

# Jesus has power over evil

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[ 0 : 00 ] Our reading this morning is from Luke's Gospel, chapter 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 Beelzebub, 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 Beelzebub. Now, if I drive out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your followers drive them out?

[ 1 : 23 ] 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 armour 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.

[ 2 : 57 ] 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 a mother who gave you birth and nursed you.

He replied, Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it. Amen. So then, How do you feel about people having power?

Maybe it depends how that power is used. It's not so great when dictators use their armies to cling on to their power. But it's much more positive, perhaps, When power is used to help the disadvantaged.

Now, you may or may not believe that Jesus had and has immense power. And even if you do think that he had power, Well, maybe you're not quite sure whether that's a good thing or not.

Well, it's Jesus's power that we're thinking about in today's passage. In the first section of these verses that we're looking at, The suggestion that comes from his opponents is that Jesus's power is a bad thing.

[ 4 : 21 ] The question being, Where does the power come from? Our first point, therefore, this morning will be the source of Jesus's power. And then secondly, as we move on to the section thinking about the strong man, We see there's a sufficiency of Jesus's power.

And then that section with the evil spirit leaving and returning, That section shows us the necessity of Jesus's power. Source, sufficiency, necessity.

So let's dive in. Remember, we're still in this section of journeying with Jesus, All the way from Luke chapter 9 through chapter 19.

We're still on the road towards Jerusalem, Heading towards the cross to Jesus' death and resurrection. And Jesus, knowing that that is where he's heading, Jesus is teaching his followers, teaching you and me after them, Teaching us what journeying with Jesus looks like.

So Jesus and his disciples are on the road, But we don't get any specifics about where they are at this precise point, Or how long it's been since that section of teaching on prayer That we were thinking about the last few weeks.

[ 5 : 26 ] The geography, the chronology, they're really not the point here. And in fact, in this first section, Even the fact of the exorcism isn't really the point. You and I, I imagine, we'd be pretty amazed Watching Jesus driving out a demon that had caused somebody to be mute.

This guy who we've known for some time. We live in a village together. We know him. We know he cannot speak. He never has been able to speak, perhaps. Or it came upon him a while ago. And now suddenly, here he is, gabbling 19 to the dozen. The crowd, understandably, were absolutely amazed. But not everyone. There's this group in verse 15 who make an accusation. They say it is by Beelzebul, the prince of demons, That he is driving out demons. By the way, don't get confused by talking about Beelzebul. We tend to use the name Satan more often. But Beelzebul is just another name for the same person, The prince of demons. See, these people standing watching Jesus, They cannot deny that he has power.

[ 6 : 34 ] They know this man who couldn't talk, and now can. They know he couldn't speak before, and now he is. Clearly, something has changed.

Clearly, there is power at work. There's no doubt about that. The question is, why? How can Jesus do this? Now, I suppose some sort of trick might be a distant possibility.

But really, they know this man. They have to believe the evidence of their own eyes. The power really is there. So where did it come from? And that's the point they choose to attack.

Suggesting that this is some kind of bizarre ploy by Satan himself. Now, this is reasonable insofar as a king, a general, Does have the authority to direct his troops.

So delegated authority from Satan would, I suppose, Be sufficient for somebody to tell a demon to leave. But as Jesus says in verse 17, This suggestion just doesn't stand up to logical scrutiny.

[ 7 : 37 ] Why on earth would Satan behave in such a fashion? That isn't how kingdoms work. What kind of a stupid general would send a soldier to tell another soldier To leave his carefully chosen, carefully prepared position For no strategic gain?

It's not like this is a promotion, is it? It's not like the demon is coming out of one man And being sent into another better position. Elsewhere, elsewhere, the demons get to head into a herd of pigs. It's hardly a consolation prize, let alone an upgrade. So Jesus says to his accusers here, Come on! You know how the world works.

You know that a civil war results in the kingdom falling apart. You know that a household cannot hold together for long If its members are at war with one another.

It simply makes no sense to suggest that this is what's happening. That it is by Satan's power that Jesus acts. That's the first argument.

[ 8 : 39 ] Then secondly in verse 19, Jesus points out that a double standard is being applied. On the one hand, he, Jesus, is accused of being in league with Satan.

And on the other hand, their own followers are themselves casting out demons. What is the basis for saying that one is the work of Satan and the other, as these accusers presumably believe, is the work of God?

Well, of course, the answer is there is no good reason for this discrepancy. They've been caught out in their hypocrisy. And going back up to verse 17, we see that Jesus knew their thoughts.

See, actually, these people didn't even have the decency to bring their concerns to Jesus himself to see what he would say. No, they just muttered away to one another. But Jesus knew not only the accusation that was being levelled in verse 15, but he knew the reasons behind the accusation. He knew why they were saying this. He knew all about the jealousy, the refusal to believe in the goodness of God. He knew what was really going on in their minds and their hearts.

[ 9 : 47 ] Jesus knew. But for you and for me, the significance of these verses, the payoff, if you like, comes really in verse 20. Jesus puts his finger on the crux of the matter.

Why does it matter the source of Jesus' power and authority over demons? Well, because if he drives them out by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon them.

Now, this is an unusual phrase, isn't it? The finger of God. And Matthew's account of the same incident, Matthew says the spirit of God, where Luke says the finger of God.

The two phrases are largely interchangeable. There's nothing that needs to worry us here. These are different ways of referring to the reality that it is God who is at work. But that leaves us still asking, well, why does Luke choose this particular metaphor?

Why do we have this phrasing of the finger of God here in Luke's account? Well, this phrase, this term, the finger of God, it appears in a few places in the Old Testament.

[10:53] It's in the creation hymn in Psalm 8. It's there in the writing of the commandments on the tablets of the law that we were thinking about with the boys and girls earlier.

We see the finger of God in a few other places as well. But the most significant time, I think, what's in the background for Luke, the most significant is Exodus chapter 8, verse 19.

The context of that verse, this is the third of the ten plagues that God sent on Egypt. Boys and girls, I wonder if any of you can remember from Karen's talk a couple of weeks ago.

I wonder if you can remember which one is the third plague. Not the first one, not the second one, the third plague. See, Pharaoh's magicians had managed to duplicate the first two plagues. They also turned water into blood. And they also managed to produce more frogs, although the usefulness of them doing so is questionable at best. But now, now faced by their gnats of the third plague, now the magicians are powerless.

[11:57] They can't duplicate this one, and they know it. And so they say to Pharaoh, this is the finger of God. And yet Pharaoh's heart was hard, and he would not listen, just as the Lord had said.

So, I think this phrase is being used here in Luke chapter 11 to remind us of the Exodus. Because remember the Exodus from Egypt, this is absolutely foundational to the identity of God's Old Testament people.

That's who they are. They are the people who God brought out of Egypt. I mean, you know, sons of Abraham and those things going on as well. But this is a foundational event for them, a definitive act of rescue.

This is the time when God redeemed his people from slavery. With his mighty arm, he reached out and grabbed them by his finger at work. And now here he is again.

God is at work once more. The powerful God of the Exodus, who parts seas and brings darkness on the land and sends plagues on livestock and directs the swarms of locusts, that powerful God is at work here.

[13:15] The kingdom of God has come upon them. And if that's true, if the kingdom really has come, if Jesus really does work by the finger of God, if he is not a charlatan, a trickster, if he's not working by Satan's power, but working by the spirit of God, if all of that is true, then you and I need to listen.

We have to take notice, don't we? If the kingdom of God has come, then we cannot afford to sit on the sidelines. Verse 23 makes it very clear.

There isn't a middle ground here. You either are on Jesus's team or you aren't. There is no in between. Whoever is not with me is against me.

Whoever does not gather with me scatters. I happened to see a tweet this week from Donald McSween up in the Isle of Lewis, who was recounting an incident where a pair of hapless tourists encountered his flock of sheep on the move and the tourists ploughed on regardless, scattering the confused sheep to the four winds.

I imagine that it was not malicious on the part of the tourists that they simply didn't know any better. And I'm not sure I would have known better either. But that's the picture that Jesus is using here in verse 23.

[14:35] If you are not actively helping to gather the sheep, then even your presence will simply cause them to scatter. In a not dissimilar way, sometimes I come and stand in the kitchen and sometimes I always manage to stand precisely where Jo needs to be as she gets the dinner on the table.

My presence even there is not neutral, but actively detrimental. The tourists, they were not neutral. They trebled the time it took to get those sheep moved from one field to another.

And when it comes to Jesus's kingdom, none of us is neutral. And in a much more serious way than standing in the wrong place, whether in front of the sink or in the middle of a croft.

Whoever is not with me is against me, says Jesus. There is no neutrality. Okay, we skipped there. We skipped over verses 21 and 22. So let's back up for a moment. And we're moving on here to my second point. In these verses, we have another picture. And this one demonstrates the sufficiency of Jesus' power.

[15:48] Jesus' power is enough. Here, verse 21, this strong man that Jesus is talking about, who's fully armed and guarding his home, that's Satan that he's talking about.

Okay, the strong man in this picture, that's Satan. So when we say the possessions are safe, at first that sounds like a positive thing, doesn't it? But actually it's rather ominous, isn't it?

But along comes a stronger man. Here comes Jesus himself. And when he attacks and overpowers Satan, well, he takes away the armor.

Satan is defanged and Jesus divides up the plunder. Now, folks, make no mistake here. Satan really is powerful.

He truly is a strong man, able to guard and keep his possessions. He really can do horrible things. He and his minions are able to possess human beings.

[ 16 : 48 ] He's described by Paul in Ephesians 2 as the prince of the power of the air. Here he's the prince of demons in these verses. Hebrews 2 tells us he has the power over death.

Satan's power is real. It is serious. And it is significant for you and me. He has armor such that he will not be lightly overthrown by feeble efforts.

And he has weapons of offense too. Let's recognize he has the means to injure you and me. Snares of every kind.

He is cunning. Read Lewis's screw tape letters sometime. Folks, it does us no good to bury our heads in the sand as though he did not exist or he were not powerful.

And maybe the idea of this sort of demonic possession is bizarre or implausible or fanciful to you. It's true. In Britain today, he doesn't seem to operate in the same way as he did in first century Judea.

[ 17 : 56 ] But the fact that he's using different means does not mean he's absent. And our tendency to treat him as a figure of fun doesn't aid us to resist him.

Then secondly, as I said a moment ago, the idea that the possessions are safe. It first perhaps sounds like a positive thing and maybe even a more positive thing.

If I point out that the word here translated safe, that that would in many other contexts be translated as peace. So it's only when you realise who has hold of these possessions that it becomes sinister. And that's true when we come back out of the world of the metaphor that Jesus is using. When we remember that these possessions are the souls of men and women.

It's still true that for many in Satan's grasp, they are at peace, content to remain there under his power.

[ 18 : 56 ] As J.C. Ryle puts it, so long as a man is dead in trespasses and sin, so long his heart is at ease about spiritual things, he has no fear about the future.

He has no anxiety about his soul. He has no dread of falling into hell. All this is a false peace, no doubt. It is a sleep that cannot last and from which there must be one day a dreadful waking.

But there is such a peace beyond question. Thoughtless, stolid, reckless insensibility about eternal things is one of the worst symptoms of the devil reigning over a man's soul.

Maybe that's you. Maybe that's where you are right now. Maybe you're only just starting to have an inkling that there is a problem. But this is the reality.

If you have not been freed by Jesus, then you are under Satan's power. Standing opposed to God. Scattering, not gathering. And if that's you, well, it is time to wake up, to stop being at peace, to see the seriousness of the problem, and to get some help.

[ 20 : 15 ] It's time to stop sitting there in the burning building saying, this is fine. Maybe these verses are a wake-up call for you. But if they are that wake-up call, then they should also be a reassurance.

Because verse 22 here very clearly says that there is hope. Verse 22 says there is someone who is stronger than that strong man.

There is someone who has overcome the prince of demons. Friends, you do not have to remain under Satan's power. However deeply ensnared you feel, however much you may be at peace and comfortable now, you do not have to stay there.

Because Jesus' power is sufficient. Jesus has overcome. But make no mistake, it is Jesus that you need.

And that, I think, is the point of the third section here. We see from verse 24 onwards the necessity of Jesus' power. Again, in these couple of verses, Jesus tells a story.

[ 21 : 24 ] He suggests a possibility. Imagine there is this impure spirit, this demon that is being cast out and he wonders, but he finds nowhere else to go. So he decides to return whence he came.

And because that demon was cast out, well, the house is now lovely. Everything has been cleaned, it has been polished. And so he decides to move back in and to bring all his mates to join him.

Of course he does. You can think of the demon as a squatter in the house, evicted by the rightful owner, who makes everything lovely for new tenants. But in this scenario, no such tenants arrive. And eventually the old squatter rocks up again. Of course he will move back in. With nothing and no one there to keep him away, why wouldn't he?

And he shares the wealth with his friends. Now it seems that Jesus is here contrasting what we could call a kind of minimalist exorcism.

[ 22 : 25 ] Maybe that that's being practiced by the followers that are referred to in verse 19. Contrasting the exorcism of these followers of Jesus' opponents, contrasting that with a true exorcism such as he himself performs.

In the former, nothing replaces the demon when they are driven out. And so the person is empty, ready for the demon to return.

And in the latter, in the true exorcism, while the gift of the Holy Spirit to indwell coincides with the expulsion of the evil spirit. So the spirit goes out, the spirit comes in, the person is safe and sound. Nature abhors a vacuum. And there's a corresponding truth to that in our spiritual lives. That the vacuum left by the removal of evil will soon be filled by something.

Whether we use the language of demonic possession today or not, this is still true. That evil removed will be replaced with something else. One might, perhaps, by great effort, one might eliminate a habit of massive outbursts of unwarranted rage.

[ 23 : 40 ] You could eliminate that habit. But unless something positive is put in place of that habit, then that outward visible rage is only going to be replaced by constant simmering grumpiness, perhaps, by the discontent that poisons a whole life.

Quite possibly even worse than did those original occasional outbursts. Maybe you curb an inclination towards gossip, but you find that instead you develop a growing, building jealousy of what others enjoy and you wish that you had.

The rage and the gossip, they must be excised. As for that matter, the grumpiness and the jealousy. And they must be replaced not with a vacuum, but with something positive.

This is the argument that I think is perhaps more explicit in Galatians chapter 5. Verse 16, Paul writes, I say, walk by the Spirit and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.

Replace walking in the flesh with walking in the Spirit. Verses 19 to 21, he lists a whole host of the acts of the flesh and then says, verse 22, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

[ 25 : 04 ] Against such things there is no law. It is the fruit of the Spirit that expels the prior sinfulness of the flesh and keeps it out, being replaced with something positive.

Now, now, it's probably obvious when rage is replaced by grumpiness, dangerous though that is. What is even more dangerous than that kind of a visible, discernible replacement is a more subtle replacement, whereby open sin is replaced by a pharisaical legalism.

And so, this narrative here in Luke 11, this isn't only a warning for new believers to ensure that they fill their new life with good things in short order as the old things are taken away.

No, folks, this is a warning too for the long-established churchgoer, a warning to consider with what we have replaced things. That ryle, again, is incisive.

[ 26 : 13 ] Many professing Christians, it may be feared, are deceiving themselves. They are not what they once were and so, they flatter themselves that they are what they ought to be.

They're no longer Sabbath-breaking, daring sinners and so, they dream that they are Christians. They see not that they've only changed one kind of devil for another.

They are governed now by a decent, pharisaic devil instead of an audacious, riotous, unclean devil. But the tenant within is the devil still and their last end will be worse than their first.

From such an end may we pray to be delivered. Friends, it is not better to be governed by a devil of legalism than a devil of license.

it is not better to be judgmental of others than it is to live a life of excess and debauchery yourself.

[ 27 : 20 ] There's a profound warning here in verses 24 to 26 of Luke 11. A profound warning. But thankfully the remedy is both simple and clear.

We must not, we cannot afford to fill the void with the first substitute that comes to hand. We cannot fill it with a different species of sin.

No, we must fill the void that is left by the removal of evil. We must fill it with God himself with the Holy Spirit. And wonderfully this warning that that is what we need it comes straight off the back of

verse 13 that promises exactly that remedy.

Do you remember it from a couple of weeks ago? Your Father in Heaven loves to give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him. More than you could imagine he loves to give good gifts to his children to give the Spirit whose fruit is love.

Friends, it is not a case of complicated calculus to figure out how you can possibly bring something in to replace that evil that must leave.

[ 28 : 35 ] it is a gracious promise of God that the Spirit will be given you when you ask him. Let's pray. Lord God, our Heavenly Father, thank you for your gracious promises.

Thank you for the warnings of your word. Thank you for reminding us to take evil seriously, to recognize that there are forces at work in this world that are opposed to you and therefore opposed to us as we seek to follow you.

Lord, help us to depend upon you for strength, not on anything else that we might find that we might think will offer hope. Lord, help us to turn to you as the one where true power is available, as the one who has promised to give us your Holy Spirit each time we come and we ask.

So fill us with your Spirit now, we pray. Amen.