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THE HEAVENLY WAR

Luke 11:14-28

By

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Luke Lesson 55

The Heavenly War Luke 11:14-28

In 1938, Orson Welles terrified millions of Americans with his radio narration of H. G. Wells' *War of the Worlds*. The drama was so realistic that many thought that aliens were actually invading our planet, intent on destroying the human race. It was only fiction; no one should have believed such a far-fetched tale. But they did.

The Bible clearly affirms that we are engaged in combat with an unseen enemy that is intent on destroying the human race: "For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places" (Eph. 6:12). It is a frightening truth which no one should doubt or ignore. But many do doubt it and live as if it is not true.

The apostle John affirms that "the Son of God appeared for this purpose, that He might destroy the works of the devil" (1 John 3:8). Luke is showing that Jesus' miracles establish His legitimate authority as the Messiah, the Son of God, sent to deliver us from the power of Satan. But Jesus' authority put Him into conflict with the Jewish religious authorities, who did not want to yield to Him. Luke 11:14-54 shows the mounting tension between Jesus and these religious leaders. Rather than approaching Jesus with teachable hearts and open minds, they accused Him of casting out demons by the power of Satan and they challenged Him by demanding some sign from heaven. As such, they were reissuing the third temptation that Satan had put before Jesus, to use His power for show by casting Himself off the Temple pinnacle. Jesus soundly refuted their demands by giving this extensive teaching on spiritual conflict, the heavenly war. We learn that ...

Since Jesus' miracles authenticate His victory over Satan,
we must decisively follow Him.

In other words, this isn't just a subject to banter about in an interesting discussion. Lives and eternal destinies are at stake. People cannot ignore Jesus. They must decide for Him or they are

against Him. Neutrality is impossible. We either follow Christ into battle on His side, or we oppose Him and remain on Satan's side. These are the crucial issues behind this section of Luke's Gospel.

1. There is a spiritual battle raging with two and only two sides.

Scripture clearly teaches that Satan is a real spiritual being, not just an impersonal force for evil. He was an angel who rebelled against God and who commands a host of other evil spirits (called demons) who also rebelled against God. He is here called Beelzebub, a popular name for the prince of the demons. The derivation of the name is debated, but it probably went back to Baal worship and meant, "lord of the temple." In 2 Kings 1:2, the king of Israel was injured and wanted to inquire of Baal-zebub, the god of Ekron, whether he would recover. This was probably a derisive Hebrew pun, which meant, "lord of the flies." At any rate, Luke was not concerned about the word's origin or meaning, but only used it as a popular name for Satan.

Satan and his demonic forces are committed to the ultimate harm and destruction of the human race. To rewrite the Four Spiritual Laws, "Satan hates you and has a terrible plan for your life!" Since God's purpose is to be glorified through the human race, created in His image, Satan's purpose is to defile and degrade people so that their lives do not bring glory to God. Some of Satan's demons are more evil than others (11:26), but they all have the same evil purpose. Since the fall of the human race into sin, every person is born under Satan's domain and power (1 John 5:19; Eph. 2:2). Jesus called him "the ruler of this world" (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11) and Paul called him "the god of this world [who] has blinded the minds of the unbelieving" (2 Cor. 4:4).

In this case, the demon caused the man to be dumb, or unable to speak (Matt. 12:22 reports that the demon also had blinded the man). We have already encountered Legion, who showed us the hideous harm that demons can inflict on people. While we may not encounter such extreme cases very often, we should not be lulled into thinking that Satan is not alive and well on planet earth in our day. As J. C. Ryle puts it (*Expository Thoughts on the Gospels* [Baker], 3:17, on Luke 11:14-20),

Do we suppose, because bodily possession by Satan is not so glaringly manifest as it once was, that the great enemy is less active in doing mischief than he used to be? If we think so we have much to learn. Do we suppose that there is no such thing as the influence of a “dumb” devil in the present day? If we do, we had better think again. What shall we say of those who never speak to God, who never use their tongues in prayer and praise, ...? What shall we say, in a word, of those who can speak to every one but God? What can we say but that Satan has despoiled them of the truest use of a tongue?

Sometimes we look at nice, decent, law-abiding people and assume that they are not in Satan’s domain, as if there is some large, neutral zone between God’s kingdom and Satan’s kingdom. But Satan is a deceiver, and he cunningly leaves many in their not-too-bad condition so that we look at them and think, “This person couldn’t be in Satan’s domain!” Do not be deceived! Even though a person may not look like Legion or may not be struck dumb and blind by demons, he or she is still just as much in Satan’s evil domain, headed for an eternity in hell, if he is not rescued by Jesus Christ. This means that every time we proclaim the gospel to a lost soul, a spiritual battle is raging. There are two and only two sides. Either the person ignores or rejects the gospel and remains in Satan’s domain; or, Jesus Christ saves him and he is transferred to the kingdom of God’s beloved Son (Col. 1:13).

2. Jesus Christ has authority over Satan’s power.

In that day, there were a number of Jewish exorcists who tried to cast out demons by special potions or incantations or magical procedures. Sometimes they seemingly succeeded, although they often failed. But every time Jesus cast out a demon, He simply spoke the word and the demon obeyed. Yet in spite of His obvious power, these skeptics accused Jesus of casting out demons by Satan’s power.

We learn from this that belief in Jesus Christ is not simply a matter of having sufficient evidence. If Jesus had not done these mighty works of miraculous power, or if He had done them by some sleight of hand, surely His critics would have pounced on this and accused Him of practicing magic. But they never used that line of attack. Since they couldn’t dispute the fact of the miracles, all

they could do was to accuse Jesus of doing them by Satan's power. Even though Jesus here knew their thoughts, this did not convince them that He was from God! Truly, the god of this world had blinded them, as he does every unbeliever!

Jesus answered them by pointing out that if a kingdom or a house is divided against itself, it will fall. Similarly, if Satan were divided against himself, his kingdom would not stand (11:17-18). Then (11:19) Jesus takes up the case of the Jewish exorcists. For the sake of argument He assumes that these exorcists had some success. But the Pharisees had never accused them of being empowered by Satan. If they are going to be consistent, they must say that the Jewish exorcists also did their work by Satan's power. Otherwise, those exorcists served to judge the Pharisees for their hypocrisy in singling out Jesus for condemnation, while accepting the exorcists, who did the same thing.

"But," Jesus adds, "if I cast out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you" (11:20). The term, "finger of God," goes back to Exodus 8:19, where the Egyptian magicians recognize God's power through Moses. Jesus is saying that if Satan is not behind His power, then clearly, God is. By saying that the kingdom of God had come upon them, Jesus was referring to the initial phase of the kingdom as manifested in the presence of the King. Jesus' deliverance of people from Satan's bondage anticipates the coming day when Jesus will reign not only in hearts, but on the throne of David, when Satan will be bound from his powerful influence on earth. Until His enemies are made His footstool, Christ exercises His rule from the Father's right hand in the hearts of all who submit their lives to Him.

Jesus further underscores His victory over Satan with the parable of disarming the strong man (11:21-22). Satan is the strong man armed. He is a powerful spiritual master. His homestead is the heart of unbelievers. All of an unbeliever's powers and faculties are Satan's possessions, at his use. Further, these possessions, securely under Satan's rule, are undisturbed, or "at peace." The unbeliever, dead in his sins, under the sway of the prince of the power of the air (Eph. 2:2) is unaware of his own desperate condition. As Matthew Henry describes it (*Matthew Henry's Commentary* [Revell], 5:697):

The sinner has a good opinion of himself, is very secure and merry, has no doubt concerning the goodness of his state nor any dread of the judgment to come; he flatters himself in his own eyes, and cries peace to himself. Before Christ appeared, all was quiet, because all *went one way*; but the preaching of the gospel disturbed the peace of the devil's palace.

Christ is the stronger man who attacks the devil and overpowers him. As Paul puts it, at the cross Christ "disarmed the rulers and authorities" and triumphed over them (Col. 2:15). What no mere man could do, Jesus Christ did in His death and resurrection. Satan is now a defeated foe, although he is still allowed to reign until his being bound at the second coming of Christ.

This means that Jesus Christ is the only one powerful enough to save a soul from Satan's dominion and power. Men cannot do it by their own will power or moral reformation. Even though men can get free of problems such as drug and alcohol abuse, or even so-called "sexual addiction," through self-help programs, this is not the same as salvation from sin and Satan. The focus of those programs is never the glory of God, but rather, the happiness of self. Satan is not unhappy if a drunk becomes sober and still goes to hell. What that sinner and every sinner needs is the deliverance that only Jesus Christ can give. As John Calvin put it, "Let us ... learn that, as we are all subject to the tyranny of Satan, there is no other way in which [God] commences his reign within us, than when he rescues us, by the powerful and victorious arm of Christ, from that wretched and accursed bondage" (*Calvin's Commentaries* [Baker], "Harmony of the Evangelists," 2:72-73).

We've seen that there is a spiritual battle raging with two and only two sides. Jesus Christ and only Christ has authority over Satan's power to deliver us from bondage to Satan. Third,

3. We are either on Jesus' side or Satan's side.

Jesus says, "He who is not with Me is against Me; and he who does not gather with Me, scatters" (11:23). In other words, neutrality is not an option. You can't straddle the fence by saying, "I'm not a committed follower of Jesus, but neither am I a follower of Satan!" Nor can you correctly say, "I don't follow Jesus or Satan. I'm my own master." Jesus makes it plain: Either you follow

Him or you are against Him and in Satan's camp. Those are the only options.

Jesus goes on (11:24-26) to illustrate what happens to the man who tries to be neutral: It doesn't work. Perhaps the man has experienced a moral reformation, either through the Jewish exorcists or through his own will power and determination. The demon that he struggled against for years has left him. As Matthew Henry (p. 697) describes it, Satan gives order to his troops to retreat temporarily in order to draw the deluded soul into an ambush. At first, it is wonderful! The man sweeps up the dirt from his soul and feels a sense of order and peace that he never felt when he was in bondage to his former sins.

But, meanwhile, the departed demon is restless. Passing through waterless places is a metaphorical expression that "denotes that to dwell out of men is to him a wretched banishment, and resembles a barren wilderness" (Calvin, p. 84). The demon is not a happy camper until he moves back in. So, he goes and finds seven other demons more evil than himself and they move in. "The last state of that man becomes worse than the first."

What are we to learn from this illustration? J. C. Ryle says it well: "Let us observe . . . *how dangerous it is to be content with any change in religion short of thorough conversion to God*" (p. 25). Jesus' words "are a solemn warning to us, never to be satisfied with religious reformation without heart conversion" (p. 26). As Martyn Lloyd-Jones points out, "*we must always remember that there are other powers, beside that of Christ, which can give 'results.'* . . . It is possible for men and women to get relief from many of their ills and troubles apart altogether from the gospel" (*Evangelistic Sermons* [Banner of Truth], p. 179).

This is especially important in our day when truth and doctrine are set aside as of no consequence. We don't really care about doctrine. We want to know, *does it work?* What will the gospel do for me? Will it help my troubled marriage? If not, I'll go to the world if it will get me some results. I had a church member ask me, "If my wife finds help by counseling with a Hindu psychiatrist, what's wrong with that?" I didn't say this in reply, but later I thought that I should have said, "If she got relief by sacrificing a chicken to Satan, would that be okay?"

A number of years ago, some people wanted to bring Twelve Step groups in my church, and at first I was open to it. I reasoned that the Steps seemed to be in line with Scripture and the program seemed to help a lot of people. Besides, a number of well-known evangelical churches were using them. But then I began reading the literature and I grew increasingly alarmed. It was obvious that the Twelve Steps “worked” no matter who or what you chose as your “Higher Power.” I thought, “If it works whether your Higher Power is Jesus or a Buddha idol, then it’s obvious that the Higher Power is not the real power.” It trivializes Jesus to lump Him with all the other possible Higher Powers, as if it really doesn’t matter which one you pick! At that point, I did a U-turn and told the church that I could not endorse those programs.

Here’s the point: If we get “help” from any other power than Jesus Christ and His gospel, we have not gotten true and lasting help. You may get a clean and well-ordered house, but you don’t have transformation of your soul. You may have a sense of peace and freedom from the troubles that plagued you, but you don’t have eternal life. You have a temporarily empty house, whereas the sinner who repents and trusts in Christ has the Holy Spirit as the new permanent occupant (11:13). Even more alarming, you may feel content enough without Christ that you assume that all is well in your soul. Not having a desperate sense of need, you will not flee to the cross to lay hold of the only true Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, whose shed blood is necessary to deliver you from Satan’s power. In that sense, your last state is worse than the first.

Also, as Lloyd-Jones points out, when you adopt a false philosophy or believe a false doctrine, at first it seems to give so much satisfaction. But after a while, it begins to wear off or disappoint. It leaves you, not just where you were before, but in a worse condition, because now you distrust everything, even that which is true. You become cynical even of the gospel. He observes, “There is no type of mentality which is so difficult to treat as that of a person who has been disappointed by someone or something in which he once believed” (p. 183).

So, Luke presses you to answer the question: Is Jesus Christ who He claimed to be or not? Is His authority as the Messiah sent from God established by the miracles He performed? Is Jesus the

Son of God in human flesh? If so, you must commit yourself to follow Him whatever the consequences or results. You may suffer trials, persecution, and even death. But if Jesus is truly Lord, if He alone defeated Satan's power, then you must commit yourself to Him and to Him alone, not to Him and to some human "deliverance" or program. How do you do this?

4. The way to be on Jesus' side is to hear the word of God and do it.

As Jesus was speaking, a woman in the crowd raised her voice and said, "Blessed is the womb that bore You, and the breasts at which You nursed." It is interesting that right in the context of Jesus' teaching about demons, this woman extols Mary! She may have been well-meaning, but clearly she was misguided. She was trying to give praise to Jesus by saying, "Your mother is a woman truly blessed to have a son like you." Of course, that was true; Mary was blessed by God to be the mother of Jesus. His response does not deny this, but He does correct the direction of this woman's thoughts. He says in effect, "Natural family ties to Me are not the point; the point is to hear God's Word and do it." The person who is decidedly with Jesus doesn't just mouth pious platitudes; rather, he hears what Jesus says and acts on it.

This is not to teach salvation by works because the Word of God that we must obey clearly teaches that we are saved by grace through faith alone. But the Bible is also clear that saving faith is obedient faith (Rom. 15:18; 16:26). Jesus' clear authority over demonic forces shows that He is both Savior and Lord. Therefore, each person is forced to choose sides in the heavenly war. Having heard the Word of God, we must now act on it in obedience to Jesus or else we are opposed to Him and in league with Satan.

Conclusion

During that part of the Naval War College course known as Fundamentals of Command and Decision, the instructor was stressing the importance of being able to make sound decisions under pressure. A visiting officer from a small foreign navy spoke up. "Talk about decisions!" he said. "I was 700 miles out to sea in my destroyer when I received a dispatch from my base: 'We have

just had a revolution. Which side are you on?" (*Reader's Digest* [5/83].)

Thankfully, our decision isn't that difficult! We have some solid evidence to go on. We have the clear record of the gospel accounts that relate to us what Jesus said and did. William Barclay puts it this way (cited by Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John* [Eerdmans], p. 414):

Either, what Jesus said about Himself is false, in which case He is guilty of such blasphemy as no man ever dared to utter; or, what He said about Himself is true, in which case He is what He claimed to be and can be described in no other terms than the Son of God. Jesus leaves us with the definite choice—we must accept Him fully or reject Him absolutely. That is precisely why every man has to decide for or against Jesus Christ.

There is a spiritual battle raging with two and only two sides. Clearly, Jesus has authority over Satan and his forces. We are on one side or the other. If you are not decisively on Jesus' side, you are against Him. To join His side, you must believe in Him and follow Him in obedient faith.

Discussion Questions

1. Why is it important to affirm that there is no neutral ground between Jesus and Satan? Is there such a thing as a "carnal" or "nominal" Christian?
2. How should we witness to skeptics who demand proof of spiritual things?
3. How can we tell if a person is under demonic influence or if he is just acting in the flesh? Does it make any difference?
4. If self-help programs help people with their problems, what's wrong with them?

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