

BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO HEAR THE WORD OF GOD AND OBEY IT

Luke 11:14-28

Key verse: 28

“He replied, ‘Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it.’”

Jesus taught us to ask our Father in heaven for the Holy Spirit. In our material, realistic world, spiritual things are often dismissed, or only treated as a subjective personal preference. As a result, the spiritual world can seem vague, or unreal. In this passage Jesus paints a picture of a spiritual world that is directly relevant. There is a spiritual war going on that impacts every human being. We see the tangible reality of this conflict in our world: violence, shameful lusts, and a confusion that calls what is evil good and what is good evil. We want to blame people, or cultures, but behind all these things is a malevolent kingdom, ruled by Satan. Where is there deliverance and victory in the spiritual conflict? Let’s find out through listening to Jesus in this passage.

First, Jesus drove out a demon that was mute (14-16). Verse 14. **“Jesus was driving out a demon that was mute. When the demon left, the man who had been mute spoke, and the crowd was amazed.”** The mute demon prevented this man from speaking. Since he never said anything, perhaps people ignored him, or thought he was rude. No one knew his agony under the oppression of an evil spiritual being, a demon, that ruined his life. But Jesus noticed him and Jesus cared for him. He actively worked to set this man free from what oppressed him. Jesus drove out the demon. Jesus came to set the prisoner free, to release the oppressed (4:18). From the beginning of his ministry he faced the spiritual forces of evil, and won, driving out demons everywhere he went.

When he was free from the demon, the man who had been mute spoke. I like to think he shouted with joy and thanked Jesus. Maybe he began to share with everyone what Jesus had done for him. Jesus often performed such healings, and each time people were amazed. On the one hand it is amazing to realize that there is a spiritual reality even though we can’t see it. But I also think Jesus’ grace and love to this man is even more amazing. He uses his power to heal, to save. Jesus describes himself as a shepherd, caring for his sheep with compassion. How

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amazing that Jesus, who has such power and authority, cared for one nameless man, suffering in silence under demonic possession. And he cares about our agonies as well. I think that is so amazing.

I do not believe I am possessed by a mute demon. But sometimes I don't speak the amazing testimony about Jesus and what he has done. I was taken off guard this week when I met a friend of one of my old band members. You may not believe it, but I was lead guitar and vocalist for a heavy metal band in college. So this guy was the manager at a cat shelter I was visiting. I'm thinking I should have shared my testimony of what Jesus has done for me, setting me free, but I didn't want to get personal. Yes, it is hard to confess our spiritual experiences in a world that either discredits it or trivializes it as one truth among many. But as I think about it, how else will people see the spiritual reality around them, unless I share? Even more importantly, how will Jesus be revealed as the Mighty Savior, except through my testimony? Let's not be mute this week. If you have been set free by the Savior, your story is more awesome than any Avengers movie. And it may amaze someone, piercing the spiritual fog of our times.

Not everyone was happy with Jesus. Verses 15-16. **“But some of them said, ‘By Beelzebul, the prince of demons, he is driving out demons.’ Others tested him by asking for a sign from heaven.”** They saw Jesus as a political rival. Isaiah had prophesied that one sign accompanying the Messiah was that the mute tongue would shout for joy (Isaiah 35:5-6). They really didn't want to have him as their king. So instead of acknowledging the obvious evidence of Jesus' Messiahship, they instead attributed his power to, “Beelzebul,” which was another name for Satan. Others tested him with signs, not to believe, but to discredit. What a terrible thing to say about Jesus' life-giving gospel ministry!

Jesus probably should have crushed them. But he didn't see them as his enemy. In fact, he told us to expect such treatment as we serve him (Jn 15:18). Have you ever been called in league with Satan? One Bible student's mother called me Satan because she has dementia and I'm not Catholic. So I didn't take that personally. One time I was out fishing on the UIC campus, and had been walking around for a while and started to feel kind of lonely. At that time I met a guy my age who was out inviting people to his own church ministry. I was thankful to see

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him, and bought him a coffee at BSB. He told me all about his ministry and his church, and how they were trying to spread to UIC. Then I told him all about our 1:1 Bible study ministry, and he got so mad and said I was doing Satan's work because I wasn't helping people to be baptized into his church. I was shocked at his response! Ever had that experience? Jesus was not shocked at this response, nor did he give up. Jesus lived as a shepherd, and continued to do his gospel work in spite of opposition. There are too many people in need of Jesus' care to be side-tracked with such arguments.

Second, “the kingdom of God has come upon you” (17-26). Jesus didn't see these guys as his enemy, but instead he began to appeal to them. Jesus really wanted them to recognize their foolishness and repent. Look at verses 17-18. **“Jesus knew their thoughts and said to them: ‘Any kingdom divided against itself will be ruined, and a house divided against itself will fall. If Satan is divided against himself, how can his kingdom stand? I say this because you claim that I drive out demons by Beelzebul.’”** They had a very wrong impression of Satan's kingdom if they thought it was like human organizations: political and full of strife. The evidence of so many suffering from demon possession proves that Satan's kingdom is not falling! Their claim was ludicrous. Satan has a kingdom, and it will not crumble with time like human kingdoms. He has great power, like a prince over the world. He and his demons will not go quietly; they must be driven out. Some people think the spiritual world is populated by all kinds of spirits, some good and some evil. The Bible teaches there are only two kingdoms: The kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan. Satan's kingdom is not divided.

Verse 19 reads, **“Now if I drive out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your followers drive them out? So then, they will be your judges.”** Jews were aware of spiritual reality and had exorcists, but I read they rarely had any success, and never as clear cut as Jesus did. Later some of them tried to copy Paul and drive out demons in Jesus' name (Acts 19). They could not deny the truth of Jesus' power from God. They would be the judges, Jesus needn't debate this.

Lastly Jesus appeals to them to see the truth: **“But if I drive out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you (20).”**

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Although there are only two kingdoms, we should not think they are equal and opposite, like Yin and Yang. It takes only God's finger to drive out demons. The kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power (1Co 4:20). His work is absolute and obvious, like the Rising Sun, dispelling all the darkness. For people who are crying out for deliverance, Jesus' word is great news! But for those who oppose him, not so much. The phrase, "the finger of God" is used in the book of Exodus by Pharaoh's magicians. When Pharaoh refused to let God's people go, God proceeded to carry out ten plagues against Egypt. The first one was the plague of blood (Ex 7:14-24), where the water of the Nile was turned into blood. That is outrageous! But the magicians were able to do it too, so Pharaoh hardened his heart. But then the third plague was dust becoming gnats. They were not able to produce gnats, and said to Pharaoh, "**This is the finger of God (Ex 8:16-19).**" They suffered the wrath of God and were swept away. These words should help the people of Jesus' time to open their hearts, repent and believe in Jesus. He is the Messiah they were waiting for, but only those who humble themselves and believe are able to receive him.

Have you seen the finger of God at work? There are many testimonies of the power of God. He is not silent or indifferent to our situations and sufferings. He is living and active in our world. I was 19 years old, and had repented my sins and decided to follow Jesus, growing as a shepherd. I had been smoking since the 5th grade and wanted to stop, because I didn't see another shepherd who smoked. I was too weak, and went from 10 to 40 cigarettes a day. I despaired, and brought my defeat to God. He took it away in one weekend. I remember when my son Judah was only a few years old, and he wanted a brother to play with him. We had already miscarried twice in those years. I told him, "Judah, mommy and daddy can't give you a brother, only God can do that. So why don't you ask him?" He prayed for siblings every night for nearly two years, and God heard his prayer. Now he has three younger brothers. God may only use his finger, but it is enough!

Look at verses 21-22. "**When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own house, his possessions are safe. But when someone stronger attacks and overpowers him, he takes away the armor in which the man trusted and divides up his plunder.**" We probably want to be the strong man or the one who overpowers him. We don't want to lose our stuff, or perhaps we want to take on

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Satan and overpower him. But neither of these are the gospel message. I think we are the possessions, kept in the house of the strong man, who is Satan. He is strong, and fully armed. He has the power of sin and death. He diligently works to guard and keep his possessions safe. From Adam, all have sinned, and therefore all have come under the possession of Satan. We cannot escape because we aren't even at the same level with the strong man. No contest. But Jesus comes as someone stronger, and attacks and overpowers Satan. Jesus did not ignore Satan, or work around him; he came to defeat him. The first thing Jesus did after his baptism was to face and defeat Satan. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work (1Jn 3:8b). He did this by stripping Satan's weapons of their power: sin and death. Jesus solved our sin problem on the cross. Sin crouches at our door, desiring to have us, and like Cain none of us can master it. But Jesus through his shed blood on the cross has mastered our sin. When we repent and come to Jesus, who shed his blood on the cross for our forgiveness, we are set free from sin; it is no longer our master. Through his resurrection Jesus has defeated the power of death. We need not fear death any longer. Jesus overpowered Satan and divides up his plunder! Colossians 1:13-14 explains, **“For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves,¹⁴ in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.”** Thank you and praise you Jesus for overpowering Satan and delivering us from his kingdom!

Since Jesus is the stronger man, we need not be afraid of Satan's kingdom. Zechariah sang that Jesus has come to his people **“to rescue us from the hand of our enemies, and to enable us to serve him without fear in holiness and righteousness before him all our days (1:74-75).”** Yes, in the past we used to have no choice but to live as objects of God's wrath (Eph 2:3). But now we have a new King, the Lord Jesus Christ, and we offer every part of our body to him as instruments of righteousness (Ro 6:13). Satan is sneaky, and wants to deceive us through lies and confusion to obey him again. Recently I found out that some things that I have said have really been a burden to others. I sinned, and I'm so sorry to those who had to bear with the “world of evil” in my tongue, perhaps my wife most of all. But this is why we never have to give up or lose the spiritual battle: in the cross of Jesus we have the blessed privilege to repent.

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Look at verse 23. **“Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters.”** Jesus gives no gray area when it comes to his kingdom. There is no neutral ground. This privilege of being in his kingdom comes with great responsibility as well. While Satan’s kingdom is not divided, unfortunately Jesus’ church is full of divisions. Several years ago we saw a presentation on Church history. One picture showed the divisions of the church over time. The Protestant Reformation sparked a series of splits that multiplied so quickly what was once a branch looked like a broom. It seems Jesus’ people have more to divide over than to unite. After reading some books on Missional Ecumenism, I realized that much of this division is over methods and practice. Actually, we are in agreement on the one and only thing that really matters, and that is Jesus. Jesus talks about gathering and scattering, which seems to be an illustration to the harvest. Jesus wants us to gather with him, not only for us to be with him, but to engage in the harvest, because the fields are ripe! Those who do not engage in the harvest Jesus says they will have a scattering influence. This again is a warning to the religious leaders of his time. I don’t want to be a scattering influence, but rather lead people to gather with Jesus.

Verses 24-26. **“When an impure spirit comes out of a person, it goes through arid places seeking rest and does not find it. Then it says, ‘I will return to the house I left.’ When it arrives, it finds the house swept clean and put in order. Then it goes and takes seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there. And the final condition of that person is worse than the first.”** We don’t know why the impure spirit went out of a person. Perhaps it was driven out or perhaps it got bored and was looking for a vacation. But evil spirits get no rest, and their destiny is destruction. So it decided to return to the person it left. The place was in good shape, swept clean and put in order. But there was no one living there; the demon still had that house as a permanent residence on its id. So, it went out and gathered seven other spirits more wicked than itself and they go in and live there. One is bad enough, but seven? That is the number of wholeness or perfection in the Bible. It signifies total depravity. What a terrifying illustration, that makes me tremble!

What sticks out to me is how having the house swept clean and put in order gave no deterrence to the demons. Although a person may live a religious and

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moral life, unless Jesus is living in them, there is nothing to stop the impure spirits. Jesus doesn't ask us to clean up our lives; rather, it seems he is standing at the door of our hearts, asking to be let in, so he may live there. He himself, the stronger man, will keep out any undesirables. He wants to be part of our lives. Living with Jesus, he works to make us holy, not just swept and empty, but having life to the full. What a blessing to have Jesus in our lives, and what a horror it is to not have him, no matter how outwardly moral and religious!

How to have Jesus living in us? I'm reminded of a passage from Pilgrim's progress. In the home of the Interpreter, Christian is shown a dusty and dirty room. A broom is brought, and the room is swept, but it only causes the dust to fill the air. This represents living by the law, which may bring about moral discipline, but cannot cleanse us. But then a water bucket and mop are brought in and the room becomes truly cleaned, because it was washed. This represents the cleansing power of the blood of Jesus in the heart of one who repents.

Third, the blessed (27-28). Verses 27-28. **“As Jesus was saying these things, a woman in the crowd called out, ‘Blessed is the mother who gave you birth and nursed you.’ He replied, ‘Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it.’”** The woman was greatly impressed by Jesus. To have a son like him would be the greatest blessing to any mother. Amen to that. Mary herself testified in her song that she is blessed (1:48). But Jesus said that Mary is blessed not because she was singled out as the human mother of Jesus, but because she heard God's word and she obeyed it. To be blessed isn't an exclusive thing for some rare individuals. Rather, in Jesus Christ, all can be blessed when we hear the word of God and obey it.

I struggled to have a key verse for this passage. I was moved by Jesus as the stronger man. But I realize that from Luke's perspective, Jesus really wants us to come to him and hear his words and put them into practice (Lk 6:47). Those who are his family members hear God's word and put it into practice (Lk 8:21). All the secrets of the blessed life, victory over Satan, the power of the cross, the new life in Christ, all of these are found in God's word. This year we are praying in Chicago to be wise builders who hear God's word and put it into practice, digging

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a deep foundation. Jesus invites us to be the blessed. As we have heard his word today, May God help us to go from this place and put it into practice.