God. And so they watch these things happen, these incredible things. He's casting out these demons and they say, he cast out demons by Beelzebul, the ruler of the demons.

[15 : 30] Now it's a very interesting word there. Basically what they're saying is that Beelzebul is the name that the Jews finally gave to the devil. It was the ruler of the Canaanites.

They worshiped Baal. His name was Baal the prince but they called him Beelzebul, the Jewish people did because it meant that he was the Lord of flies. And so after seeing all these miracles they look at what Jesus did and they say, you are the Lord of crap because that's where flies come to.

Can you imagine that? You're the Lord of the flies. Others, to test him, in Greek the word basically means to find fault, to trick him.

It's the same word that was used by Satan when he took him out into wilderness to tempt him. They were demanding a sign from heaven. They wanted to see something huge. They wanted to see an eclipse or something that was out of control. I thought about this passage a lot because we live around people all the time and say, if God could just show himself to me, if Jesus could just show himself, then I'll believe.

But here you have people who are with Jesus every day and they saw amazing things from him. Feeding 5,000, catching fish, healing people, bringing people from the dead, freeing people who are demonically possessed and all of these people say, I still don't believe.

[17 : 01] Would we really believe that Jesus walked in the room right now? The people in Jesus' day didn't. They wanted a sign. But he knew their thoughts and he said to them, so he's listening to their thoughts and he can hear their hearts.

Any kingdom divided against itself is laid waste and the house divided against itself falls and if Satan is also divided against himself, how will his kingdom stand? He said, for you say that I cast out demons by Beelzebul.

So he gives them this benefit of the doubt. So let's say I do. I do cast them out by Beelzebul. Well then how do your sons cast them out? Because it was well recorded that Jewish historians throughout history, that Jewish guys would go around and they would exercise demons.

Some of them would do it with incantation, some of them would do it with a potion, but it happened. And in the Talmud, the rabbis always said that anybody who could cast out a demon was definitely the hand, the finger of God and Jesus says, okay, let's say that I am.

How do your guys do it? If I, by Beelzebul, cast out demons by whom you, do your sons cast them out so they will be your judges but I, if I cast out demons by the finger of God and the minute he said that they would have thought back to Egypt with Moses in front of Pharaoh, it's the exact same words of God's handwriting, it's the exact same words of God's finger writing out the Ten Commandments, everybody would have understood what he was saying.

[18 : 32] If I write out and do these things by the finger of God then the kingdom of God has come upon you. God is here. The Messiah is here. If these things are really happening, God is in your presence. What are you going to do about it? How are you going to react when a strong man fully armed guards his own house?

His possessions are undisturbed. But when someone stronger than he attacks and overpowers him, he takes away from him all his armor on which he rallied and relied and he distributes his plunder and immediately the people would have known who he was talking about.

The strong man is Satan, the devil. And he has this world under control. and his possessions are who?

Who are his possessions? Us. His possessions are us.

You have an owner. Everyone has an owner or a master. And so the strong man guards his house and the only thing that a strong man is worried about is somebody stronger and when the stronger person comes, Jesus, he attacks him, he overpowers him, he pins him down, he conquers him completely, he takes off his armor and he distributes everything.

[19 : 59] Well, Jesus is just describing what happened. He just cast out a demon. He just bound the strong man and he freed this guy like he does in our lives. And then he says something very specific.

My mouth is dry. All this time he's trying to share that we're in this war, that there's these two kingdoms that are fighting each other. There's only two kingdoms. There's a kingdom of God and there's a kingdom of the devil.

Is there a third kingdom? No, there's not a third kingdom. There's two kingdoms. There's a kingdom of God and there's a kingdom of the devil. And all these passages Jesus is trying to say that we're

in the middle of this huge war that is much greater than anything we could talk about, that Satan is real.

He's trying to grab people to his kingdom. He's trying to keep them blinded. He's trying to let them forget that there's a battle going on. In verse 23 he says something very hard and harsh. He says, he who is not with me is against me and he who does not gather with me scatters.

Did you hear what he said? I mean, the minute he said that everybody would have just, he who is not with me is against me and he who does not gather with me scatters.

[21 : 17] I mean, Jesus is saying there, and this is huge, he's saying there's no, there's no neutrality. You can't sit on a fence. There's no Switzerland. There's no place in between the two kingdoms where you're safe.

You're either in one kingdom or in your other kingdom. Either you're working for the kingdom or you're working for the other kingdom, but there's no, there's no neutral place. You can't be indifferent. You can't say, well, I just, you know, I don't know.

I'm just trying to make a decision still. I haven't heard enough yet. But what Jesus is saying to his disciples and he's saying to us is that every one of us is in one of two camps.

Now, I'm not saying that if you don't follow Christ right now that you're demon possessed. That's not what the passage says here. But the passage says that if you're not a Christ follower that you're in demon territory. And that Satan has control of where you walk and what you do and who you are and what happens in your life.

And Jesus says to us and he says to them, hey, we need to make a choice. Every woman, every man is either for Christ or you're against Christ.

[22 : 29] Every woman, every man is either for Christ or you're against Christ. Jesus doesn't allow a spiritual reality of a center in between place.

He's saying we gotta choose. How do we choose? What does it mean to take that next step into choosing? He uses very specific words.

He says gathered. And the minute people in Jesus' day would have understood this, they would have thought of a couple things. They would have thought about the shepherds that go out and get the sheep and gather them. But they would have thought about this passage in Judges. And there's a story in Judges 8 where Gideon is about to go up against the Midianites and the Midianites have an army of like 30,000 people.

And God basically whittles Gideon's army down to 300 men and God gives them victory over the 30,000 people. And after the battle is over, Gideon is chasing these guys and they're corralling them, they're gathering them, they're destroying them utterly and they come to this city, Sukkoth. And they go to the city and say, we need your help because we're in the middle of this huge battle and things are raging and we need food and we need refreshment and we need you to come join us because we need your help. And the people of Sukkoth said what?

[23 : 45] You know, it's not really clear to us who's going to win this battle. We really don't know what side we want to be on. I think we'll just stay right in the center and see what happens.

And Gideon says, okay, you can do that. But after I win through God's power, I'm going to come back and we're going to have a talk.

And the talk's not going to be very good. It's going to be hard. What Jesus says here is in reality, in spiritual world, that it's impossible to remain neutral.

That Satan sees neutral people as his. And you might walk around and say, I'm neutral, I'm Switzerland. But the demonic forces in our world today don't honor neutrality.

They want us to pick a side. The next passage I see as we read through this in verses 24 through 28, we get this choice and the choice is, do pick a power.

[24 : 52] How are we going to live? And Jesus tells this story and it's a very interesting parable in a story and it's never told before and he basically says, this is what happens when we try to live our life in our power.

He says, when an unclean spirit goes out of a man, it passes from waterless places seeking rest and not finding any that says, I'll return to my home from which I came.

And when it comes, it finds it swept and kept in order. In Greek, the word is beautiful. And then it goes and it takes along seven other spirits more evil than itself and they go in and they live there and the last day to that man becomes worse than the first.

Jesus is trying to show us and try to show his disciples that there are many ways to live. There are many ways to clean our house. But you gotta be careful how you do it.

I mean, if you look at the world today, people, we're very complicated people. We're social and spiritual and physical and there's so many different dynamics and I've seen so many people change their lives, lose 80 pounds and become disciplined and they all do it through some kind of power and strength.

[26 : 06] And Jesus says, be careful guys where that power comes from. I think the question for us today I often hear is, does it work?

Will it help me? I mean, will I feel better if I become a Christian or if I become a Buddhist? Does it make my life easier? Does it make my life sexy? I mean, if Christianity, maybe you've heard this, I don't know if you've heard this, but I hear it all the time, if Christianity won't give me what I want, I might as well be a Buddhist.

I mean, I found real peace in going to the Hindu temple. What's wrong with that? It works for me. I mean, these books that I'm reading and these self-help books and these seminars, they've really helped me change my life around and Jesus gives this warning here and he says, be careful guys because if you try to renovate your own life, if you try to modify your behavior and you leave a vacuum in your life, then something's going to come into that vacuum.

And the passage says that your old life is going to be worse than your new life. I mean, he wants us to think about that there's a way to get change and there's a way to get power and there's a way to clean our house and there's a way to give ourselves up to something.

I mean, we all give ourselves up to something, don't we? Don't we? Look at your business cards.

[27 : 56] Look at your titles. Look at how you talk about your heritage or who you are. We all give ourselves up to something and Jesus is warning us in this sense. He says, be careful because these powers, they're going to change us.

They're going to make us different. And if you try to change yourself by anything but me, it might work for a while.

I mean, you might find peace going to the Hindu temple. You might find peace sacrificing dogs. All of these things might give you peace.

But it doesn't mean it's right. Where's the power come from? How do we change in our life? In 1930, the Great Depression hit the world and my grandparents went through it and they said afterwards, we will never ever be poor again.

They got self-control. They got a vision. They got power. They got a drive. They got their house in order. Their focus and their goal was not to be poor, not to depend on other people because people are worthless.

[29 : 10] You cannot depend on anybody else. And this power drove them and this power changed them and this power changed the way that they saw people.

This power changed the way they saw stuff. This power changed the way they interacted with their world. And the question I asked myself was, were they better off then or before?

Some people would say the problem we have in our world today and the economy and the way everything is going is because of that that we wanted to change.

A very close friend of mine was taught at an early age. He said the key to life was to be very educated and always maintain control of his emotions. Real men are tough, smart, and never show their emotions.

emotions. He clung to these things and he used them to change himself. He got smarter, he got stronger, he got colder, he forgot his feelings, and he got his house in order. Fear drove him in everything that he did and he changed.

[30 : 26] Is he a better person? I don't know, I guess it depends on who you ask. His wife would say that she doesn't even know him, that he feels distant and that she feels used by him.

His kids are turning out just the way that he is and all of a sudden he's starting to think, is that a good thing? But he grabbed that power, that power of being stupid and poor and he used that power to change his life and to get his life in order.

And now he's looking at his life and he's wondering, did he allow seven demons to come into his world and make his life worse than it was before he grabbed onto those things?

I mean, there are many ways to fix ourselves, guys. We can use religion, we can use education, we can use money, we can use power, we can use relationships, we can use 12 steps, we can use

self-help books, we can use titles.

Did I say we can use religion? We can use all these things. We can harness that power and they will work in our lives for a while. But what Jesus says in his passages, at what cost?

[31 : 50] Is our life better after all these things? Are our families better after all these things? Are our relationships better after all these things? Or will we let seven demons come in and control us?

The passage says that if the power doesn't come from Christ in the gospel, then the emptiness is going to be filled and you have to be careful how you fill it.

Because it says, then it goes and it takes along seven other spirits more evil than itself and they go in and they live there and the last state of the man becomes worse than the first. The last state of the man becomes worse than the first and Jesus is telling us and he's telling his disciples and everyone who will listen that unless God changes you, unless the Holy Spirit fills you, that there's a vacuum and that vacuum is going to get filled up by something and you better be careful because what fills it up might not be what you want.

Let the Holy Spirit fill it up. So we choose a side because there's no Switzerland. We're asked to choose a power and make sure that it's not our own but it's the Holy Spirit who's doing this and then finally we're asked to choose a lifestyle, a response and we see that in verse 27 and 28 and I think this is hilarious.

Please don't do this to me as I'm preaching or talking but as Jesus was saying these things, one of the women cried out and raised her voice and she said, blessed is the womb that bore you in the breast at which you nursed. Now what do you say about that?

[33 : 26] Thank you very much. Can some of the ushers escort that lady out of here please? I mean, in her goodness she's trying to praise Jesus. In her goodness she's trying to praise and compliment Mary and everyone who hears that hears these words.

Blessed are you from where you came. Blessed is your mother because of you and he redirects her really gently and he says in a South Alabama twang, ma'am, the reason my mama is blessed is because she heard God's word and she obeyed it.

Ma'am, the reason my mama is blessed is the angel came to her and said, Mary, this is what's going to happen to you and she looked at that angel and she said, the hand servant of the Lord may be done to me as you said.

And Jesus is telling us and he's telling his disciples here that we have a choice how are we going to respond to what goes on around us and he says here that God's people respond by listening to God's word and obeying it.

God's people respond to his spirit by listening to God's word and obeying it. I mean, we can obey a lot of things but here in this passage Christ says true change, true hope, true blessedness happens because we hear God's word and we can obey it.

[35 : 18] Now, how does all this even happen? How can I even do this in the passage it says really clearly because there was a strong man who had you and me bound, who had control over everything that we have, who made all of our decisions for us and controlled our life.

And this stronger man, Jesus, comes in, he breaks those bondage chains. He gives us freedom. He gives us hope. He gives us mercy. He gives us grace. He gives us a new family. He says, walk with me.

Walk with me. there's a war going all around us. There's only two sides. We have a choice to make every day.

We have a power to choose from and we have a response. And we have a savior who is beside you all the way.

[36 : 39] No matter what you're going to experience today, no matter what happens in your life, no matter who you are, no one can say, but you don't know me, this is really happening to me. Jesus says, I know you. And I freed you.

And you have a choice. Are you going to walk with me today? Are you going to trust me? Are you going to realize that I'm good?

Let's pray. Father, we just thank you for this day. We thank you for your word which is so powerful. We thank you for the message that we see in your son.

We thank you for the choices that we have now as your children. Help us to see the battle around us.

help us to realize that there's kingdoms at war and that we're not neutral. Either the war on one side or the other. Father, help us to realize that the power to change comes not because we try really hard or we do really well or we read a book, but the power to true change comes because of your son and through your spirit.

[38 : 04] Father, thank you for the response that you give us to do every day that we have a choice to listen to your words, to hear your words speak to us, to see the words of life come into our life and you ask us to obey.

Some of us in here realize that's impossible. It's impossible. And your word says, yes it is. It's impossible in your own strength.

But the stronger man has come in and he's freed us and allowed us to choose and to walk and to read and to obey and to follow.

Father, may we be a church and a people who point people to the stronger man every day in our journey. Help us, each one of us, to realize what it means to take small steps of change to trust you. And Lord, we come before you in the middle of this war and we realize how lost we are and we can just cry out to you and claim your victory. We pray all these things in your son Jesus' name.

[39 : 27] Amen.