

Why They Reject Christ

Luke 11:14-16

April 5, 2020

I'd ask you to turn in your Bibles, there, to Luke 11 and verse 14, Luke 11:14. That starts a new section and starting today and for the foreseeable future, we're going to see Jesus as he faces a significant season of controversy, as he responds to what really amounts to a blasphemy. A blasphemous charge against him, against his ministry, but really, more fundamentally, it's a blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. And then the subsequent rejection of the people. An unbelieving reaction to him, as they seek, and ask for further signs, other than what he's already given.

The section starts with Jesus doing what we've come to expect Jesus to do. He is graciously delivering a man from demonic oppression. And the reaction to this deliverance ministry is completely opposite of what we would expect. It is completely contrary to what the kindness of Christ merits. This is un, what he merits, what he deserves from us is unreserved worship and unmitigated praise. That's not what we find here, in the text.

So, as we typically do, we're going to begin by reading this section. Just the, not the entire 11th chapter. But the entire 11th chapter is dealing with this time of controversy, but we're just going to read, is, a larger chunk, but we're going to read from 14 to verse 36. That's the section we'll be working through over the next number of weeks.

So, look in your Bibles, there, if you have them. Luke 11:14. "Now he, Jesus, he was casting out a demon that was mute." And the demon had gone out. "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.

"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. 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 divides his spoil. Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters.

“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.’ When the crowds were increasing, he began to say, ‘This generation is an evil

generation. It seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah.

“For, as Jonah became a sign to the people of Ninevah, so will the Son of Man be to this generation. The Queen of the South will rise up at the judgment with the men of this generation and condemn them, for 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 rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold, something greater than Jonah is here.

“No one after lighting a lamp puts it in a cellar or under a basket, but on a stand so that those who enter may see the light. Your eye is the lamp of your body. When your eye is healthy, your whole body is full of light, but when it's bad, your body is full of darkness. Therefore be careful lest the light in you be darkness. If then your whole body is full of light, having no dark part, it will be wholly bright, as when a lamp with its rays gives you light.”

It's quite a section, isn't it? And that controversy, as often happens, becomes an opportunity for Jesus to teach us, to teach his disciples. But just sticking with the passage itself, you can see a lot of themes coming out of that section. There's our need for light and our need, need, for eyes that see, that have the capacity to make use of that light. That's a theme.

There's the real meaning of the sign of the son of man. Very important theme, there. There's the indication: What is the true indication of true blessedness from God? That's an important theme. But all of this starts with Christ's power over demons, and what that actually means. And what purpose his powers of exorcism serve in his mission and in his ministry.

We're going to work our way through all of those themes in weeks to come. But for today, for today, we want to examine the positive and the negative reactions to the gospel of Jesus Christ. There are positive and negative reactions to the gospel, and definitely to our own evangelism. Isn't there, positive and negative reactions to our evangelism? And that is how Luke has introduced this entire section, starting in verses 14 to 16. We can see positive and negative reactions.

Jesus is here in the normal flow of his ministry. He's preaching the gospel. He's healing. He's doing what he sent his apostles out to do. He's doing what he sent the 72 out to do. As Josh mentioned in Matthew 28, our, our memory verse for this week. He's doing what he's commanded us to do. He's taking the gospel out to the people. He's preaching the gospel, and he's healing.

And we just read about the outcome of one of these healings. We see a negative reaction come out of that and we have to ask: What went wrong? Why the poor reaction? Is it that Jesus failed to take the temperature of his audience? Didn't understand what he was dealing with in that audience? Did his disciples not do a good enough job with pre-evangelism, preparing the people for Jesus' arrival. Did he not take enough surveys? Did he not understand the temper and the temperature of people's hearts, at that time, but was it not meeting their felt needs. What is it that happened here?

I'm thankful. Personally thankful, that the lord is causing us to pause and to wonder what happened in this text.

Before we enter into Jesus' reply to this, this false charge of cooperation with Beelzebul. Before he corrects the false expectations of the people, about signs and things like that.

Because, if I can just back out of this text, just for a moment, and speak personally, just to the context that we're living in. We're all feeling the distance, aren't we? We're all feeling the separation. We're tucked away in our homes. Feeling this isolation. We have this longing that's intensifying, increasing. This longing to interact with each other. To fellowship together.

Someone goes walking by with a dog in front of my house that I may have ignored in weeks past. Now I'm like, hey, how you doing? You wanna talk for a while? And we're just, we're just longing for human connection, aren't we? Closely connected to that, as Christians, not only do we miss one another, the fellowship's human contact, but we are also sensing, in this time of separation, this opportunity that's really, kind of, passing us by.

Because we want to bring the gospel out to the people in this world, who so desperately need it. Who are looking for answers at such a time, as this. And were told to stay at our homes. Don't talk to them. Even when you go to the store, to get needs or supplies, you feel kind of hurried through and hurried out. People are needing answers. People are looking for answers and they need Christians to tell them the truth.

There's a famous British scholar, an Anglican Bishop named N.T. Wright; Nicholas Thomas Wright, who wrote an article on March 29th for Time magazine with quite the unfortunate and disappointing title. Here's the title: 'Christianity offers no answers about the Coronavirus.' It's not supposed to!

According to the article, instead of offering answers, our part is to teach the world to sit and lament. Sit and lament. That's what Christianity offers to the world. He comp, closes this lamentable article with, this, these lamentable words. Quote, "It is in, it is in no, it is no part of the Christian vocation then to be able to explain what's happening and why. In fact, it is part of the Christian vocation not to be able to explain and to lament instead. And as, and the spirit laments

within us, and so we become, even in our self-isolation, small shrines, where the presence and healing love of God can dwell.”
End quote.

I suppose N.T. Wright is trying to come off, there, as humble to the unbelieving world. But by telling the world that we, as Christians, are just as lost, just as confused, just as bewildered, and puzzled, and perplexed, as the rest of the world is about all of this, he really does come across as weak and, really, as having nothing to say. It's understandable, if the world tunes him out.

For the rest of us Christians, holding the very word of God in our hands and having hidden the very word of God in our hearts. Indwelt by the Holy Spirit, we can see very clearly, that this Holy Bible has plenty of answers. It explains everything that is happening and it tells us all the reasons why.

Now I'm no credentialed academic, but I'll take a stab at answering the world's questions. God is the all-powerful creator of the heavens and the earth. And in the beginning, he created

the world and all it contains. And now, even now, at this moment, from then till now, he sustains the world by his power.

He created mankind in his own image. And he is the righteous law giver who commanded mankind about how to live. Mankind, though, sinned against God. Contrary to the very goodness of God's perfect and holy character, which is evident in everything that he has made. Man chose to believe a lie. Man chose to believe that God had ulterior motives. That he was hiding the very best from mankind, and so man disbelieved God and turned from him and sinned against God and he transgressed the commandment.

In unbelief, by that transgressive sin, man introduced death into the world. He brought upon himself and the entire creation, the very curse of God, and that curse is thorough. The curse has ruined the very fabric of creation, causing the earth itself to groan. The curse runs through our veins. It runs in our cells. It's in our DNA. It's passed on from father to son from mother to daughter, generation after generation. More curse. We're all born in sin.

We're all born with an appetite for sin. We're all born with a proclivity too sin. Our sin nature becomes manifest early, early on. No parent teaches their child to sin. There are no courses on sinning. Unless you go to university, I guess, but no courses on sinning for the young ones, they just do it naturally. Sin comes by their very nature. We have to correct against their sinning.

Our sin nature becomes manifest with an increasing clarity with every passing day, month, year. And early on it looks fine. It looks entertaining. But as we get into our 30s and 40s, we start to see the consequences of sin and it's ugly. It rips apart, lives. It rips apart families. It destroys nations. It sends nations to war against one another. You find that war in the very homes.

Some people who are sequestered in their homes with their families. Many of them, not Christians. They're finding it impossible to live with one another. I'm concerned about the violence toward children with abusive parents or abusive siblings or whatever the cause. It's a sad thing to see what's being done in our nation.

All of this because of our sin against the Holy God. And every now and again, God uses things like, like this pestilence. Like the coronavirus. Like a pandemic. He uses drought. He uses natural disasters, like tornadoes, and hurricanes, and earthquakes, and all the rest. And he does those things to stop us in our tracks. To turn us from all of our distractions and our entertainments, that we might turn our eyes heavenward, and see the high and holy one lifted up. To seek his face.

To seek to be forgiven from our sins. To seek to be cleansed from all of our iniquities, that we might receive his favor and his blessing. And listen, I see that period happening in our nation, right now. Throughout the world. Don't you see that? I mean, who cares anymore what some movie star has to say? Who is interested about finding out what some sports icon or some big personality thinks that we ought to do to get through the coronavirus? Nobody cares.

Seriously, they have nothing to say to us anymore, which tells us how utterly irrelevant things like sports and entertainment have been all along. Just a month or two ago, the

major drivers of the economy. Major figures in our news. Now all of them are absolutely useless, to help in these more serious times. One writer summed it up in an article entitled, 'Celebrity Culture is Burning.' It's very true.

So, I'm going to differ with Bishop Wright in saying this: That, the, contrary to his point of view, Christianity doesn't only offer some answers, it offers the only answer about the coronavirus. Because that's what it's supposed to do; is offer answers. The gospel of Jesus Christ answers every single question we can ask. It gets to the very heart of the matter. It goes to the very deepest, darkest places. And it sheds light.

Christ explains everything that's happening. He tells us all the reasons why. We just need to listen. So, keep that in mind, as we look into the text, Luke 11:14 to 16. Because we're going to see that Jesus comes bearing gifts, and answers, and healing. He comes bringing the gospel. But we're going to see the purposes of God in sending Christ. There are two purposes actually, and we're going to see the first purpose in verse 14.

Now. Here's the first purpose. You can write this down in your notes, if you'd like to. That Jesus came to proclaim liberty in salvation. Jesus came to proclaim liberty in salvation. If you prefer to use the term, freedom, that's fine, but it's not gonna rhyme with my second point, so stick with liberty. Jesus came to proclaim liberty in salvation.

Look back at the start of all this and back in Luke 11:14 and notice what Luke tells us. "He, Jesus, he was casting out a demon that was mute." The slight emphasis on the verb construction there was casting out. Its, its, conveying the fact that Jesus here is conducting himself in the normal course of his ministry. He's preaching the gospel. He's healing. He does this as a, as a matter of lifestyle.

He's healing in this case by casting out a demon, which was very common to him. And then we read in verse 14, just the facts. The demon left, the man was healed and the crowd marveled. And really, that's it. Just the facts. Not a lot of detail provided for us here, but it is enough for us to see what we need to see. Enough to learn what created this occasion to spark controversy. He was casting out a demon that was mute. And

the result of the demons' influence is that the man is mute. Which is clear, because once the demon departed, that man spoke.

Look, whenever Jesus cast a demon out of a poor soul. Whenever Jesus set a prisoner free. It becomes evidence, proof positive, that he has real power to act. Real power to overcome our greatest enemies, unseen enemies. Real power to address our deepest spiritual needs. After all, if Jesus can overcome demons and he can do it with nothing more than a word, what can you do about our sin nature? What can he do to deliver us from the penalty and the power of sin?

We've been keeping up with our daily Bible reading. Just want to encourage you, like Josh did in the, the opening there, to continue in your Bible Reading. It is so important to get the life-giving truth of God's word in you, every single day. We've had the opportunity, though, in the past a number of days. We're in Chapter eight today of Luke's Gospel. We've been studying those earlier chapters of Luke. It's good, good stuff and I want to take a few minutes to remind you of what's come before. Because it really informs us about what we're seeing here.

So, I'd invite you to go back to Luke chapter 4. Luke chapter 4. Right at the beginning of Jesus' ministry. He has emerged from the waters of John's baptism. He's led by the Holy Spirit into the wilderness for a period of testing, and the first part of Luke 4, Jesus has overcome all the devil's temptations. He's worn out the devil and sent the devil packing. He's, as the devil tried without success to tempt Jesus to sin. He's worn himself out and he leaves for a more opportune time.

After enduring that 40 days in the wilderness, and after overcoming his tempter, Jesus returned to his hometown of Nazareth. He went there to introduce his own people, his own family members, his own neighbors, to his ministry. I love that. Do backyard evangelism before you fly overseas, right? So, he's doing it right there. He's trying to deliver the, them, ah, deliver to them the good news about his life. About his purpose. About his ministry. About everything that's going to be coming.

We'll pick up the story there in verse 16. Luke 4:16. "He came into Nazareth, where he had been brought up. And as was his custom, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, he stood up to read. The scroll of the Prophet Isaiah was given to him. And

he unrolled the scroll. He found the place where it was written, 'The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor.

"'He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.'" And stop there for a moment. Let those words sink in, because that's salvation language. Jesus came to proclaim liberty. Liberty for the poor. Liberty for the captives. Liberty for the blind. Liberty for the oppressed. Liberty. Liberty for wretched sinners. He announced 'the year of the Lord's favor' to them.

He is preaching God's amazing grace. This is the gospel. This is the start of Christianity. Right here, with all the answers. This is the hope of the world. For us to be delivered from the bondage to sin and saved from the penalty of sin; which is death. Jesus came to tell that to his fellow Galileans. To his neighbors. To his neighbors, and family, and friends in the hometown of Nazareth.

He says, today, looking down the passage, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." And they marveled, didn't they? Same thing that we saw in Luke 11:14. Right? When the demon had gone out, the mute man spoke, and the people did what? They marveled. Same word, they are astonished. They are wondering. They're in complete surprise.

But we learned right here at the beginning. Luke has been very careful to show us this. We don't want to put too much weight in people marveling, because that shock, and surprise, and wonder quickly wears off in us humans. Skip ahead to verse 28. Jesus started speaking to them in the intervening time about their sin. And that's a gracious thing to do.

He's not being rude. Before they can be rescued from their own spiritual poverty, and captivity, and blindness, and oppression, they need to see that they, indeed, are spiritually poor, and captive, and blind, and oppressed. And it turns out, they didn't like the hometown boy coming back and saying anything impolite to them. They said, how dare he!

Look at verse 28, "When they heard these things, all in the synagogue were filled with wrath. They rose up, drove him out of the town, and brought him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they could throw him down the Cliff." I mean, that's, that's just almost, almost, almost impossible to believe, to picture how one of their own: They would be willing to murder by throwing off of a Cliff.

Jesus says in verse 30, "Passed through their midst, he went away." He's going to take his gracious gospel elsewhere. He leaves Nazareth for Capernaum, verse 31. We'll keep reading. "He went down to Capernaum, a city of Galilee. And he was teaching them on the Sabbath, and they were astonished at his teaching, for his word possessed authority.

"And in the synagogue there was a man who had the spirit of an unclean demon, and he cried out with a loud voice, 'Ha! What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are- the Holy One of God.' Jesus rebuked him, saying, 'Be silent, come out of him.' Having and, and when the demon had thrown him down in their midst, he came out of him, having done him no harm." Isn't that interesting?

First miracle in this text that Jesus performs is casting out a demon. The demon who intends to do harm to humanity. Jesus delivers the man, not only delivers him from the demon, they also preserve the man's body from harm. That's our savior. He cares about body and spirit. Look at the reaction, then in verse 36. "They're all amazed. And they said to one another, 'What is this word? For with authority and power he commands the unclean spirits, and they come out.'" Then verse 37, "Reports about him went out into every place in the surrounding region."

In the next scene, Jesus cared for Peter's mother-in-law. He delivered her from a debilitating fever. She got up to serve them, and then, look what happened in verse 40. "And when the sun was setting, and all those who were sick with various diseases, they brought them to him, and he laid his hands on every one of them and healed them. And the demons also came out of many, crying, 'You are the son of God!'"

Take note of that expression. He laid his hands on every one of them. Healed them. That is to say, he didn't wave his hands over the mass and say, be healed. He was like a, a doctor

in the emergency room. And he's walking, moving from patient to patient. Tireless in his care. His patient's care. His bedside manner. He's visiting each one. He's interacting with them all. He's touching each one with his hands and he is healing them all.

What do we see? We see authoritative teaching. Power from on high over demons, over every kind of virus, all harmful bacteria, diseases, maladies. Luke, as the author of this gospel, he's the beloved physician. You can hear him rejoicing in the background in this healing power of Jesus Christ. He only wished he had that in his, in his, physician work. But this healing power validates the power that Christ had to save spiritually, as well. To go even deeper.

But remember the hands. Remember his touching the sick and the infirm, because that features in the next scene we want to look at. Look at Luke 5 and verse 12. Luke 5:12, "While he's in one of the cities." So, he's moved on from Capernaum, and he's traveling around Galilee and there was a man, there, full of, full of leprosy. It says, "full of leprosy. When he saw Jesus, he fell on his face and he begged him, 'Lord, if you will, you

can make me clean.' And Jesus stretched out his hand." Look at that. "And touched him, saying, 'I will; be clean.' And immediately the leprosy left him."

What's the impression you get from reading that? Power to heal of course, but, but also there's such kindness there. Such compassion. There's even a courageous, fearless compassion about touching someone as sick as this guy is. I mean, keep in mind, lepers in that day were remanded to a quarantine. Isolated from the rest of society. Maybe we, ourselves, are getting a better sense of what that might feel like, in these days we're living through. Give us a little sympathy for the leper.

The lesson, of leprosy, biblically speaking, the lesson of leprosy is to see that our sin, yes defiling, yes, all around us, and pervasive. But it's to see how our sin isolates us. It has an isolating effect. It separates us, first from God and, then, from the fellowship of his, of his, own people.

Quite the picture, isn't it, to see the compassion of Christ. Break the quarantine. To touch, who ought not to be touched. To touch this afflicted leper. To eradicate any sign of

the disease and restore this healed man. Removing from him this social isolation with a touch. How, how, he had longed to be touched, and hugged, and cared for. And Jesus restored him back to social interaction. Back into the fellowship within the community.

And that's why Jesus, in verse 14, commands him not to tell anyone just yet, about his healing, but rather "go show yourself to the priest, make an offering for your cleansing as Moses commanded, as a proof to them." Why did you do that? Because the priesthood acted as the public health inspector, in that day, in Israel.

The remov, they were there, to, with the authority to remove the stricture of the quarantine. To approve the healed individual to come back into society. They are the government, so to speak. They're the CDC. They're the W.H.O. or whatever version they had back then. So, even though Jesus, he himself, being possessed of divine authority, divine power, notice: That Jesus follows the public health protocols, that God gave to Israel through Moses. Maybe we ought to think about that carefully.

But notice, that removing the physical malady here, that's one thing. Remove, removing the social stigma, that's completely another thing. That's a deeper thing. But the entire picture, here, goes even further. It teaches us that Jesus came to perform an even deeper spiritual healing, of cleansing and restoration. And so, verse 15, "even more the report about him when abroad, so great crowds gathered to hear him and to be healed to their infirmities." No wonder, right?

I would love to walk through the rest of Luke's gospel chapter by chapter, miracle after miracle, discourse after discourse, of gospel teaching and preaching, and look carefully at every single instance of healing, because there aren't just the physical aspects of it, in play here, but also there are all the spiritual implications, of every single healing.

But we need to keep moving. So, we want to turn back to Luke 11:14, and just point a few things out about this situation here. First in Luke 11:14. This just, this introduction. Just the basic facts about this healing. The emphasis of the grammar in that first sentence. "He was casting out a demon that was

mute." Luke was telling us, again, this is in accordance with Jesus usual manner of casting out demons. Part of his ministry.

Just take a, take everything that we have just reviewed. Just that short review. Inject all of that into this short summary that Luke has provided. This miracle it's, it's about Jesus' power. Yes. It's about his authority of over demons. Yes. But it's also about his love for this man. It's about his mission of compassion. It's about setting sinners free.

The ministry of Jesus is about the certainty that we can find that, God in Christ, not only does he have the ability, he also has a willingness. He has the eagerness to cast out demons. To deliver oppressed sinners from sin. To set people free. That's our savior.

Second, another thing to point out, we read that when the demon had gone out the man, the mute man spoke. A mute man spoke. Think about the context. What have we just come out of? The Lord's Prayer. Right? With Jesus over and over, encouraging us to pray.

We see here Jesus is loosing this man's speech. Loosing his tongue. He's enabling him to talk again, and that comes right after what we just learned about Jesus loosing our tongues. Encouraging us to use our tongues for their purpose. To talk directly with our father in heaven. As is so often the case, the physical miracle points to the greater spiritual purpose. And in this case, Jesus wants us to see that our tongues are to be employed in the praise of God and the worship of God through prayer.

When Jesus came to proclaim liberty, it's not just a liberty from sin or from physical malady. Our liberty, turns into a liberty, not only from, but to. It's a freedom to praise and worship God. It's a freedom to, to come before his throne: To bow, and sing, and pray. He is our eternal reward and we have the joy of letting our tongues be loosed and no longer be silent. But to praise and worship him. What a joy.

The third thing here, just to observe, Luke tells us at the end of verse 14, that people marveled. Yeah, they marveled. As I said, don't put too much weight on that reaction. Jesus' fellow

Nazarenes marveled, too, just before they tried to throw him off a Cliff. As one commentator wrote, he, right, he's right about this. He said, "Marveling is not faith." However, here in fact, marveling creates an appetite for a greater spectacle and leads away from both Jesus and faith.

Be careful that you're not in love with the spectacle. That, that, you're loving Christ and God in Christ. Beloved, if you marvel at Jesus works, if you marvel, particularly, not just in the power that he had, the authority he had, and all the rest. But if you marvel, in particular, at the grace that he has shown to you to set your heart free. To set your tongue loose, so that you might use it to praise and glorify God in the language of the spirit, in the name of Jesus Christ.

Listen, you need to rejoice because you're sons and daughters of the king. If you trust him, you, if you believe, and if you continue believing, listen, keep on obeying him. Keep on worshipping him. You belong to God in Christ and great is your reward. Use your tongues. Use your heart of worship to let that spill out into every life that you see. Every person you know.

We see here, however, that not all have faith. And not all react like you do to the work. To the grace of Christ. Many reject him. Many reject him starkly. Reject him outright. Some pretend friendship. Some, they want to claim to be agnostic. Just can't make a decision, just yet. Don't have enough evidence. Pretend friendship. Speaking well of Jesus. But in their hearts, they really are unbelieving rejectors of him, and that's also what Jesus came to demonstrate.

God sent Jesus not only to proclaim liberty in salvation. There's a second point here. In the text, Jesus came to provide clarity in condemnation. Jesus came to provide clarity in condemnation. Verse 14, "The demon left, the mute man spoke, the people marveled."

And then, this verses 15 to 16, "But some of them," that is, some of those who had just marveled, by the way. "Some of them," they said, "'He casts out demons by Beelzebul, the prince of demons,' while others," and this is again, is others of those who had just marveled, "others, to test him, kept seeking from

him a sign from heaven." Two reactions here. Both of these reactions come out of a heart of unbelief.

The first reaction is the one that's represented in the view of the Jewish leadership. This is the reaction of the scribes and the Pharisees. This is the position of the elders of the people, and eventually the chief priests, as well.

This second reaction from the people. This represents those who wanted to remain neutral. Wanted to stay fair and balanced. Wanted to stay agnostic about Jesus: Not be too hasty. They're wavering, really, between two different opinions. Testing their loyalties. Which one am I going to follow?

We're going to walk through each one. But we're going to start with the source of this ridiculous accusation in verse 15. Where is this coming from? This whole Baalzebul thing? And I want to just give you the punch line up front. We need to realize here the power of pride and the power of jealousy. The power of envy. Because that is what is at work here in all the leadership of Israel, who rejected Jesus Christ.

As this report about Jesus went out from Galilee and spreading throughout the land, even reaching Jerusalem itself. As news was spreading far and wide, and reports about Jesus, in Luke 7:17, and says, "it spread throughout the whole of Judea, as well." So, south of Galilee, in Judea, and all the surrounding country.

You know what? The religious establishment didn't like that one bit: The growing interest in Jesus. It drew even greater crowds. They gathered to hear him, to be healed of their infirmities. So, the more his popularity increased, the more people look to him, the more it provoked their ire, it stoked their pride, it stirred their jealousy, their envy. The religious establishment just could not handle that.

They didn't like Jesus' growing popularity one bit, because it threatened their prominence. It threatened their power. Their hold over the people. They're standing with the people. So early on, they sent their representatives to Galilee. They wanted to investigate. Report back.

In Luke 5:17, it says, that one, "On one of those days as Jesus was teaching, Pharisees and teachers of the law, they were there." Sitting there. Sitting there, and you need to think, sitting in judgment. That's the sense. They'd come from every village of Galilee, and Judea, and from Jerusalem. Was early on in Jesus' ministry.

Jesus healed a paralytic in their presence that day, may remember. What got under their skin, though, they kind of dismissed the healing? I'm, I'm, thinking to myself: How could you dismiss a healing of a paralytic? What really got under their skin wasn't so much the healing; was that he first forgave the man sins. What audacity? Who do you think you are? That's what they're thinking.

Verse 21 says, in Luke 5, says, "That the scribes and Pharisees began to question, among themselves, saying, 'Who is this, who speaks blasphemies? Who can forgive sins, but God alone?'" Now that second question is the right premise. That's true. Who can forgive sins, but God alone? But they abandoned the connection to the first question.

That first question indicates a refusal to consider the claims of Christ. The claims of Jesus that he, indeed, is the one sent by God, as their Messiah, to do exactly that; to both heal and forgive. So, the scribes and Pharisees condemn Jesus for eating and drinking with tax collectors, prostitutes, Pharisees, or sinners. Other people like that.

They're, for being really among those who need the physician. They need the help. So, they condemn Jesus for, for sitting among them; Levi's friends. They condemn Jesus for healing a man on the Sabbath and they are so bent out of shape about it, in Luke 6:11, it says that, "They are filled with fury."

Remember, we talked about the man who was filled with leprosy. It covered him. It was in all of his skin and his cells. Well, these guys are filled with fury. They start conspiring with one another. What they might do to Jesus. How such incredible anger, and hatred, hostility. What's going on here?

Let's ask a few questions about this. First question. What is, what is this charge anyway? This is the worst kind of slander that one could make about Christ, that he cast out demons by Baalzebul, the prince of demons. Are these, are these religious leaders saying this? Are these shepherds of Israel? Seems inconceivable, doesn't it? Just by Jesus being Jesus.

Just by him doing exactly what God sent him to do. His grace, his kindness, his love, he's speaking the truth in love. It exposes the true heart motivations of this leadership. Not everybody who calls themselves leaders are true leaders of Christ. Not all that say they are Christ servants are Christ servants. You can see how they react when love and grace is shown. If they despise it, or if they receive it.

It's one of the purposes in God's sending Christ is to expose hearts. He was sent there to divide among the people of the earth. To provide clarity. To provide people with a justification or the, the, understanding rather, of, of, God's condemnation of sinners. Why he condemns sin and sinners, who hold on to their sins. Because of this kind of thing. They're shown grace and they react with blasphemy, slander.

This, actually, isn't the first time the leaders have accused Jesus of performing miracles by the power of Satan. Earlier in his ministry, when he was traveling in, around and around the region of Galilee. Jesus healed a man who was both blind and mute, as due to demonic oppression. And that account is recorded twice in the gospels in Matthew 12 and Mark 3.

Those are parallel accounts and they're different from the one we're reading, but they sound very similar. Jesus made the, did the healing. He cast out the demon. And, at that time, when the people saw that, they started to ask this question: They said, can this be the son of David? I mean is, is, this the Messiah?

Immediate answer coming from the scribes and the Pharisees was, whoa, whoa, whoa. When they heard the people saying this, the text says, they said, "It's only by Baalzebul the prince of the demons, that this man casts out demons." They're trying to quell any interest of the people. They're trying to shut down any enthusiasm. They don't want them following him.

Similar circumstances, same charge, and Jesus gives the same response, that we're about to hear now. Same thing. The same thing is going on in Judea, as he gets there. He's traveling in and around Judea and he's hearing the same thing. Why is he hearing this? Why is this being spread? Why this, this false rumor and accusation against him?

Because they are intending to create sides. And they want to bully the people to choose between this newcomer, this upstart, this supposed Messiah. To have to make a decision against their opinion. Against their judgment. That they are the religious establishment. They are the ones who sit in Moses' seat. And they are saying: This man has a demon.

They intend to influence the people. They want to put pressure on them. They want to manipulate them. So, if they want to side with Jesus, they are going to have to face the charge of siding with this person they say is in league with Satan. That's what they're doing. A lot of smart people saying that.

All these scribes, Pharisees, teachers, law professors, very smart people, influencers, power brokers, those who give

and take away social credit. Those who do the hiring and firing in that land. Very hard for the common people to turn away from that kind of pressure.

So, here's the second question. What's the deal in this name Baalzebul? I mean, why not just say you're in league with Satan? Why didn't you say: Charge him with being in league with the devil? Why that name? Why this charge?

Well, there's a bit of a dispute about the term Baalzebul. But the first part, *Baal*, is clear enough. *Baal* refers to a common Canaanite deity. And it's a term that roughly translates "lord." That's what *Baal* means in the Old Testament. So, you can see, Baal-Peor, Baal-Hermon, Baal-Hazor. That's Lord of those places.

Sometimes it's a, it's a lord of the north; Baal-Zephon. So, this is Baalzebul. Literally means something like lord of the dwelling, lord of the temple, maybe even lord of an exalted place like, even heaven itself. So, the word, *zebul*, refers, occurs five times in the Old Testament. And it refers to an

exalted place, an exalted house, exalted temple, even refers to heaven itself.

So Baalzebul, could mean any of those things. Some evidence, the term Baalzebul is closely related to Baalzebub. You may have heard Baalzebub. Centuries old name, of a, of a Syrian God in Ekron. King Ahaziah, you may remember, he had fallen through his lattice and he had sinned by sending his servants to inquire of Baalzebub. To see if he would heal or not. And Baalzebub is the god of Ekron.

It's Ekron. It's one of the Philistine cities. Baal worship, you may remember, in the Old Testament, plagued the kingdoms of Israel and Judah. And for that reason, God sent his people out of the land. They were vomited out of the land. Went into exile because of their idol, idolatry. He sent them. He rubbed their noses in Babylon, and in Assyria, in idolatry. He, they got their fill of it.

So, after the exile, many of these Jews, they came back to the land, and they were determined, bound and determined, never to commit idolatry again. They've learned the lesson about

idolatry. Multiple gods, a planned pantheon of deities, they needed to, to, appease and worship; especially the leadership. They became strict monotheists.

They turned that term Baal, and the god Baalzebub, into a form of contempt. It was a contemptible thing. Something like Baalzebub, could then be seen in some other language variations, there, lord of the dung heap. And like, like, any dung heap known to attract flies. That then, meant lord of the flies, Baalzebub. It's probably best in this context not to see this term Baalzebul, as the same here as Lord of the dung heap or lord of the flies. That's not in play here. Rather, it's probably lord of the exalted place or even Baals dynasty. That's how Jesus seems to be using it.

Even, if the leaders there intended the contempt and the association. So, Jesus, in Matthew 10:25, he said, "They've called the master of the house, Baalzebul." So, he's referring to that master of the house. That exalted position. Both Jesus and his accusers seem to use the term in the same sense here. So, the way they're using it, Baalzebul, he's the master of the

household of evil servants. He's the arch ruler of a dynasty of demons. A kingdom of demons.

Down in verse 17 and 18, Jesus refers there to a divided kingdom, a divided household. He's really making a word play from the name Baalzebul. One that everyone there would understand. In this slanderous charge, notice no one has doubted the effect of the exorcism. No one is disputing the miracle has been done. That the demon has departed. That this formerly mute man is now able to speak. There's no question about that.

And even in the charge itself, there's an acknowledgement that Jesus has indeed done a mighty work. Powerful miracle, healing, casting out the demon, they never disputed any of that. Seeing the power. Witnessing supernatural power. No doubt. It's the otherworldly power. That's a power that demands explanation.

So, the explanation they come up with, while preserving their own authority, their own prominence, their own position, trying to divide the people away from Jesus, and to themselves. The charge they come up with to explain this unexplainable power. Source of Jesus power. What is it? They're charge,

Baalzebul, the prince of the demons. It's Satan himself. He is the source of Jesus power.

Which would mean, then, that Jesus is, he is a servant of Satan. He is in their explanation: He's a tool of the devil. He's an agent of the darkness, of dark deception. And you gotta think about that. In order to believe that, you have to turn away from everything you've just witnessed. Everything you've seen.

That charge totally contradicts Jesus' manner. His character, his teaching, his kindness, everything we've just reviewed. His touching people. His care shown. That even a guy, who a demon has thrown down, intending to do physical harm: Jesus preserves him. So, there is no harm. Come on!

They've witnessed all this first hand. This slander is without any basis whatsoever. It is formed out of thin air. Doesn't take into account any evidence. It flies in the face of all evidence. All testimony. And it manufacturers a false accusation. Spreads this false slanderous report.

They may have marveled along with the rest of the crowd, no doubt, verse 14. But they chose to spread a blasphemous rumor that Jesus is actually there to trick everybody. That, he, he's carrying out an elaborate deception: Campaign of deception. He's pretending to be kind. Oh yeah, he's pretending to be compassionate, gracious. Ohh, but, but don't, don't be fooled by any of that.

Don't be fooled by this power to, to, make you restored again. Oh yeah, you couldn't walk before, but don't be fooled by the fact that you can walk now, or that your withered hand is now unwithered. They want to convince the common people, that what they're seeing is not what they're really seeing. While Jesus is doing all these miracles, sure, but watch out. He's only healing all your diseases, casting out all your demons, raising all your dead loved ones, to serve the devil, and to enslave them, even more, to Baalzebul.

They couldn't find a more despicable term to cast aspersions on him. It would frighten the common people. Make them reluctant to side with Jesus. Like, oh maybe, maybe, I'm

just too uneducated. Too blue collar to see what these high white collar, well studied men are seeing. My eyes can fool me after all. Who wants to follow anybody who's in league with Baalzebul?

Which brings us to a third question. What could possibly drive these religious leaders to such a cruel, contrary to the evidence, supposition? This charge, as we said from the beginning, it's this devious destructive sin of envy, of jealousy. Proverbs 27:4, says, "Wrath is cruel." Yeah, stay away from wrath. Its cruel.

Anger is overwhelming. Watch out for the angry man, right? But who can stand before jealousy? Jealousy. Answer? Answer is no one. No one can stand before jealousy. It turns out, not even the Messiah. Because jealousy and envy is what put him on the cross. Jealousy. It's silent murder, isn't it? It's devious murder.

Pontius Pilot, he certainly had his set of faults and flaws, but a lack of perception about a sinful heart wasn't one of them. He knew the Jewish leadership had stirred up the crowds

and calling for Jesus' blood and sending him to the cross. He saw through their kangaroo court. He saw through their false charges. Their lack of witnesses.

And in the haste of it all. Matthew 27:18, Mark 15:10: Both of those texts tell us that Pilot knew. He knew. He perceived. He didn't get into his governorship by accident, because he was an idiot. He was actually an intelligent man. He could perceive. He was out of envy that the chief priest had delivered him up.

He'd been dealing with jealous, envious people, and politicians all of his career. He climbed over the back of them. He knew exactly what these guys are about. Envy, jealousy: A very sly, devious, subtle form of evil. It's hatched deep in the heart with anger and hatred. It pursues a campaign of slander and character assassination. Demolishing the reputation to diminish the influence. And if that doesn't work, it's going to be calculated murder that's going to be the end result, conspiracies and all the rest.

It's exactly what happened in Christ case. So, it's jealousy. Jealousy, envy: It's that insatiable sin of envy, that

drove the nails into Christ's hands and feet and raised him up on that cross.

Now, Jesus is gonna answer this blasphemous charge about being in league with Baalzebul, in verses 17 to 26. The first chunk of the text, we read, is about him answering that charge. The charge, that they leveled against him, really doesn't merit a response at all, because it's so contradictory on its face. But because the leaders are so influential over these people and because Jesus loves these people, he takes the time to address it.

Leaders are desperate. They're repeating the same self-contradictory charge, over and over again. That he's an agent of the devil, in league with Satan, doing the bidding of Baalzebul. Why are they so desperate? Because they see Jesus as a threat to their power. A threat to their influence. And they've staked a claim to retain that position of honor and authority over the Jewish people. But Jewish, Jesus is too influential. They'll do anything. They'll even embrace a lie, if they have to. To keep their place in prominence and in their position in preeminence.

Okay, so, that's covering the false position of the leaders, the Jewish establishment. That's the first point of clarity, that Jesus' ministry brings, to reveal the reason for God's condemnation of Israel's leaders. Israel's shepherds are filled with pride. Filled with envy. They're driven by greed and they covet influence. And where does this leave the common folk?

Look at verse 16. "Others to test him." To test him. That's, that's the way that's translated, there is correct. It's, it's, showing purpose there, in that, in that verb. Their purpose in, in seeking a sign is to test him. So, "others to test him," kept seeking from him a sign from heaven. The grammar they're suggested it's, it's, actually because of these blasphemous accusations, that they begin seeking a sign from Jesus, and keep repeating their desire for a sign.

You say, wait a minute, didn't he just give them a sign of his power and authority? Yeah, he sure did. You're not wrong about that. But that was quickly forgotten. Why is that? Because all their marveling, over his current miracle, has been lost. It's dissipated. It's forgotten, under the spell of their

leadership. Under this pressure, the social pressure to conform, to keep on following their leadership and not ask any questions.

So, the people here are caught between two opinions. They're looking back and forth between Jesus the Messiah, and then, their leaders that they know personally. That they've grown up together. That they, these, these leaders, that, they, many of them Pharisees, are the ones, who own the businesses that they work for. These leaders are the ones who instruct them in the synagogues. They know these people. They respect them. Who are they going to believe? Who are they going to believe? The heart of this common sin. You know it.

Second point of clarity that comes through Jesus' ministry: Revealing the just condemnation of God. Here's the point of clarity, here, that people are enslaved by the fear of man. They are enslaved by the fear of man and they want to remain in that prison because they will not fear God. That's the heart of this sin. This social pressure coming from Israel's leadership.

It's really a test of their hearts, isn't it? It's really exposing what's actually there, that they have a latent unbelief. It's stirred up within them, an unbelieving suspicion. Like yeah, maybe, maybe, he is in league with Baalzebul. So, the people decide to ignore everything they just witnessed, on the spot. Everything they know to be true. All they've seen, heard, experience. They put all that to the side and they, they, embrace this false charge of the leaders. Or at least they're going to play with it a little bit.

Hold it. Hold one in one hand, and one in the other. And they're gonna put Jesus to the test. They want a sign. Not some measly healing. Not some exorcism. All that's old. That's passe. We've seen that before. Now, here's what we want. Give us a sign, this time from heaven. Show us something cosmic. Show us some wonders up in the sky and then we'll believe you.

So, after Jesus answers the false charge of the Jewish leadership, verses 17 and 26, he's going to turn and answer this demand, of a sign from heaven, in verses 27 to 36. They don't deserve that. Do they? They don't deserve any explanation. They don't. They deserve condemnation, and judgment, and wrath.

But Jesus is here. And he's designed to show them mercy by teaching them. Why do these people deserve to be condemned? Because at the heart of their sin, is a denial of all that Jesus taught and did for them. It's ultimately a denial of his goodness. It's a denial of God's goodness. It's casting aspersions on the character of Christ and God.

They are putting Jesus to the test. Why are they doing that? Because at the heart of their double mindedness. The shape that their unbelief takes here, what this reveals, is that they do not fear God, but they fear man. They fear losing the good opinion of the Jewish leadership. They fear falling out of, out of favor with the influential people in society; the movers and shakers, the Pharisees, the scribes, the elders, the lawyers, of the chief priests. They want to remain in their favor.

Jesus is the newcomer. I mean, why risk shifting loyals, loyalties to him, too quickly? I mean, once he's come and gone, there have been a number of messiahs, people claiming to be Messiah. Maybe he's going to come, and go once his popularity

fades. And it does, even now, seem to be eroding with the bad opinion of the religious establishment.

Well, the people, they're going to need to curry favor with their leaders. They're gonna, after all, they got a life to live. They got a job to maintain. They got careers to pursue. They got mouths to feed. Kids to put through college. So gotta retain their good standing with social influencers. Religious political leaders. That's how the world works, after all.

Proverbs 29:25, says, "That the fear of man lays a snare. But whoever trusts in the Lord is safe." Jesus came to deliver them from all sin. Including this sin. Including the fear of man. That they would fear only one. That they would fear the Lord God of heaven and never allow fear of man to hold sway over them, ever, ever again.

Listen, if you do not fear God, you will fear everything else. Oh, it may become ranking in a pecking order, but you will fear everything. You will never be a person of courage. A person of resolve. A person of steadfastness. Because everybody is

going to demand your loyalty. Everybody's going to put pressure on you, to conform to them and their wishes.

Listen, if you fear God, you don't fear anybody else. You're set free to fear him, and him alone. And at his heart, he doesn't have an ulterior motive, ulterior agenda. Agenda. He's told you what his agenda is. It's to glorify himself and to do you good. You want his agenda to come to pass? You want to serve that agenda? And, so, if you fear him, you'll fear no one else.

So, whether it's people or priests. Whether it's leaders or followers. Whether it's the high and mighty, or the low and the weak, Jesus came to expose the pride of man. The absence of the fear of God in man, the love people have of one another's approval. All that driven by envy, and greed, and all the rest.

So, what old Simeon said, didn't he, at the beginning? Jesus, just a baby. Mary's there with Joseph at the temple. He told Mary, "Behold, this child. He's appointed for the fall and the rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is to be opposed so that the thoughts from many hearts may be revealed."

Jesus is fulfilling his purpose here. Don't look at rejection as failure. Look at rejection as fulfilling the purpose of God.

John the Baptist said much the same thing. He said, "Christ, he holds in his hand his winnowing fork and he goes to gather." He's gonna clear out that threshing floor. He's gonna gather the wheat into his barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.

Folks listen, the problem with Christianity, the problem in the gospel and all the rest. There really, there is no problem, but it's certainly not for a lack of evidence. It's not a lack of proof. The problem at the heart of people's rejection of Christ. It's a moral problem. It's a moral issue. They love themselves.

They want what they want. They love their pride. They love their position. They love their prominence. And Jesus is going to confront all that. "If anyone would come after me," he says, "Let him deny himself". All your pride, self-centeredness, your works, your position, your prominence, all your ambitions, your aims, everything that you hold dear, people's good opinion, and

reputation, and all the rest. Jesus says, "deny yourself, take up your cross and follow me. I'm going to death. Follow me."

It's a moral problem at stake here. It's a matter of what people really want. And what people, most of the time, want, most of the time, is to get their best life now. It's to find comfort and ease in this life. It's to gain the good, of good opinion, of men, over the favor of God and God alone.

Jesus came to proclaim good news to the poor, liberty to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind, set at liberty those who oppressed. He came to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. So go out, beloved, go out and proclaim that gospel. And you tell the truth, in all of its fullness, its richness, its depth, and its full strength.

Preach the gospel. Let it fly. Do not hold back and do not be afraid. You tell them all, tell them to bow the knee to Jesus Christ. To repent before a holy God, because he is gracious, and merciful, and compassionate, and he receives every sinner who comes. You tell them, turn away from this world, it's empty. It has nothing for you. It's filled with distractions,

and bad influences, and enticements, and false fleeting pleasures.

You tell them to repent of all their sins. You tell them to look to Jesus Christ for their salvation. Find forgiveness of their sins and find the righteousness that they themselves lack in Christ given to them to find in him full and free salvation and the liberty to fear the Lord.

Just realize many will reject. Some will reject with blasphemy and reviling, with despising you, calling you despicable and hated. Others will reject in a more subtle way; pretending friendship. Claiming to be agnostic. Refusing to decide. Claiming they don't have enough evidence to make an informed decision.

Why do they reject? Because they love the praise of man. Care nothing about the praise of God. Remember, Jesus faced the hostility of sinners against him first. He shows us all the way forward. Because if we're going to identify with him, we're going to identify with him, and his hostility, and the suffering that was unleashed upon him.

So, you keep preaching the gospel. God will save his people. He'll grant them the fear of the Lord. And remember that this rejection, this laden rejection, in the culture, in the people. Definitely in the leaders. It's going to lead to his crucifixion. His crucifixion. And the wisdom of God turns into our very salvation. We're looking forward to thinking, meditating on, reflecting on that crucifixion day; this Good Friday.

I want you to be thinking about that in your homes. Meditating, leading your families through that. And then next Sunday, we have the privilege of meditating on the resurrection from the dead. Because, yes, there is a grave. There is a tomb. But there is also the power of the spirit to raise our good lord Jesus from the dead. And that hope of resurrection power is our hope of glory, as well.

Bow with me in a word of prayer. Father, we thank you so much for your love, your concern for us that we would see clearly what it is that makes people reject your beloved son. There's no good reason for it. But apart from your regenerating

grace, apart from your saving grace, our eyes, too, would be closed. We would be just like these people. Maybe, maybe we'd even be, so like some of these religious leaders, blasphemous. Embracing a lie in order to hold on to our position. How despicable. How shameful.

Oh God, you've saved us from that life of shame and the surprise, at the end, to stand before you. To give an answer for all of that. And to be thrown like the chaff, into unquenchable fire. So, thank you for your kindness to us in Christ. Thank you for sending your spirit to cause us to be born again, that we might turn in faith and repentance to Christ. Thank you for your kindness in saving us and giving us perfect righteousness in him. We love you and commit this time to you. For our good, for your glory. In Christ's name, amen.