

Standing Strong

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About one year ago, we took a break from an ongoing study in the Gospel of Luke. In fact, over the last few years, we've spent a good amount of time in this gospel with the goal and intent of seeing Jesus. Nothing is more important for our ongoing hope and faith in God than seeing Jesus with the eyes of our mind and heart. We need to see him, glory in him, learn from him, submit to him. Paul says in 2 Cor. 3 that the transforming power of God works in our lives when we behold, when we see the glories of Jesus. That's why we want to keep looking at him as much as possible. Reading and studying a gospel might just be the best way to do that. So, we are back in Luke again for that very purpose.

We start a new section half way into Luke 11 today. In Luke 9, this gospel has a shift in mood and purpose. In chapter 9, it says, Jesus set his face toward Jerusalem. Jesus knew what was coming to him there; he knew the work that he would do through his suffering and death. So, starting in Luke 9 we see a determined Jesus, a focused Jesus. He's not going to get distracted from his journey to Jerusalem because that's where his most important work will get done.

But something happens after he does that; Jesus starts ruffling feathers. He starts provoking some arguments and disappointments. Jesus' mission offends the human will. If your flesh doesn't get a little offended and bent out of shape by the words and teachings of Jesus you're not reading it clearly enough; I mean, he says stuff like, "You can't serve God and money; love your *enemy* as you love yourself; If you love father, mother, son or daughter more than me you're not worthy of me." Jesus has come to bring life-shattering change. Nothing short of ripping men and women away from the kingdom of darkness is his mission. And that hurts. The powers of darkness aren't just out there somewhere, they are even in our own hearts. It's painful to change allegiances to Jesus. While our spirit loves God for it because we know when we are born again that we need this change, our darkside, our shadow, hates it. We want to remain in darkness to foolishly and naively feast on things that kill us. Our sin is so irrational, isn't it? Jesus' work of transferring people from the realm of darkness to the kingdom of light is painful, difficult, and filled with opposition. But it works and it's worth it.

Something new starts happening with our passage. Before the story we are going to read today, the crowds are always positive about Jesus in this gospel; always hopeful for his ministry. But starting in our passage, the crowds begin getting suspicious. They stop being eager for Jesus and become another source of opposition. Jump to vs. 53-54 and notice what we read (READ). The opposition to Jesus just keeps increasing more and more in the Gospel of Luke and the writer wants us to know that it won't stop until Jesus is dead.

It's good for us to know this about Jesus and his ministry, but the author has us in mind, too. He's saying, "So, if you're are going to follow Jesus, you have to be ready for opposition as

well. Will you keep standing with Christ? Will you keep seeking him? Or will the pressure and opposition stop you from moving forward in acts of worship and allegiance to him?" So, this series of messages will be called *Faith that Stands*. That's what we want; in the face of challenges and obstacles that come with pursuing Jesus, we want a faith that stands.

Let's read our passage this morning, Luke 11:14-26 (READ - Note: vs. 14-15 the crowds begin acting/responding like the Pharisees; subheadings aren't always helpful). Let me spell out the point of this passage first and then we'll get into the details. The key, I believe, is vs. 23 where Jesus says, "whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters." While this passage is filled with dramatic spiritual rescue, the point is Jesus' call to all people to align themselves with him. A spiritual battle has broken out between the forces of good against the powers of evil and darkness. The dark forces in our world have been at ease since the dawn of time; they've been able to have their own way. But in the coming of Jesus, the new age, the coming kingdom has broken into this dark world and has put the demons of darkness on notice - your time is short. Whose side will you be on? That's what Jesus is pressing.

Jesus is performing his deliverance ministry in this passage. A man is being afflicted by a demon and Jesus rescues him from the oppression. But rather than being happy about what's taken place, the crowds of people question Jesus. "Is he using demon sorcery?" they wondered. "Maybe I'll believe him if he performs *another* miracle," they said.

While the forces of darkness are not the main point of this passage, let's talk about them since they are a major focus in this passage. In our modern, technological, scientific world it's not so apparent that there are underlying spiritual forces at work in our world today. Thankfully, there's a growing cultural shift in that thinking. We're beginning to realize that science can't answer all of our questions. People are actually becoming more skeptical that science can do everything for us and this is a place for religious, moral, and spiritual insight that can't be naturally observed.

Of course, when you stick with the scriptures you see that this world is composed of both seen and unseen spiritual realities. And while we don't always know how they fit together, our spiritual beliefs and convictions change the way we live in the natural world and also natural, earthly decisions make an impact in the spiritual dimensions of reality, too; they go hand in hand and we do ourselves a disservice when we fail to see the blending and necessity of the both the natural and spiritual realms of reality. In light of that, Paul told us 2000 years ago in the book of Ephesians that (6:12) "we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces in the heavenly places." So, fundamentally, life isn't primarily a natural struggle with natural solutions; it's a spiritual struggle with spiritual solutions that get worked out in the natural world.

We're seeing that on display in Luke 11. A man is afflicted by a demon and that makes a tangible, earthly impact in his life (he's unable to speak). The first correction Jesus offers the crowd of people relates to their logic (we're not going to spend a ton of time on this). They presume that maybe Jesus is using dark forces himself to defeat the demonic. "Maybe he calls on demons to defeat demons," they wonder.

Jesus says, "That doesn't make sense. A house divided against himself won't stand." He corrects their logic; evil can only be defeated by good, not evil. So, they are irrational in their thoughts. That's something to consider: when we fail to walk in the light of Christ we will not think rationally.

Sin is irrational. Have you noticed that? I look at my sin and I wonder, "Why did I just do that? That was stupid!" Trading eternal rewards for temporary ones. Pleasing people who I don't answer to while displeasing the one I will stand before and give account. Again, I don't want to spend too much time on it, but Jesus is pointing out the obvious: our sin and thoughts when living in darkness won't make any sense. Good defeats evil; evil can't defeat it - it only makes this worse.

Jesus' second move is to draw the people's attention to the great power of God. He says, "Obviously, I'm not casting out demons by demons; it's the power of God at work. And if the power I'm casting out what was too powerful for you, imagine how powerful the finger of God is?" That's the whole point of his strong man story. If a strong, mighty, heavily armored man is guarding a house (that's a reference to the demon oppressing the mute man) is attacked and defeated by one who is stronger (that's God!) who's more powerful? Who should you give allegiance to?

Jesus says in vs. 20, "The kingdom of God has come upon you." By implication, Jesus is asking, "So, now what are you going to do? I've just demonstrated to you the power of God, the coming of God's kingdom - it's come upon you. Now what?" Hold that thought (we'll get to it in a minute), but first, let's see Jesus' last point in vs. 24-26 (READ).

It's a peculiar little story; what's the point? Here's the point of what Jesus is making: there's danger in not going all in with Jesus. He again is using the spiritual realities of darkness as his context and illustration and says, "If unclean spirits are swept clean out of a person's life, but nothing replaces it; if my ways, my kingdom, my words don't take up residence in this newly swept heart, these unclean spirits will just come back and when they do, watch out! They are going to be so much stronger."

Friends, can I press that warning into your life right now? There is a particular danger for not going all the way with Christ; Jesus is highlighting that right now. His summary statement is key, "And the last state of that person is worse than the first" when a person (you and me) don't make a point of replacing the evil thoughts, the destructive habits, the cancerous relationships with truthful thoughts, life-giving routines, and encouraging relationships. This reminds me a

little of Jesus' call earlier in this gospel when he says, "anyone who puts his hands to the kingdom plow, but looks back isn't fit or ready." We've got to go all in, my friends. There are destructive consequences when we don't.

With these things in mind, let me jump to the point in vs. 23 (READ). Jesus can see the unbelief in the people. He knows they are waffling. And here's what's really important to see: they are waffling about *him*. They are doubting *him*. With many complicated questions and confusing situations where there could be a lot of debate and disagreement Jesus makes it simple - are you with me? Do you agree with me? Are you working with me or are you working against me? That's why he says in vs. 23, "Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters."

So, what will it be for you? This is where you start to have a faith that stands. You start with Jesus. Who he is. What he's done. What he says.