

## Exposing the Myth of Neutrality

Luke 11:14-28

**Introduction:** There are certain sayings or beliefs that we are told, believe, and have even used that we have no idea where they originated, have never substantiated, and have actually perpetuated. Myths are like that. They begin as a whisper, a wise little saying, a tale told to people that has enough plausibility to seem true, even to reasonable, rational minds. I looked up some of these myths (and if its on the internet, it must be true - another myth) that I have been told, maybe believed (or didn't think about enough to disprove) and perhaps have spoken. Take the "swallowed gum will stay in your stomach for 7 years", or "dropping a penny off the Empire State Building will kill someone if it hits their head (tried it, doesn't work)", or "lightning never strikes the same place twice". These have each been debunked, and though not big enough to create national news, are left in the category of myth and legend (also you don't need to wait after you eat to go into the pool, cracking my knuckles does not give me arthritis, and the word "irregardless" is a word, no matter what spell check or Eric Durso says - but these are discussions for another day).

We come to a passage that has Jesus on His final path to Jerusalem with His eye on the cross (Luke 9:51). Opposition grows as does the clarity of His message the closer He gets to Calvary. As His teaching reaches a broader audience, the method of opposition grows in equal measure. There were some direct assaults and interaction, but often the best way to take down an opponent is create a falsehood about them, one that cuts down their credibility, record, or action (we see this vividly in political debates over the last few weeks). One of the myths that had begun a year before in Galilee, as religious opponents of Jesus began to put out there (it'd be like a modern day Twitter war, or some undocumented report that spreads like wildfire on social media) that Jesus did His miracles by the power of Satan (Matthew 12:22-32). The account is almost identical, but we know that the Luke account occurred in Judea, where Matthew's was in Galilee, and Matthew's account also records the man was blind. The key is that a false information campaign was being waged against Jesus. This demonic ploy continues today, and Jesus clarified **2 key truths about following Him that we must understand today - neutrality is a myth, and moralism without regeneration kills.**

### The Smokescreen of Accusation (11:14-16)

*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.***

The setting is one we've seen before. Jesus exercises mercy and compassion on a man who was demonized to the point that he could not speak. The story is somewhat non-descript concerning location and identity of this man, but it clear that the people knew who he was as well as his plight. When Jesus powerfully and decisively cast out the demon, the man began to speak, which led to (and undoubtedly, this would be our reaction) the people marveling. But there were some in the crowd that were committed to a slander campaign, and began to shout out these lies to the crowd. Wickedness and evil use the most powerful weapon at their disposal: **the lie**, seeking to deceive, cause people to question, and call what is clear to be shady, what is right to be wrong. This was seen both in the approach of **slander and denial**, both effective tools to keep people away from the truth.

- **Slander**

"*He casts out demons by Beelzebul, the prince of demons.*" They could not deny that He did the miracle (they tried, but it was so clear and obvious). The next best thing was to embrace that He did the miracle, but did it with the power of Satan. The name "Beelzebul" meant "lord of the flies" and was a

corruption of the name "Baal-Zebul", or prince Baal, exalted lord. This was not simply calling Jesus into question, this was full blown accusation. He was not simply under the influence of demons, he was working in tandem with full participation with Satan himself. This was pretty much the worst, slanderous thing they could think of, and was so egregious that Jesus said that belief in light of the revelation of Jesus was blasphemous against the Holy Spirit (Matthew 12:31-32). This was a lie literally from the pit of hell.

- **Denial**

The second way to spread deceit about Jesus was to **test him**, to demand another sign from Him, one from heaven. They denied the clear manifestation of Jesus' power over satanic forces and subtly denied him by asking for more. Jesus said later on that an evil generation seeks a sign (Luke 11:29) when plenty had been given to respond in faith. Jesus did not oblige their request.

*Myths are created to misdirect us from the truth*

Jesus did miracles through the power of Satan, and He needs to do more to convince us was the propaganda of the day. Both were clearly false but had enough logic to them to lead people astray. What myths are perpetuated today about Jesus?

- Jesus, or whatever, is all I need (love, goodness, tolerance, etc)
- We can do this ourselves because we are not THAT bad, or at least not as bad as others
- We have done too much to be redeemed
- We can have Jesus and whatever sin we want to cling onto - cause there's forgiveness, right
- We can have Jesus without His church
- We can sin in private without it affecting every aspect of our life - especially our thinking - and there's no way I can talk about it with others
- That everyone seems to have it all together, and I'm not like anyone here...or they don't get me...or they don't understand...or they don't \_\_\_\_\_.
- That life in Christ would somehow make my life easier

Each of these has enough plausibility, enough truth to make us believe it, and leads us in the exact opposite direction that God wants for us, that will give us the answers we are looking for, and where will bring us to the greatest joy. Each of these either slander or deny Christ at some level, and must be exposed to walk in the truth.

### **The Straightforward Appeal (11:17-23)**

*But He, **knowing their thoughts**, said to them, 'Every kingdom divided against itself is laid to waste, and a divided household falls. And if Satan is divided against himself, how will his kingdom stand? For you say that I cast out demons by Beelzebul. And if I cast out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they will be your judges. But if it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. 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 divided his spoil.'*

Jesus answered their attack with clarity and compassion. Notice that both of these are at play when He answered the most heinous of blasphemous of responses to His gracious miracle. Though this was slander at its deepest level, He still responded in mercy to expose the rank deception to offer the freshest and sweetest truth. He did this by **exposing 2 lies and espousing a powerful truth..**

- **Exposing an irrational argument (17-18)**

The satanic host do not have to play by consistent rules. The truth is always the truth, but by nature lies are inconsistent and do not have to pass the test of rationality. Like any house of cards, it look good, solid, and remarkable from the outside or in passing, but when any pressure is applied, it collapses under its own weight. Jesus gave a clear, rational, and truthful response to the accusation that He cast our demons by the strength of demons: *a house divided against itself is laid to waste*. In any **Civil War**, there is no real winner in the end, and only two losers (though one will declare victory). It does not take the height of logic and reason to see that Satan would not cut his own legs out from under himself. Even if this was a ruse (a spiritual fake out), the frequency by which Jesus had cast out demons had damaged the demonic kingdom beyond any upside of camouflaging it. Their argument was **irrational and untenable**, showing that it was based on a lie.

- **Exposing an inconsistent argument (19)**

Jesus built on this irrational fallacy with a question of His own: *If I cast out demons by demons, what about your own that do the same?* Since spiritual warfare has always been around, and the power and control that some give over to demons is real, trying to deal with and expel these demons has always been around. **Acts 19** records the actions of "itinerant Jewish exorcists", the seven sons of the Jewish High priest Sceva, who tried to cast out an evil spirit by invoking the name of Jesus, whom they heard Paul proclaim. Unfortunately for them, the demon said he recognized Paul and Jesus, but not them, overpowered them and they fled naked and wounded.

Though these exorcists were not effective, the logical argument remained. Their own people recognized that demons would need to be cast out, so why was the same standard they had for Jesus not be applied to them? The danger for the Jewish leaders was the fact that if this were indeed true, they would be saying that Satan had more power than God, which would have gone against all of their teaching and belief. This shows that a lie, taken to its logical conclusions, will always crumble.

- **Espousing a powerful argument (20-22)**

Now Jesus changed the argument from explaining the fallacy of their argumentation to the true logic of what had just happened. If by the **finger of God** He did this, the Kingdom of God has come. The finger of God was a historical reference to the plagues of Egypt as Moses spoke in front of Pharaoh (Exodus 8:19). Pharaoh's magicians could produce the first two plagues, but *could not produce gnats*. The magicians then said, "**This is the finger of God**", recognizing a greater power than they had. With only one logical response left, it was clear that Jesus did the miracle by the same God who brought the people out of Egypt. But as Pharaoh's heart was hardened against this message, so were the religious leaders of Jesus day.

To drive the point home, He gave an analogy of a **strongman** who held sway, had power and authority over people, until a **stronger man** came along He took away his armor and redistributed his plunder. This was a direct analogy to what He did and was doing to Satan. Satan had delegated authority and exercised it over people, but he trusted in himself and forgot that there is a power greater than he. Satan could blind, deceive, lie, attack, and control those who gave up their control to him, but he could not outdo the real and true power that God has over him. We know that Jesus' death on the cross rendered him powerless who had the power over death, that is, the devil (Heb. 2:14).

Jesus then drew an interesting conclusion to this discussion:

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

This verse is a definitive statement. In the moment, it was a signal to the Jewish leaders and the people that there was a clear dividing line. They had seen miracles, heard the teaching, and been with the

Messiah, and attributing this to Satan was blasphemous, the type of sin that one cannot come back from. Those who slandered and those who denied were on the same ground: they were against Jesus, thus were not on His side, nor a part of His kingdom.

For us, there is a clear principle:

*Neutrality is mythical ...there is no middle ground when it comes to our standing with Jesus - with or against, gathering or scattering*

We tend to default to this type of neutrality. We want to believe that since we do not make blasphemous or directly negative statements about Jesus that we must be ok. We are not opposed to Jesus, we might even like Him, appreciate Him, and apply some of His teaching. But it is clear that this falls short of what He calls us to. We are either all in or all out, we are either gathering with Him or scattering. We either know Him or are not known (Matthew 7:21-23). We must be clear that it is NOT our commitment that saves us, it is Christ's commitment to live, die, and rise again that saves. However, when God's grace allows us to believe, the call of that belief is to leave everything for the love and service of Christ.

Neutrality is a myth. It desires a middle ground that does not exist. There will be far too many who trust their neutrality, who make a decision by not making a decision, and will be found wanting in the end. There is a scene in *The Lord of the Rings: Two Towers* that has always been poignant to me. When Theodin, King of Rohan, faced the prospect of war with the oncoming enemy, he refused to rally his army and fight at the risk of exposing his people to harm in open war. The response by Aragorn was simply "Open war is upon you, whether you would risk it or not." In other words, you can try to stay out of the fray, try to stay safe by not making a decision, and trying to believe there is a mythical middle ground in our eternal state, but we are simply deferring the inevitable

The question for each of us: **which side are we on? Are we with Christ, being found in Him, living for Him, dependent on Him, with His glory our chief aim?** If the answer is anything short of absolutely yes, the opposite answer is clear.

### **The Self-Deception of Moralistic Approaches (11:24-28)**

*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' 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.'*

- **Emptiness of Moral Reformation (24-26)**

Building off this teaching, Jesus then went on teaching about another fallacy of the Jewish leaders teaching, though not directly from a question or a lie. The story is straightforward, but admittedly a bit strange (at least it was to my ears). Moving to a hypothetical of casting out a demon from someone, the story follows the demon and what he does next. He travels through "**waterless places seeking rest**", which is a metaphorical way of saying aimless wandering, purposeless, and in search of a purpose. He did not find another to indwell, so he decided to check on his old stomping ground.

When he returned to his former vessel, he found this man's life was swept, put in order. He was in his right mind. He was back to 'normal'. He was able to function under his own control. However, and this is key, he also found that it was **unoccupied, empty, and open for a new resident**. This demon then

called 7 other spirits to dwell as well, strengthening the hold on this man's life. The man's condition was worse than it was before the first demon left.

**What was Jesus teaching?** Simple. The man was free from demonic oppression, but there was no replacement in his mind and heart. In other words, life got back to where he could do things again on his own, but not yielded in the Holy Spirit in salvation. Salvation means **regeneration** (Titus 3:5), which is washing and renewal of the Holy Spirit. It means that the life we lived apart from Christ is not only yielded to Christ, but is **indwelt by the Spirit** (2 Tim. 1:14; Rom. 8:9). We are scrubbed clean and the Holy Spirit resides in us, guiding us in the truth, convicting us of our sin, and leading us to Christ.

When we reach a point where we know life needs to change, that change cannot simply be done in our own strength. We cannot simply try harder, do more, or tweak the way we go about things. We must completely yield ourselves, repenting of our sin, and asking God for forgiveness. In that, God gives us His Spirit, and once the Spirit is in us, He never leaves. However, when we choose selfishness over sacrifice, disobedience over obedience, and our own way over God's, we are not *filled with the Spirit* (Eph. 5:18). Salvation is not simply a renouncing of our past, but it is a change for our future. It means that life is not simply ridding ourselves of past sin by doing something in the present, it is presenting ourselves as living sacrifices for Him (Rom. 12:1-2).

- **Wholeness of Total Transformation (27-28)**

After this a woman shouted out in the crowd blessing the mother of Jesus. This was a bold move considering the circumstances. Every Jewish mother at some point longed to be the mother of the Messiah, and this woman's bellow showed she believed who Jesus was. Notice that Jesus did not correct her but added to her statement. Her understanding of Him was not wrong but it was not complete. She was right to commend the mother of Jesus, but her declaration fell short of the whole truth. Jesus gently corrected her to move beyond commendation: **blessed are those who hear the word and observe it**. This was not a call to works based righteousness, but in believing the One who was sent to save. Attempts at moral reformation are not enough, but they are readily appealing to us, since we can see tangible results and feel like we are adding to the work.

This is often seen in "*crisis counseling*". This is the type of counseling where a relationship or situation has reached critical mass with the understanding that something has to give. Counsel is given, crisis is averted, and instead of realizing that a major overhaul is needed, we go back into the same rhythms and patterns that got us into the crisis in the first place. Instead of seeing it as an opportunity to break, to be contrite, and to yield ourselves completely, we keep trying to do it on our own with the vain hope that *this time its gonna work!* The question is: *has this way lead to peace, rest, and joy, or simply prolonged misery.* Morality helps us feel like a contributor, makes us feel like our life is cleaned up, and believes we really don't need anyone else because we are good enough to save ourselves. This type of thinking is appealing, yet deadly.

*Morality is a deadly, but appealing myth*

**Concluding questions:**

- **What are some of the myths you believe (or a friend believes) about God? Jesus? Salvation? The church? Christians? How do you go about answering those? What is critical for us to know in order to see the truth? How do we expose myths?**

- **Where do you see your life drifting into neutrality? Look up Galatians 5:16-25 and the pattern of life when we walk in the Spirit vs. the flesh.** What do you notice about the myth of neutrality here? Where is the middle ground?
- **Why is focusing on morality so appealing? If morality is not the answer, where does obedience come into play?** What does walking by the Spirit, being filled with the Spirit, and pursuing a relationship with Christ look like each day? How do we cultivate that in the midst of busy schedules?

Here is the note written by Todd's wife. Obviously we are deeply saddened. From a human perspective this is a huge blow to both their family and the ministry in Togo. Yet we have faith that, just as Jesus said about Lazarus' death, "It is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified throughout." Praise our Savior that we do not grieve as those who have no hope. We thank you for your faithful pray over the past couple of days, and ask that you would continue to pour out our prayers for this family and for the ministry in Togo.

In His grace,  
Stephen & Lisa

"He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose" - Jim Elliot

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from Jennifer...

The harvesters are paid good wages, and the fruit they harvest is people brought to eternal life. What joy awaits both the planter and the harvester alike! John 4:36

Today, Jesus called Todd home from the work he was doing planting and harvesting in Togo. In the mystery of His will, God chose this day to reward Todd with the unequalled joy of heaven. This is the promise of God that we as believers cling to through tears and pain. Todd poured out his life as an offering to God in Togo. I know that Todd would similarly encourage us who remain here for a little while longer to also be faithful in our service to our King (Philippians 2:17). Please continue praying and ask Jesus to bring comfort to William, Grant, Luke, and Drew. Ask that His Spirit would provide peace that is beyond the knowledge of this world. Keep praying that the boys grow strong in their knowledge of God's Word so they can live out the legacy that their father has given to them. Also, pray that our Father in heaven would send more workers like Todd to the beautiful fields of Togo where the harvest is so great!

My heart is overwhelmed with unspeakable grief – for myself, our boys, our extended family, our spiritual family and the Hospital of Hope team. I cling only to the gospel and the certain hope of our salvation through Jesus Christ. I long for the men, women and children of Togo to know the Savior that Todd served so faithfully. Even in my pain, I am confident that our sacrifice – that Todd's sacrifice – was worth it. I believe that the great commission is a cause worth dying for. And in the midst of my grief, I fix my eyes on Jesus, the author and finisher of my faith.

The outpouring of prayers and support in recent days has been overwhelming. And I can't begin to thank all those who have shown kindness to our family. There are many decisions to be made and I will update you again in the days to come. Please be patient as I will not be able to respond to every call, message or e-mail personally. Thanks for standing with us through this time.

In Christ Alone we find our strength, The DeKryger and Benefiel families