

Facing Opposition

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[0 : 0 0] God, in Jesus our Savior, and through the Spirit. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Now, we have a lengthy portion of Luke 11 that we're going to think about together, so we're going to break it up into two sections, and Steve Willis is going to come and read for us now from verse 14 to verse 28. Thanks, Steve.

Luke 11, verses 14 to 28.

Jesus was driving out a demon that was mute. When the demon left, the man who had been mute spoke, and the crowd was amazed. But some of them said, by Beelzebul, the prince of demons, he is driving out demons. Others tested him by asking for a sign from heaven. Jesus knew their thoughts and said to them, any kingdom divided against itself will be ruined, and a house divided against itself will fall. If Satan is divided against himself, how can his kingdom stand? I say this because you claim that I drive out demons by Beelzebul. Now, if I drive out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your followers drive them out? So then, they will be your judges. But if I drive out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own house, his possessions are safe. But when someone stronger attacks and overpowers him, he takes away the armor in which the man trusted and divides up his plunder. Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters. When an impure spirit comes out of a person, it goes through arid places, seeking rest, and does not find it. Then it says, I will return to the house I left. When it arrives, it finds the house swept clean and put in order. Then it goes and takes seven other spirits, more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there. And the final condition of that person is worse than the first. As Jesus was saying these things, a woman in the crowd called out, blessed is the mother who gave you birth and nursed you. He replied, blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it. This is God's word.

Thank you, Steve. And we'll pick up our reading there in a few moments. But before that, we're going to sing a portion of Psalm 31. We're going to sing together from verse 19 to verse 24.

And again, we'll stand together so that we can sing this section. Your goodness, Lord, is very great, prepared for those who fear your name.

[3 : 2 0] To show your goodness openly, to all who your protection claim.
your presence hides and shelters them from those who plot to take their life.

And in your tent you keep them safe from each other.

evil times that stir up strife. The Lord be praised because he showed the wonder of his love to me.

When in a city I was trapped, surrounded by the enemy.

[4 : 5 5] In my alarm I rashly said that I was hidden from your eyes.

But when I call to you for help in grace, you listened to my cries.

O love the Lord, O you his saints. The faithful will be kept by God.

But he will give the proud. There do be strong.

Take heart, hope in the Lord. So we're going to continue reading in Luke chapter 11 in our church Bibles.

[6 : 31] It's page 1043. In case anyone's looking for a Bible and you were caught out because we used to have them at the front door. Now they're in the back corner. So if you need a copy, you can go and grab one there. and we're going to read from verse 29 to the end of the chapter. Let's again hear God's word.

When Jesus had finished speaking, sorry verse 29, as the crowds increased, Jesus said, this is a wicked generation. It asks for a sign, but none will be given it except the sign of Jonah.

For as Jonah was assigned to the Ninevites, so also will the Son of Man be to this generation. The Queen of the South will rise at the judgment with the people of this generation and condemn them.

For she came from the ends of the earth to listen to Solomon's wisdom, and now something greater than Solomon is here. The men of Nineveh will stand up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and now something greater than Jonah is here.

No one lights a lamp and puts it in a place where it will be hidden or under a bowl. Instead, they put it on its stand, so that those who come in may see the light. Your eye is the lamp of your body. When your eyes are healthy, your whole body also is full of light.

[7 : 46] But when they are unhealthy, your body also is full of darkness. See to it then that the light within you is not darkness. Therefore, if your whole body is full of light and no part of it dark, it will be just as full of light as when a lamp shines its light on you.

When Jesus had finished speaking, a Pharisee invited him to eat with him. So he went in and reclined at the table. But the Pharisee was surprised when he noticed that Jesus did not first wash before the meal.

Then the Lord said to him, Now then, you Pharisees clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside you are full of greed and wickedness, you foolish people. Did not the one who made the outside make the inside also?

But now, as for what is inside you, be generous to the poor, and everything will be clean for you. Woe to you, Pharisees, because you give God a tenth of your mint, rue, and all other kinds of garden herbs, but you neglect justice and the love of God.

You should have practiced the latter without leaving the former undone. Woe to you, Pharisees, because you love the most important seats in the synagogues and respectful greetings in the marketplaces.

[8 : 56] Woe to you, because you are like unmarked graves, which people walk over without knowing it. One of the experts in the law answered him, Teacher, when you say these things, you insult us also. Jesus replied, and you experts in the law, Woe to you, because you load people down with burdens they can hardly carry, and you yourselves will not lift one finger to help them.

Woe to you, because you build tombs for the prophets, and it was your ancestors who killed them. So you testify that you approve of what your ancestors did. They killed the prophets, and you build their tombs.

Because of this, God in his wisdom said, I will send them prophets and apostles, some of whom they will kill and others they will persecute. Therefore this generation will be held responsible for the blood of all the prophets that's been shed since the beginning of the world, from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, who was killed between the altar and the sanctuary.

Yes, I tell you, this generation will be held responsible for it all. Woe to you experts in the law, because you have taken away the key to knowledge.

You yourselves have not entered, and you have hindered those who were entering. When Jesus went outside, the Pharisees and the teachers of the law began to oppose him fiercely, and to besiege him with questions, waiting to catch him in something he might say.

[10 : 15] This is God's word. So this evening we come to this point in the journey of Jesus, where he is facing different types of opposition.

And as we begin, it's important for us to recognize that opposition is a reality for Christians. Even within our own church, the different countries and the families that we represent, opposition comes in very different ways.

In certain places, it's just simply that views are unwelcomed. For other people, their experience is that coming to faith means their family won't accept them.

Some people live in countries where Christians and churches come under intense surveillance from the state. Others live in places where churches and the Christian community can be targeted at particular times to score political points.

For some of us, to be a Christian will be to be excluded from certain groups or certain opportunities. To follow Jesus is to share in his experience is to know opposition.

[11 : 30] This journey that Jesus is taking is a journey to Jerusalem. It's a journey towards the cross. Indeed, we could use the language of verse 49 and recognize Jesus stands in that line of God's messengers who will be persecuted and killed.

And as Jesus would say to his disciples, if they hated me, they will hate you also. So our purpose this evening is to consider what did the opposition look like in this section of Luke's gospel on this journey?

To listen in as Jesus responds and to let this confrontation examine us as well. Especially as we recognize that it is nothing more important than our own response to Jesus.

So let's look first of all at verses 14 to 28 where we see the first sign of opposition as the people misrepresent Jesus.

So to just follow what's going on, we read in verse 14 that Jesus has driven out a demon. That he has done something incredibly good and powerful and merciful.

[12 : 48] But the accusation comes, yeah, Jesus does that because Jesus is on the devil's side. How does Jesus respond?

If Satan is divided against himself, how can his kingdom stand? He challenges their logic. Of course he is not a part of the kingdom of darkness. We know this.

If a political party begins infighting, then that group will be weakened and collapse or a sports team that begins to turn on one another. Jesus also says to them, listen, your followers are doing the same thing and you don't call them part of the kingdom of darkness.

Rather, positively, what does Jesus say? Verse 20, if I drive out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.

That's a wonderful image. Just the finger of God is sufficient to drive out this demon. And it represents, again, the breaking in of God's kingdom.

[13 : 56] Verses 21 and 22, there is another reality here as Jesus pits himself against the devil, acknowledging, yes, the devil is a strong man, but Jesus is the stronger man.

And he is on a rescue mission. His work on the cross will be the climax of that rescue mission. His resurrection will be that victory accomplished.

Spiritual hostages set free, transferred from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of God. He faces misrepresentation, but that's how he responds, by pointing to the reality of who he is and the kingdom that he's bringing.

And now Jesus will bring his own challenge to his opponents. In verse 23, notice what he says, whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters.

He asks them the question, whose side are you on? There is the fighting imagery in a battle. You're either for or against.

[15 : 11] There's no neutral position here. When it comes to the work of farming, you're either helping in the harvest or you're hindering. Jesus is saying, when it comes to me, there is no neutral position.

And then towards the end of the section, and especially in verse 28, we can hear him asking the question, how is our hearing spiritually?

So he talks about this situation. Suppose a person is cleansed from a demon. So the demon is driven out, but there's no replacement going on. Not replaced with God and his word, not replaced with faith.

Jesus will say, well, the final condition of that person is actually going to end up being worse. And then he responds to someone in the crowd crying out, blessed is the mother who gave you birth and nursed you.

What a blessing to be in Jesus' biological family. And Jesus says, here's what's better, hearing and obeying as Jesus brings the word of God, because it's a word that brings life.

[16 : 13] It's a word that saves. So as we think about Jesus being misrepresented, and as he challenges his listeners, it's important for us to ask ourselves the question, how is my hearing?

In 2019, in Australia, the Peaks Observatory Radio Telescope, that big thing up there, the listeners got really excited.

So they spent all their time listening to signals from around the galaxy. They got really excited because they were pretty sure they picked up signs coming from another planet.

They thought extraterrestrial life was trying to communicate. And it went public. Really exciting news. And then a few days later, there was the rather embarrassed retraction.

Actually, it was just the case that some signals got crossed, the signal got mixed up. They heard the message wrong. Jesus came as God's promised king, bringing the good news of spiritual rescue, transferring people from death to life, calling people into relationship with God through faith in him.

[17 : 35] All of this profoundly good news, but as we see here, Jesus and his message misrepresented. And it's a truth throughout Christian history that the Christian faith and the Christian message has often been misrepresented, that people have got mixed up for a variety of reasons.

So in the first century, even as the church was growing rapidly through the Roman Empire, you will discover as well that there was a real hatred and hostility towards the Christian faith, in part, because it was mixed up and misrepresented.

So they heard Christians said, Jesus is Lord, not Caesar is Lord. So they presumed then, Christians would be the worst of citizens. They're bad news. We need to get rid of them. They heard about the Lord's Supper, about the bread and the wine representing the body and the blood, and they got mixed up and they thought, Christians are cannibals.

They're bad news. Stay away from them. All through church history, this kind of thing, 21st century, Christianity still gets misrepresented, the Christian church, and its message still gets treated as bad news, doesn't it?

Any exclusive truth claim is bad. It's intolerant. Religion is the problem in society. Christians are the narrow-minded, bigoted ones who are bad news in our day and age.

[19 : 07] We hear it in different ways, don't we? So in the reality of spiritual opposition, where Jesus and his church and his message are likely to be misrepresented and opposed, will we first of all, as Jesus says, will we hear and obey the gospel word?

Do we recognize and do we trust that Jesus came from God as God to save lost and dying people? And if we do, will we have the courage then to follow Jesus as king?

Even when that comes with a cost. Even if the people around us choose to misrepresent Jesus and misrepresent us. The question always remains, where do we stand?

Do we take our stand with Jesus or are we against Jesus? So we need to be careful about how our hearing is, especially in the context of spiritual opposition, that we would learn to be dependent on him and on his word, that we might stand our ground.

Let's look now at the second set of opposition that we find against Jesus, verse 29 to 36, the crowd increases and Jesus acknowledges and recognizes a fresh challenge.

[20 : 49] As the crowds increased, Jesus said, this is a wicked generation. It asks for a sign, but none will be given it except the sign of Jonah.

Second up opposition, rejecting evidence for Jesus. Maybe you've had this experience of being in a foreign country and finding yourself at various points feeling lost.

Perhaps the signs, road signs or airport signs, are only in an international language and not in English, and it can be thoroughly confusing.

There are some people in Jesus' day who never seem satisfied with the signs that Jesus gave them.

We already heard it in verse 16. Others tested Jesus by asking for a sign from heaven, demanding more signs, demanding more evidence that Jesus is who he says he is.

[21 : 55] By now, in Luke's gospel, what have we come to discover? Well, we have just seen him drive out a demon. We have seen and heard of him healing many, many sick people with various kinds of diseases.

We've seen his power over nature as he has stopped a storm. We have seen his power over sickness and even over death.

We have seen him feed a huge crowd with one small boy's lunchbox. The problem is not a lack of evidence.

The problem is spiritual blindness and hard-heartedness. They could not and would not read the signs. And there is that refusal to trust and believe.

So what does Jesus say to them? Verse 29, you're asking for a sign. None will be given except the sign of Jonah. So Jesus is going to take them back to the Old Testament.

[23 : 00] And it's really interesting. Jesus points them back to the Old Testament and says, look, it points forward to me. If we want to know how to read the Old Testament like Jesus, that's one important thing for us to learn.

As we read the Old Testament, we're looking to see how it is fulfilled in Jesus. But he gives them what he calls the sign of Jonah.

Jonah. What does he mean by that? Who was Jonah? Well, Jonah, of course, was that Old Testament prophet sent on his mission.

A mission to declare the judgment of God on Nineveh. But to declare that judgment implicitly was to open up a window for mercy. Jonah was reluctant.

He tried to run from God. God sent a storm. Jonah was thrown overboard, swallowed by a fish. Okay, but here's the sign of Jonah, I think, that just as, and Jesus would say this in Matthew's Gospel, just as Jonah spent three days and nights in the belly of the fish, so Jesus would spend those three days and nights in the heart of the earth.

[24 : 15] And just as Jonah, as it were, came back from death to life to preach a message that demands response, the response of repentance and faith.

So Jesus would die and rise and calls us all to repent and to believe. That's the sign that he's going to give to them. In his dying and rising, he's going to show he's the greater than Jonah.

But he doesn't just stop there as he gives Old Testament lessons, does he? He also talks in verse 31 about the Queen of the South, perhaps more familiarly known to us as the Queen of Sheba.

And it says there in verse 31, she'll rise at the judgment with the people of this generation and condemn them for she came from the ends of the earth to listen to Solomon's wisdom. And one greater than Solomon is here.

So there was this queen who traveled hundreds and hundreds of miles, such was the fame of Solomon, God's king with God's wisdom.

[25 : 21] And Jesus says, she was wise, you're unwise, you're going to be condemned because Jesus is a greater king than Solomon. Jesus has greater wisdom than Solomon.

Paul talks about Jesus, the wisdom of God, our righteousness, our holiness, our redemption. Jesus is all the wisdom we need, but his generation were rejecting him. So she becomes a sign that will lead them to judgment and condemnation.

And then even the men of Nineveh, verse 32, will stand up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it for they repented at the preaching of Jonah and now something greater than Jonah is here.

Nineveh was a really evil city. But when they heard that message, 40 days in Nineveh will be destroyed, there was repentance from the greatest to the least and God showed mercy.

Jesus, a greater preacher, bringing eternal life, bringing grace from God as God himself comes to them and they reject him and they demand more evidence.

[26 : 30] They say no. And then Jesus uses this imagery in verses 33 and 36 by way of challenging the opponents.

Asking the question, how is your spiritual eyesight? Look at verse 34, your eye is the lamp of your body. When your eyes are healthy, your whole body also is full of light, but when they're unhealthy, your body also is full of darkness.

See to it then that the light within you is not darkness. Jesus has come providing the light of God and it is being rejected in favor of darkness.

And so Jesus says to them, how you see Jesus, how we see Jesus, how we respond to him is a sign of whether we have God's light or not.

Do we respond to the light or do we remain in spiritual darkness and blindness? darkness. Jesus is saying our view of Jesus determines our spiritual condition.

[27 : 41] How is my eyesight today? Have you ever taken an eye test? You know the letters are there on the chart, they're right in front of you, but you can't make them out.

I guess every glass wearer has had that experience. You know, when it gets fuzzy it's a sign that our eyesight is not great, that we need fresh lenses.

If you've ever tried to live with fuzzy vision it can be uncomfortable sometimes. I'm not a huge fan of wearing glasses, so I often walk past people in the street who I know but I don't realize that I know them.

That's uncomfortable. They can also be dangerous if you don't know where you are going. And so it's important for us to ask spiritually, do I see Jesus clearly?

maybe especially when we think about the people around us who maybe bring challenges and are looking to know, you know, I want more evidence, I want more proof, and they have challenge after challenge.

[28 : 47] Jesus reminds us that there's the reality of spiritual blindness. And so one of the things that we absolutely need to be doing is to be praying, and that God would allow the light of the Lord Jesus to shine in that person's heart and life.

It just as Jesus invited his opponents to read their Bibles in order to see Jesus clearly, perhaps one of the best things that we can do with our friends or our family members who have questions is to take them to God's Word, to invite them to read a Gospel, to discover who Jesus really is, because often the version of Christianity or the Jesus that people are rejecting is not the same as what's found in God's Word.

It's important that we know and see that Jesus is more than, you know, Jesus talks about I am greater than.

He's not just a good man, he's not just a wise man, he's not just a role model, he is greater than anyone, anything, he is the king we need, he's the prophet we need, he's the wisdom we need, and he's the king, the prophet, the wisdom that the people around us need also.

So especially as we recognize as Jesus speaks to us that the judgment we pass on Jesus now affects the judgment Jesus passes on us when he returns, how important it is for us to pray and to seek and to share who Jesus truly is, what he came to do with people who are struggling and wondering about the evidence.

[30 : 35] The third opposition that we see from verse 37 to the end of the chapter is the opposition of those who choose man-made religion over Jesus.

there are particular opponents in view here in verse 37, it's the Pharisees, in verse 45, it's the experts in the law.

These two groups of religious leaders who of all people should be hearing with faith. They should be reading the signs and recognizing who Jesus is, and they should in turn then be pointing people to trust in Jesus as God's promised king and savior.

But their problem is that they're choosing their own superficial man-made religion that's based on works rather than God's salvation that comes through grace, that comes through trusting in Jesus.

And so as Jesus confronts this opposition we discover that their hearts are unchanged, their hearts are unclean, but they feel really good about themselves because of the externals.

[31 : 42] Jesus is meal time, verse 37. A Pharisee has invited Jesus to eat with him. And notice the Pharisee's surprise.

Jesus doesn't wash according to the rules that we've set. He doesn't conform to our standards of what it means to be clean. Jesus says to him, you don't conform to God's standard of cleanness.

You Pharisees clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside you're full of greed and wickedness. Jesus wants to confront the religious leaders, relying on a man-made religion.

It's what's on the inside that counts. How is your heart? Rather than being concerned simply to look good at playing at religion.

It becomes clear, Jesus hates that, God hates that, he wants sincerity, we see it in the Old Testament, and we see it here as well. And as if that wasn't enough, Jesus then proceeds to pronounce these six woes, these judgments are pronounced.

[33 : 00] So look at verse 42, there is woe on these Pharisees for their hypocrisy. So they're brilliant at tithing their herbs, you know, they've got their garden herbs all tithed neatly, but they don't love their neighbor in practice justice, and they're neglecting the love of God.

And they think that they're doing well. He confronts their pride in verse 43, their love to be seen before other people, rather than being humble before their God.

He confronts their uncleanness in verse 44, you're like unmarked graves. They are unclean, and people are stumbling upon them in their teaching, and because of their influence, they're making others unclean too, they're dragging others into the same mess as them with their bad teaching.

Verse 45, one of the experts in the law said, teacher, when you say these things, you insult us also, and Jesus has some woes for them also. Verse 46, because of their legalism, piling on, heaping on, a crushing burden of man-made religion, not helping by cutting through all that, and showing Jesus is Lord and the one they need to trust.

He challenges them for their hypocrisy. Their ancestors killed God's messengers, the prophets. they build tombs, thinking they're doing this great religious thing.

[34 : 45] Jesus says, you're basically saying that what your forefathers did, you approve of. He will say to them, you stand in line of those who kill God's prophets.

And of course, as the story goes on, we know that they will do the same to Jesus. And then we get to verse 52, that last woe.

Woe to you, because you've taken away the key to knowledge. You yourselves have not entered, and you have hindered those who were entering. What a dreadful situation.

They've locked and barricaded the door to know God through faith in Jesus. They've thrown away the key. They're turning people back from trusting in Jesus, the way, the truth, and the life, because they're persuaded that their way is the way to God.

And so Jesus, it challenges this man-made religion by pointing to the importance of the heart. Remember God's word that came to Samuel, the prophet, in the Old Testament.

[35 : 53] Man looks at the outward appearance, but God looks at the heart. But we have this somber reminder that Jesus can be opposed and resisted even by those claiming to be religious, even by those who are in a position of religious leadership.

Jesus denounces them because of how far short they come of God's word and God's way of salvation. Jesus says only heart change will do.

But a religion based on work will aim to change some habits, serving to keep Jesus at arm's length. Jesus would humble us by showing us our sin, by showing that we cannot keep God's law, we cannot be holy by ourselves, but man-made religion, tick these boxes, encourages pride in our own ability.

It ignores God's perfect holiness, and it ignores human sinfulness. The question to ask ourselves is how is my heart?

That image that Jesus had in verse 39, you Pharisees clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside you are full of greed and wickedness.

[37 : 29] Have you ever had this start to the day? You're getting ready for school or you're getting ready for work and you get the fresh bowl out of the cupboard or out of the dishwasher, you pour your cereal, you add the milk, you get ready to tuck in, you take your first spoonful and you get that disgusting taste because you realize your milk is off.

Not just me. The glass or the plate can be clean but inside it's disgusting. And Jesus wants us to understand how foolish it is to try and merely clean up our act, to try harder to do better when our heart is still a dark mess of sin.

What we need is not more man-made religion. What we need is to trust and ascend from heaven redeemer. Jesus came to establish the new covenant, to establish us in relationship with God by his death on the cross.

And in that new covenant, as it's spoken of in the Old Testament, there is a spiritual heart transplant that takes place. Ezekiel says that God will change our heart of stone and give us a heart of flesh.

So we need God's grace to change us from the inside out. And so we must never settle for man-made religion. So as we follow Jesus on this journey, and as we've seen him face opposition of various kinds, we're reminded opposition is real.

[39 : 15] people are we willing to face it for Jesus' sake. Jesus will suffer it for us, walking this road to suffer, to die, to save his people.

His life is one in which opposition, persecution, suffering, and ultimately death were never far away. The result of his mission, the result of his sacrifices, that we receive the gift of new life, an entry into God's kingdom, and the guarantee of final victory and glory.

At the same time, we identify with Jesus, being ready to suffer. For some Christians today, they will pay the ultimate price for following Jesus, but we know that every follower will know some opposition, so will we walk that road day by day?

And how do we do? Or doesn't it begin by trusting in Jesus and remembering Jesus, the one who walked this road before us, the one who walked this road for us, and the one who promises that he walks that road of opposition, suffering, and suffering with us.

And so we can trust him today and every day. Let's pray together. together.