

Blessed are Those Who Hear and Obey the Word of God

Luke 11:14-28

President Abraham Lincoln referred to this passage in a speech in order to illustrate that our nation was divided by slavery. He said a nation that was half-slave and half free cannot endure. In other words, being half-slave and half-free would lead to complete and utter destruction. There was no halfway with slavery, because it was and is completely sin and sin will completely destroy. There is no neutral ground with slavery and there is no neutral ground with sin.

Jesus' point in this text is that you either belong wholly to sin or wholly to Christ. There is no neutral ground when it comes to Him. You cannot plead ignorance or claim to be undecided for to be undecided is to decide. We are not born with neutral natures and then become sinners. We are born with sin natures and therefore we sin. We belong utterly to Satan unless Jesus loosens our tongues to confess that He is the Christ and obey Him. The true blessed condition is the blessing to submit to the authority of Christ. This is a gift of grace from God.

I. Witnessing Christ's Authority (Luke 11:14)

Verse 14 describes the event that sets off everything in this text. In v. 14 the people reacted to Jesus' healing of the mute man by casting out the demon. It culminated in a woman's poor confession of Jesus and then Jesus corrected her confession.

Verses 14-26 are not instructions on how to interact with demons and demonic possession. This text is about how people responded to the authority of Jesus—they rejected it.

Verse 14 says that after the people witnessed Jesus' display of the amazing power to cast out the demon *they marveled at Him*. They were stunned. They were astonished at His power to do what only God could do.

Before we move any further in the text, I want to ask the question: how do people witness the authority and power of Christ today?

Since Jesus is not physically present with us, we witness the authority and power of Christ in the word of God. How do we know God's word is God's word so that we can believe the witness of Christ in it? This is not a new question. People have been asked this question for hundreds of years. It is not a question that Jesus' disciples should fear.

Question 5 of the *Baptist Catechism* that was developed to teach children helps us here. It asks the learner: *How do we know that the Bible is the Word of God? Answer: The Bible evidences [witnesses] itself to be God's Word by the heavenliness of its doctrine, the unity of its parts, and its power to convert sinners and to edify saints. But only the Spirit of God can make us willing to agree and submit to the Bible as the Word of God.* So let's think about the answer to the catechism in order to make application:

1. The witness the heavenliness of the doctrine of God's word. Reading and hearing the word of God is a witness to the authority of Christ. The word of God is a witness to the authority of Christ. People come to know the word of God is the word of God by the *heavenliness* of its doctrine. In other words, when you read it you can tell this is not the word of man but came from God in heaven. This is the record of how God left heaven, came in Christ to rescue mankind from their sin. You witness this and unbelievers witness this.
2. The witness of the unity of the parts of the word of God. When you read all of the genres of Scripture: narratives, history, wisdom, prophecy, law, gospels, letters, and apocalyptic writings, Old Testament, New Testament, all tell one story. The records in the Scripture are as old as time itself and yet Scripture is telling

one story—God came in Christ to redeem sinners from their sin. You witness this and unbelievers witness this.

3. The witness of the word's power to convert sinners. This is evidence that God's word has authority and power. It changes the lives of sinners. It gives them new life. People witness the word of God saving sinners and making them new from the inside out. They have new loves, new purposes, new directions, new desires and all of this is directed toward and under the authority of Christ, the One they want to follow. You witness this and unbelievers witness this.
4. The witness of the Spirit of God as it uses the word of God to convince people that this is the word of God and to submit to its teaching as the word of God. You witness this and unbelievers witness this.
5. So, no obviously you and I were not there when Christ cast out the demon that was causing the man to be mute. But God's word is timeless and when you read the story, you must decide, do you believe Jesus is the Christ? You may have not been there but God was there and reading His account of what happened in His word is as good as being there. You and I are held accountable by the word of God. So, just to be clear, when you read v. 14, you have just witnessed Jesus casting out the demon that was causing the man to be mute—this is the power and authority of Christ that comes through the word of God. The authority of His word is as binding on us just as if we were there 2000 years ago.

II. Rejecting Christ's Authority (Luke 11:15-16, 23)

Verses 15-16 are classic responses of people who refuse to submit to the authority of Christ in their lives. First, we see the refusal to admit the obvious—Jesus has the authority of God and the other is to claim ignorance by way of not being able to make up their mind.

- Verse 15: *"But some of them said, 'He casts out demons by Beelzebul, the prince of demons.'"*

This statement is not about demons. It is a denial that Jesus is who He says He is, the Son of God with the Authority of God because He is the promised Messiah. It was well known that the mute man could not talk and that was because he was oppressed by a demon. When Jesus cast the demon out there was no doubt that the power of God had worked through Christ. They could not deny for everyone saw it. So like unbelievers do, since they cannot deny the obvious they must come up with an alternate explanation for what had just occurred. If they admit that God had just worked in and through Jesus then they must admit that He had been sent by God and they must listen to Him and submit their lives to the authority of His word. It meant that they must follow Him.

However, if you don't want to follow Jesus and you don't want other people to follow Jesus then you must come up with some other explanation of what just happened. Then you must proclaim that theory to others so that they will not consider the claims of Christ on their lives and that was what they did.

- Verse 16: *"... while others, to test him, kept seeking from him a sign from heaven."*

This was a mixed group of people. Some of these people, although confronted with the truth, still refused to believe. They were a hard-hearted group who instead of submitting to Christ, just kept testing Him hoping He would fail their little tests. As long as they could say they were testing Him and checking Him out then they would not have to make up their minds.

The *"signs from heaven"* they desired to see were things that only God can do. They were seeing them but they still said they were not convinced. They simply refused to believe so instead of believing they just kept asking Jesus to do magic tricks. But these were not magic tricks they were acts of power that only the Messiah could do.

- Bottom line: both groups rejected the authority of Christ. Unconverted sinners never want to submit to Christ. Apart from the work of the Holy Spirit on their hearts they never will.
- 1. Even converted sinners, do not want to submit. Let's be honest, even those of us who are born again do not like it when someone has authority over us. So, before we look at other groups and point our fingers at them as if they are some kind of wicked pagans, we must remember there are three fingers pointing back at us because even Christians still struggle to submit to Christ' authority over their lives. We all want to be the Lord of our own lives. We all want to call our own shots and do our own thing. The difference for us is that Jesus has called us to Himself and His Holy Spirit will work on us, sanctify us, and call us to repent.
- 2. The unconverted will never submit to Jesus. To not submit to Jesus actually means Satan is actually lord of our lives. You may think, no one is lord over my life for I am my own boss. Newsflash, you have duped. Satan loves it when we think we are lord of our own lives. We are under his control and we do not even know it. This is one of the great cover-ups the enemy pulls over on us. We somehow think we are neutral in the world when we are not. The enemy has you in his clutches. You will deny it until your dying days because until your eyes are opened, your ears are opened, and your tongue is loosed to confess that Jesus is Lord you will proclaim your lordship over your life. You are not your own, you belong to Satan.

Everything is at stake in your life. God is at stake. Where you will spend eternity is at stake. True freedom is at stake. True joy is at stake. Everything is at stake when it comes to how you respond to Jesus.

- 3. Some deny Jesus' authority over their lives by redefining Jesus. If they can define Jesus as just something other than the Son of God, the Promised Messiah then that will somehow get them off the hook and they will not have to submit to Jesus.
 - a. Some religions claim that Jesus is one of many gods. Hindus and Mormons do this. They deny His claim that He is the Way and the Truth and the Life and that no one comes to God except through Him. This kind of exclusive power is just too much so they will not submit to Jesus.
 - b. Some religions claim that Jesus was just a prophet and not the Son of God. Muslims do this. They claim that it is an offense to God to become flesh and blood and unbelievable to think that Jesus can be both truly God and man at the same time. This kind of power is beyond their belief so they will not submit to Jesus.
 - c. Some people claim that Jesus was a good moral teacher. They say His example should be followed but He did not come to die on the cross for sinners. They go on to say that Jesus' miracles, Jesus' dying on the cross and rising from the dead is simply ridiculous and part of the gospel was added by those who followed Him. They say no one has the power to come back to life after they are dead and a God who is trinitarian: God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit is impossible.
 - d. Some people claim to not really know what to think about Jesus. They believe that this somehow gets them off the hook with God because they cannot make up their minds. They might believe there is a god but they say a person cannot be sure. This is what we call an agnostic. He may be there but we cannot know Him. Besides, they say, God would not waste His time on us and so the power of the love of God goes in one ear and out the other.
 - e. While others simply deny that God exists. This is the atheist. He denies any power that a deity may have because no being can create everything by the power of His word. This is just too much.
 - f. All of these belief systems are ways to deny Jesus' authority and supremacy in their lives. It is a way they can maintain their so-called personal autonomy and authority over their own lives.

You may be thinking, “*But what about these other religions?*” All other religions, except Christianity are works-based so that means those who practice them are making their false god beholden to their efforts. In other words, their religious efforts are all aimed at personal autonomy and controlling their god as they earn their salvation. Their god is not a god, he is just some clerk at the heavenly checkout counter who owes them salvation after they have paid for it by their efforts and intentions.

- g. What do we make of all of this? Jesus says in John 3:19-20: “*And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. ²⁰ For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed.*” In other words, the people who said what they said in Luke 11:15-16 denied Jesus’ authority and supremacy because they loved darkness. They were like the demon possessed man. They were in bondage to Satan.

People say these things today because they love the darkness. Darkness tastes good to them and the light tastes bitter. They hate the light of Christ because it means they must submit to the authority and supremacy of Christ.

4. Here is the dilemma: how do you get set free from the darkness? This the major problem but I am not going to answer this question right now. I want to leave this hanging for the moment and keep moving through our text.

III. Destroying the Enemy’s Authority (Luke 11:17-26)

In vv. 17-26, Jesus does some apologetics with those who claim His authority and supremacy is from the enemy, Satan. Jesus uses an illustration and two short parables to address the poor logic of those who are attacking Him.

- Verses 17-20: The house divided:
 - Verse 17 is the parable: “*Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and a divided household falls.*” It means that an army that is fighting against itself cannot win. It is already defeated.
 - Verse 18a: “*And if Satan also is divided against himself, how will his kingdom stand?*” Jesus is applying the parable to the strategy of Satan’s army. He is saying that if Satan is attacking Satan then his army is doomed. It cannot win.
 - Verses 18b-20: In vv. 18b-20 destroys their logic and states that the truth is obvious. “*For you say that I cast out demons by Beelzebul. ¹⁹ And if I cast out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they will be your judges. ²⁰ But if it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.*”

The real question in all of this is where does Jesus’ power come from? So . . . whoever has the greatest power will be the judge. Therefore, if Jesus cast out demons by the power of Satan then Satan is defeated because he will eventually destroy himself.

However, if Jesus casts out demons by the power of God, then the kingdom of God has arrived and they must submit to the King for He is the Judge of all. Note that Jesus uses the phrase “*by the finger of God*” in v. 20. With this phrase, He referred to a display of the power of God all the way back in Exodus 8:19. After God brought the plague of gnats on the Egyptians, Pharaoh’s magicians tried to copy the plague but they could not. When they could not reproduce the act of power they said, “*This is the finger of God.*” But Pharaoh’s heart was hardened, and he would not listen to them, as the Lord had

said.” The display of God’s power did not cause Pharaoh to believe but instead it hardened his heart.¹ Sounds like our story in Luke 11 doesn’t it?

The point is that Jesus speaks the very words of God. He has the power and authority of God. He does what He does by the Holy Spirit of God. They wanted a sign and He had given them one, the finger of God set this man free but even that was not enough. Those people were like Pharaoh, they had hard hearts.

- Verses 21-22: The house delivered:

Jesus delivers those from the power of Satan and his bondage. Satan may be a strong man but there is One who is here now that is stronger. If Jesus can kick Satan out of the house then truth is that He is more powerful than Satan.

- Verses 23-26: The house desolate:

- Verse 23: No one is neutral in relation to Jesus. We love light or we love darkness. But the fact is we are born in bondage to the darkness. No one is born neutral in relation to God. We are born loving darkness. It does not matter whether that darkness manifests itself as total and complete rebellion against everything and everyone or whether it is displayed as one of the kindest grandparents you will ever meet that is steeped in disciplined self-righteousness.

Darkness loves darkness. If you reject Jesus and you are the sweetest person on the planet you love yourself and not Jesus. You love self-glorification and not Jesus. You love your wisdom and kindness and not Jesus and you have not submitted yourself to God and therefore you are against Him.

If you watched Iowa State and K-State play yesterday, then you only saw two teams on the court. There were no neutral players that played for both teams. You didn’t see players wearing both Iowa State and K-State jerseys at the same time. They wouldn’t know when to play offense or defense.

It is the same with the kingdom of God. You are in the kingdom or not. You are with Jesus or not. There is no third position that is neutral. There is no such thing as living for Jesus one day and then living for yourself the next. You will go crazy if you try to live this way and you will be worse off than before if you try it. This is Jesus’ point in vv. 24-26.

- Verses 24-26: Reformation without regeneration leads to desolation. This last parable illustrates man’s inability to clean up his own life. Jesus stays with the unclean spirit illustration to show how a man may clean up his life but it only means he worships himself and, in the end, he is worse off than before.

Retired pastor Dr. Kent Hughes says it this way, *“Jesus is saying to his religious hearers that self-reformation without regeneration and the indwelling of God the Holy Spirit is fatal. Temporary moral reformation is inadequate. Anyone who purges evil but puts nothing in its place is in grave moral danger . . . A vacuum has to be filled with something. And if it is not the Spirit of God, there is no telling what it will be.”*² Reformation without regeneration leads to desolation.

IV. Confessing Christ’s Authority (Luke 11:27-28)

After Jesus said all of these things the people were stunned. They had to pick their jaws up off the ground because if the display of the power of God was not enough then the wisdom of God finished them off.

¹ The phrase *the finger of God* is also used to describe the writing of the Ten Commandments in Ex. 31:18 and Deut. 9:10. God wrote The Ten Commandments are on tablets of stone by Holy Spirit. The phrase is also used in Psalm 8:3 to describe how God, by the amazing power of His word, spoke the universe in to existence.

² R. Kent Hughes, *Preaching the Word: Luke, Vol. One: That You May Know the Truth*, 430.

One woman was so amazed say proclaimed, *“Blessed is the womb that bore you, and the breasts at which you nursed!”* This was another way of saying, *I wish I was blessed enough to have a son like you.*

Jesus did not let this statement just go in one ear and out the other. He didn’t say, *“Isn’t that nice.”* He put everything in perspective because after all is said and done, at the end of the day, true blessing is not witnessing acts of power. Those who are truly blessed are the ones who hear the word of God and obey it.

These are the ones who bear fruit. These are the ones who take up their cross daily and follow Jesus. These are the ones where regeneration has produced reformation. These are the one who now see the light and love it. These are the ones whose ears have been opened. These are the ones who whose hearts were swept clean by Jesus taking the word of God and the Spirit of God breathed new life in their hearts. These are the ones who have been delivered from bondage and truly set free. These are the ones who step back and look at their lives and think, *“It does not matter what I have accomplished or not accomplished—Jesus saved me and I love Him. This is enough.”*

To close I want to show you something and this is your big take away. Because I want this to be practical and I think it is but often what we want is a lot of *“how to’s”*. You know, tell me what to do. Give me some practical things to begin doing. It is not bad to want to begin to love others, serve others and fight sin in our lives but I think the most practical thing that could happen, the most life changing thing that could happen is for us to be stunned by the power of God, the authority of Jesus and the supremacy of Christ in our lives. I think it is good for us to remember who we once were and the bondage we were in so we will appreciate the salvation we have been given. I believe this is what our passage is point to.

So, go with me to Ephesians 2 because I want to close by showing you how Luke 11:14-28 connects to Ephesians 2:1-3, *“And you were dead in the trespasses and sins ² in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— ³ among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.”*

There are two things at work in our fallen nature, our unsaved, unregenerate nature that has not had the grace of God act upon it.

1. The ordinary natural person hates God. Everyone who has been born is born in lockstep with his natural desires and that desire is to hate God. He or she is disobedient not by choice but by their nature. It is who they are. They are by nature children of wrath and are in the spiritual bondage of death. This was the man in Luke 11:14. He is an illustration of our fallen nature. Oh, you and I may not be possessed by Satan like that but we are children of wrath, following the course of the world, the prince of the power of the air, the prince of darkness, carrying out the passions of our flesh that results in a host of sin like self-glorification, self-righteousness, the redeemer complex, pride, prejudice, gluttony, drunkenness, cursing, pornography, adultery, and the list goes on and on.
2. It gets worse. Satan exploits our natural bondage to sin and death. 2 Corinthians 4:4 says, *“The god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.”* I like what John Piper says here. He says, *“Here we are in our natural spiritual blindness and Satan comes along and takes advantage of this. It is like He comes along and gags us and puts a bag over our heads to blind us even more. So not only do we naturally love the darkness but now we are bound and gagged by Satan. Not only do we love the darkness but Satan has blinded us.”*

But notice what the text says. It says *he has blinded us from seeing the light of the gospel on the glory of Christ*. Listen to this, there is a divine supernatural light that shines through the gospel and that is the glory of Christ. You and I are unable to see the light of the glory of Christ apart from the sovereign grace of God overcoming our natural and spiritual blindness. We have no ability to see the glory of Christ in the gospel. We have no ability to confess Christ with our tongues, it is as though we are mute and cannot say *Christ is Lord*.³ Prior to conversion, we are the demon possessed mute man. This is our condition. We were helpless and without hope in the world.

Here are the two things I want you to see this morning:

1. In order to be stunned by your new identity in Christ you must be stunned by the depth of the bondage of your old identity apart from Christ. The Reformer, Martin Luther says, *“Unless we feel the power, and the pervasiveness, and the eternal peril of the bondage of our will, we will not see or savor or sing the glory of God’s sovereign grace.”* So if you are no longer in bondage to your guilt, your spiritual muteness, your spiritual blindness, your spiritual deafness, if you love the light of the glory of Christ in the gospel, if you love His authority in your life, His supremacy in your life, and if the gospel is the greatest treasure because He swept your life clean and has inhabited it by His Holy Spirit you owe all of this to the sovereign grace of God. You didn’t do any of that. He penetrated your spiritual blindness, deafness, and muteness by His sovereign grace and set you free. Be stunned, and worship Jesus with awe and amazement. You didn’t deserve any of this.
2. Lastly, if you are here and you are listening to all of this and thinking, *“All of this Jesus stuff is ridiculous and is unbelievable.”* You should tremble. You are in great danger. There is no neutral position with Jesus. You are actually against Him.

You should tremble and cry out for mercy and ask God to open your eyes, open your ears, open your mouth to confess Christ and break open your hard heart. If you die in this condition then you will die separated from Christ and go to Hell for eternity.

You need to look to Jesus. Anyone can look. Look to Him, call on Him to save you. Look to the one who obeyed God perfectly on behalf of sinners. He loved God with all of His heart, soul, mind, and strength and He loved His neighbor perfectly. But then He died on the cross to pay for our sin of not obeying God’s commands. He is the sinner’s substitute. He paid our debt of sin and He purchased our righteousness before God. He was buried and rose from the dead on the third day victorious over the death that held us bondage. Only Jesus can call sinners from spiritual death to spiritual life. He is calling you to turn from your sin and trust Him as your Lord and Savior today. Do not wait one more second.

³ John Piper’s sermon: *The Bondage of the Will, the Sovereignty of Grace, and the Glory of God*, helped me to illustrate and apply the meaning of Jesus’ casting out of the mute demon. His sermon can be found at: <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/the-bondage-of-the-will-the-sovereignty-of-grace-and-the-glory-of-god>. This is an excellent sermon and I commend it for understanding the bondage of the will and supernatural light of the gospel that has set us free.