

REDISCOVER JESUS, PART 41: “TWO OPPOSING KINGDOMS”

LUKE 11:14-28

Ps. Eric Yee

Personal Introduction

Hi everyone. If you don't know me, my name is Eric and I'm a pastor at HMCC of Jakarta, and it's my privilege to preach the Word of God to us today.

Sermon Series Introduction

We're currently in Part 41 of our sermon series called "Rediscover Jesus," where we're going through the Gospel of Luke together.

So let's get right into today's sermon: "Two Opposing Kingdoms."

Sermon Introduction

When I was growing up, there was something called the "Pepsi Challenge," where there would be a taste test between Pepsi and Coke. They would get people who were hardcore fans of Coke to do a blind taste between Pepsi and Coke, and then the person would tell them which one they thought tasted better.

And to their surprise, many of the hardcore Coke fans, when they couldn't see the labels of the two drinks, they ended up saying that they liked *Pepsi* better than Coke.

And that's kind of similar to the topic that we'll be looking at today. You could call it a "Kingdom Challenge," where there's a test between the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan. And Jesus is going to get the religious authorities, who *say* they're hardcore followers of God to do a "*logic test*" (so to speak), and they'll surprisingly find out that they seem to like the kingdom of Satan better than the kingdom of God.

But this "Kingdom Challenge" is *not just* for the religious authorities of Jesus' day, but it's for all of us who are hearing the word of God today.

The One Thing

***Choose either to be blessed in the kingdom of God
or oppressed in the kingdom of Satan.***

I know that this seems like an obvious choice when it's stated like this, but in our everyday lives, the choices are rarely presented like this. And *that's* what Jesus wants to address in today's passage because he wants us to see that these are the *only* options and he wants to hold them up side-by-side, so that we would clearly see consciously choose the obvious choice each day.

Scripture Introduction

Turn your Bibles to Luke 11:14-28.

Just want to give a bit of context before jumping into today's passage.

Throughout Jesus' ministry, he preached about "the good news of the *kingdom* of God" (Luke 4:43). And earlier in this chapter, in the Lord's Prayer, he taught his disciples, as children of God, to approach their heavenly Father and pray, "Your *kingdom* come."

But in today's passage, Jesus will make it very clear that *not everyone* experiences the *blessedness* of belonging to the kingdom of God. Rather, there is an *opposing* kingdom with an *opposing prince* who cannot rest unless he is *oppressing* all those in his kingdom. And Jesus *warns* all who hear to carefully *choose* which kingdom they will belong to.

So that's where we are and what we'll be looking at more closely in today's passage.

Scripture Reading

Let's read Luke 11:14-28.

¹⁴ Now he was casting out a demon that was mute. When the demon had gone out, the mute man spoke, and the people marveled. ¹⁵ But some of them said, "He casts out demons by Beelzebul, the prince of demons," ¹⁶ while others, to test him, kept seeking from him a sign from heaven. ¹⁷ But he, knowing their thoughts, said to them, "Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and a divided household falls. ¹⁸ And if Satan also is divided against himself, how will his kingdom stand? 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. ²¹ When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own palace, his goods are safe; ²² but when one stronger than he attacks him and overcomes him, he takes away his armor in which he trusted and divides his spoil. ²³ Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters.

²⁴ "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.' ²⁵ And when it comes, it finds the house swept and put in order. ²⁶ 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."

²⁷ 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!" ²⁸ But he said, "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it!"

This is God's Word.

Overview

We'll look at this passage in two parts.

- I. Choosing between two opposing kingdoms (vv. 14-23)
- II. Consequences of belonging to each kingdom (vv. 24-28)

I. Choosing between two opposing kingdoms (vv. 14-23)

A. Jesus and Satan are rulers of two opposing kingdoms (vv. 14-20)

Verse 14 say this:

¹⁴ Now he was casting out a demon that was mute. When the demon had gone out, the mute man spoke, and the people marveled.

Here, we find Jesus casting out a demon from a man who was mute. Not much description is given here about *how* Jesus did it, but all throughout the Gospel accounts, all Jesus seems to do each time is simply *rebuke* the demon, and they listen and come out.

So in this instance, here is this man that has been presumably mute for a long time. Everyone in the town knows who he is. And all of a sudden, Jesus comes by and rebukes the demon, and the man is speaking again. It's so anticlimactic, but that was just the point!

Nobody could cast out demons like Jesus could. And this was no magic trick where Jesus “randomly” picked someone from the audience. No, they *knew* this man for many years. He was not a fake. So nobody could deny that a great miracle had occurred. And so, “the people marveled.” They were amazed—at least *many* of them were... but not *all*.

Verses 15-16 say this:

¹⁵ But some of them said, “He casts out demons by Beelzebul, the prince of demons,” ¹⁶ while others, to test him, kept seeking from him a sign from heaven.

After seeing this great miracle, “some of them”—and from the other Gospel accounts, we know that these were the Pharisees (Matt. 12:24) and scribes (Mark 3:22), or the religious authorities of the time—they accuse Jesus of casting out demons “by Beelzebul, the prince of demons.”

Beelzebul was a name attributed to Satan, which becomes clear later.

So essentially, the religious authorities were saying that Jesus is an agent of Satan, and it's only by the power of Satan—“the prince of demons”—that he is able to cast out demons so effectively.

This was slander of the worst kind. This was calling good “evil,” calling light “darkness,” calling the Son of God “the son of Satan.”

Still, there were others that didn't take up the mantle of slander, but they opted for something not much better: cynicism.

This was *not* honest skepticism, but this was insatiable cynicism.

They weren't satisfied with the miracle that they *just* witnessed right in front of their eyes, but they wanted to “test” Jesus further, and so they “kept seeking from him a sign from heaven.”

Notice that they “*kept* seeking” a sign, even when a sign was right in front of them.

Jesus will address the cynics more in the passage that we'll look at *next* week (Luke 11:29-32), but *here*, he begins to address the slanderous accusations of the religious authorities—that he's somehow casting out demons by the prince of demons.

So how does Jesus respond to them?

Verse 17 says this:

¹⁷ But he, knowing their thoughts, said to them, “Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and a divided household falls.

Apparently, the slanderous comments were *not* made public to Jesus, but were being said in private among themselves. But Jesus, “knowing their thoughts,” makes their private gossip *public*.

And he shows them how *illogical* their slanderous accusations against him really are.

He first gives a general principle that everyone would agree with.

Usually, a kingdom fights against *another* kingdom, but if a kingdom fights against *itself*, it will eventually destroy itself.

But if the kingdom language is still too *conceptual* to grasp, Jesus brings it home—*literally*—in talking about a “household” or “family.” Unfortunately, all too often, families are ruined by divisiveness.

Perhaps siblings go to war over control of a family business or an inheritance when the patriarch or matriarch has passed away.

Or perhaps the husband and wife have locked themselves in a pattern of undermining and cutting each other down rather than encouraging and supporting one another. And if that's the case, then it doesn't matter how much the parents love their children; at that point, the whole family is *broken*.

Whether its siblings or parents that go to war against each other, the result is the same: "a divided household falls." And sadly, I'm sure we all have either experienced or witnessed that happen to families.

Now what does this general principle have to do with the slanderous accusations against Jesus?

Verse 18 says this:

¹⁸ And if Satan also is divided against himself, how will his kingdom stand? For you say that I cast out demons by Beelzebul.

This is a rhetorical question because based on the general principle, the answer is obvious. If Satan is divided against himself—or against his own kingdom—his kingdom will *not* stand. There's *no way* that Jesus is casting out demons by the power of Satan; otherwise, Satan would effectively be destroying his own kingdom.

Jesus then takes their questionable logic one step further.

Verse 19 says this:

¹⁹ And if I cast out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they will be your judges.

In the verses 17-18, Jesus exposed their *flawed* logic. But *even if* he were to accept their flawed logic, Jesus is now exposing their *inconsistent* logic.

Jesus was renowned for how effortlessly and effectively he cast out demons, but he was *not* the *only* one to cast out demons. Of course, there were Jesus' disciples that he sent out with *his* authority to cast out demons in *his* name. But there were also Jewish exorcists ("their sons") who would attempt to cast out demons as well (cf. Acts 19:13).

So if Jesus is casting out demons by the power of Satan, by the *same* logic, why aren't they accusing their *own* Jewish exorcists for casting out demons by the power of Satan as well?

Obviously, none of the Jewish religious authorities would say that their *own* Jewish exorcists are doing so by the power of Satan, but rather by the power of God. But if that's the case, then why can't they acknowledge that Jesus, who is doing the *same* thing—but much more effortlessly and effectively—is *also* doing so by the power of God? It's inconsistent.

But let's think for a moment: *why* are they giving Jesus such a hard time? It's because Jesus is not *just* an exorcist. His exorcisms validate his *teaching*, and it's his *teaching* that is most threatening to the religious authorities.

- Jesus taught that *he* has the authority to forgive sins (Luke 5:24).
- Jesus taught that *he* is the Lord of the Sabbath (Luke 6:5) and that it's lawful to do good on the Sabbath (Luke 6:9-10).
- Jesus taught his disciples to call God "Father" (Luke 11:2).
- And to his apostles, he taught that *he* is the Christ, and that he would be delivered over to the religious authorities to be killed and on the third day be raised (Luke 9:21-22, 44).

In essence, Jesus put *himself* at the center of his teaching and said things about himself that were *not* proper for any man to say unless he was God himself.

And on top of that, Jesus will later explicitly say that the Pharisees are “full of greed and wickedness” and are “fools” (Luke 11:39-40), and he will warn his disciples against the hypocrisy of the Pharisees (Luke 12:1).

So as you can imagine, the Pharisees and scribes were *not* very fond of what Jesus taught, and so here, they are trying to invalidate his *exorcisms* so as to invalidate his *teaching*.

But by saying, “Therefore *they* will be your judges,” Jesus basically tells them to go ask their Jewish exorcists by *whom* they cast out demons.

Jesus is quite sure that they will attest that it is only by the power of God that these demons can be cast out. Why? Because Jesus has already established that Satan will *not* cast out his own demons. Therefore, if anyone is casting out demons, it can only be by the power of God. And so, “their sons” will validate Jesus’ exorcism ministry, and by implication, they will validate his teaching.

Verse 20 then says this:

²⁰ But if it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.

So Jesus has exposed their *flawed* and *inconsistent* logic, but here, he now begins to give his *own* logic.

If Jesus is *not* casting out demons by the power of Satan, then the only rightful conclusion is that he is doing so by the power—or “finger”—of God (cf. Matt. 12:28).

And if Jesus is casting out demons by the “finger” of God, then the kingdom of God has come.

So far, Jesus has only referred to the kingdom of Satan, but here, he introduces a *rival* kingdom—the kingdom of God.

In essence, Jesus is saying, “I am *not* part of the kingdom of Satan as you have been falsely saying, but I am part of the kingdom of God.”

But there’s something *more* that Jesus is also saying. He’s saying that the *kingdom* of God has come because the *King* has arrived.

At the start of his ministry, Jesus taught that *he* is the Spirit-empowered servant from the prophet Isaiah who has come to bring about the future, glorious kingdom of God, where God will right every wrong and establish a new community that will live out true godliness (Luke 4:16-21).

And one of the *signs* that would accompany the proclamation of the “good news” of the kingdom of God was the “set[ting] at liberty those who are oppressed” (Luke 4:18).

So as Jesus is casting out demons—or *freeing* those who are oppressed—in *unprecedented* ways, it’s clear evidence that the kingdom of God has come because *he*—the Messiah King—has arrived.

The kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan are two opposing kingdoms.

It doesn’t make sense for *Satan* to cast out his own demons. But if Jesus is the King of the rival kingdom of God, then it *does* make sense for Jesus to cast out demons—or to set at liberty those who are oppressed by Satan’s demonic forces.

But are Jesus and his kingdom on *equal* ground as Satan and his kingdom? Are they two *equal* superpowers that are forever fighting against each other with no clear victor? Absolutely not!

By just the “finger” (not even the *arm* or the *hand*) of God, Jesus effortlessly and effectively casts out demons with just a rebuke. He doesn’t even *pray*; he just says the *word* and the demons come out (Luke 4:36).

And the demons recognize *who* Jesus is when they see him—and they tremble and shudder in fear (cf. James 2:19). They call him, “the Holy One of God” (Luke 4:34) and “Son of the Most High God,” and they *beg* Jesus *not* to torment them (Luke 8:28).

Clearly, Satan and his kingdom are no match for Jesus and his kingdom.

And Jesus makes this clear in what he says next.

B. Jesus is stronger than and overcomes Satan (vv. 21-23)

Verses 21-22 say this:

²¹ When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own palace, his goods are safe; ²² but when one stronger than he attacks him and overcomes him, he takes away his armor in which he trusted and divides his spoil.

Here, Satan, the prince of demons, is pictured as the “strong man.” And contrary to what the Pharisees and scribes are saying, Satan is fully armed and ready to *guard* his palace; he doesn’t *attack* his own kingdom.

But Jesus, the King of the kingdom of God, is pictured as the “*stronger one*,” who attacks Satan and overcomes him. He strips him of his armor; or as the book of Colossians says, “He *disarmed* the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them” (Col. 2:15).

And then he “divides his spoil,” meaning that all the goods that Satan was trying to guard and keep safe for himself, Jesus plunders and gives them away as gifts.

In context, what are those goods? They’re *people*. It’s all those whom Satan has kept oppressed in his kingdom, whether through possession, deception, accusation, or temptation. It’s all those who, whether knowingly or unknowingly, belong to the kingdom of Satan.

But Ephesians 4 pictures Jesus as the conquering and victorious King who gives gifts (or the spoil) to his people—and what are those gifts? They’re *people*. “He gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ” (Eph. 4:11-12).

By the mere “finger” of God, Jesus, the “stronger one,” attacks and overcomes Satan and his kingdom, he plunders him and sets free those who are oppressed in his kingdom, and then he repurposes them and gives them as gifts to build up his church.

Contrary to what the religious authorities were saying, Jesus is *not* aligned with Satan, but he attacks, overcomes, and plunders him.

And in light of these two opposing kingdoms, Jesus confronts all the hearers with a hard truth.

Verse 23 says this:

²³ Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters.

Here, Jesus uses mutually exclusive language—and this is the whole point of what Jesus has been saying so far. You’re either on Team Jesus and in his kingdom, or you are on Team Satan and in his kingdom. There is no neutrality when it comes to kingdom allegiance.

And Jesus gives two simple metaphors: fighting and shepherding. You’re either fighting *with* Jesus, or you are fighting *against* Jesus. You are either *gathering* the flock with Jesus (Mark 14:28; John 10:11), or you’re *scattering* the flock with Satan (Mark 14:27; John 10:12).

You’re either acting like Jesus and joining him in bringing his people together, or you’re acting like Satan and his demonic forces where you’re driving people away from Jesus.

The 72 disciples that Jesus sent out were obviously on Team Jesus. They preached the good news of the kingdom of God, healed the sick, and cast out demons; and Jesus said that, as they participated in *his* ministry, he “saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven” (Luke 10:18). They were joining *Jesus* in toppling the kingdom of Satan and gathering people into the kingdom of God.

But the religious authorities were unknowingly on Team Satan. They were slandering Jesus, and they were discrediting his miracles and teaching. They were joining *Satan* in opposing the kingdom of God and scattering people away from the kingdom of God.

You’re either on Team Jesus and in his kingdom, or by default, you’re on Team Satan and in his kingdom. That may sound shocking, but this is all over Scripture.

The Bible says that we were once dead in our sins and we once “followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air [that is, Satan]” (Eph. 2:2 NIV). But when we put our faith in Jesus, God “rescued us from the kingdom of darkness and *transferred* us into the Kingdom of his dear Son, who purchased our freedom and forgave our sins” (Col. 1:13-14 NLT).

So to enter the kingdom of God is to *transfer* kingdoms. We’re always a citizen of *some* kingdom—either the kingdom of God or the kingdom of Satan. But none of us are citizenship-less or kingdom-less. We all belong to one or the other, and we all serve one or the other.

Now, the reason this is so hard for us to believe and accept is because Satan is “the father of lies” (John 8:44) and “the deceiver of the whole world” (Rev. 12:9), but he “disguises himself as an angel of light” (2 Cor. 11:14).

Satan does not want anyone to be aware of the reality that they’re in *his* kingdom. Rather, he wants them to think that neutrality and indifference to Jesus are viable options. He wants them to think that they’re in the kingdom of God and even serving God, all the while, they’re really serving the purposes of the kingdom of Satan.

Is that not what the Pharisees and scribes were blinded by? They were the religious authorities! And yet, they’re slandering the Son of God and they end up plotting his arrest and crucifixion through bribes, false witnesses, and all kinds of manipulation.

When we think about those in the kingdom of Satan, we ought not to think of merely those who are in a Satanic cult or who are demon possessed. We ought not to think of merely those who are given over to drunkenness, sexual immorality, and scandalous behavior. Rather, we *also* ought to think of those who are outwardly and obviously religious or moral—they seem to live good lives and do good works—*yet* they remain neutral or indifferent about Jesus, or even those in the church who are bent on stirring up divisiveness and scattering people away from Jesus.

Jesus says, “Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters.” There are two opposing kingdoms and if we’re not actively choosing to be part of the kingdom of God through faith in Christ, then by default, we are part of the kingdom of Satan.

And so, Jesus lays out the reality that we live in and the choice that lies before us: which kingdom will you choose to belong to?

<pause

So first, choosing between two opposing kingdoms; and second...

II. Consequences of belonging to each kingdom (vv. 24-28)

A. Those in the kingdom of Satan are oppressed (vv. 24-26)

Verses 24-26 says this:

²⁴ “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.’ ²⁵ And when it comes, it finds the house swept and put in order. ²⁶ 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.”

Here, Jesus presents a man, presumably the previously mute man, who is liberated of an “unclean spirit” (or demon), but not necessarily *permanently* (cf. Mark 9:25). The demon roams “waterless places” (or deserts), which is where demons were popularly understood to inhabit (cf. Luke 8:29),¹ but it cannot find rest.

So even though it had been cast out, it returns and still refers to the person as “my house.”

And when it comes back, the demon finds the house cleaned up, but most importantly, it’s *empty*. There is no “strong man” or “stronger one” residing in the house, so the demon goes and gets seven other “more evil” spirits to enter and “dwell” in that person.

To “dwell” (*katoikei*) literally means to “settle down” or “live permanently,”² so basically, they have no intention of leaving. And the conclusion is that “the last state of that person is worse than the first.”

It would have been better to be possessed by *one* demon than to be possessed by *eight* demons. But truth be told, it’s not preferable to be possessed by *any* demon, but it’s better to have *no* demons.

So what is Jesus’ point in saying all this?

Jesus is *not just* giving a specific lesson to any person who had previously been possessed by a demon. Rather, Jesus is using demon possession as an illustration for a broader principle of what it’s like to belong in the kingdom of Satan, and this pertains to *all* the hearers whom he *just* challenged about making a choice between belonging in the kingdom of Satan or the kingdom of God.

We notice a few principles here.

The first principle is that Satan and his demonic forces cannot rest, but they’re bent on oppressing people.

The sole purpose of demon-possession was to oppress and torment the person. But demons don’t necessarily need to *possess* someone in order to *oppress* and torment them.

Aside from possession, their normal tactics of oppression are deceit, accusation, and temptation. An easy way to remember them are D-A-T: “*Dat’s* the devil” (Gerry Breshears).

- In terms of deceit, Satan is “the father of lies” and “the deceiver of the whole world.”
- In terms of accusation, Satan literally means “accuser.”
- In term of temptation, Satan has tempted people to sin since Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden.

And he switches so quickly. He’ll tempt you to sin, and as soon as you do, he’ll turn around and accuse you of guilt and condemnation and try to crush you in hopeless despair. He’ll say, “How can God love you now? Don’t think that God will keep on forgiving you. He’s growing tired of you. There’s no hope for you.” He berates you with accusations of how unworthy and how unloved you are, which of course is a half-truth, which is the most insidious of lies. Yes, we are indeed unworthy sinners, but it’s completely false that we are not loved. No, “God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8). Satan doesn’t often start by telling us complete lies to start, but he wins us over with half-truths, and once we believe those, we become easy prey to believe complete lies.

¹ Walter L. Liefeld and David W. Pao, *Luke*, rev. ed., EBC (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2009).

² Leon L. Morris, *Luke*, TNTC (Nottingham, England: IVP, 2008).

Satan and his demonic forces cannot and will not rest. They are constantly trying to oppress people in deception, accusation, and temptation. “*Dat’s* the devil,” and we need to be aware of his tactics of oppression.

The second principle is that we cannot remain empty (or neutral), but we’re all filled or influenced by something.

A believer in Jesus Christ is *indwelled* by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit has made *permanent* residence in the believer and nothing can drive him out. He has the “stronger one” in him that cannot be overcome, so a believer *cannot* be possessed by an evil spirit.

Now, with that being said, that doesn’t mean a believer cannot be *oppressed* by evil spirits. Remember, possession is *not* the *only* way to oppress someone.

There is a spiritual battle going on inside every believer. We have the Holy Spirit indwelling us and giving us new desires to please the Lord. But we still have our sinful nature inside us that continues to have fleshly desires for sin and a world around us that is constantly normalizing and tempting us to sin—and Satan and his demonic forces constantly leverage those things against us.

So every day, the believer is faced with the question: what influence will I submit to?

Will I be filled by the influences of demonic forces that constantly appeal to my sinful flesh and to the sinful world? Or will I be filled by the influences of the Holy Spirit that constantly appeal to the love and worthiness of Christ and the eternal satisfaction I have in him?

Everything we do is a surrendering to one of those influences. We are not empty houses, living in a vacuum of *no* influences, but either the Holy Spirit is filling and leading us, or Satan and his demonic forces are filling and leading us.

If there is no spiritual battle going on inside of you, but you find yourself constantly surrendering to your sinful flesh and the sinful world with less and less of a fight, then that should be very alarming. That is *not* a sign of a believer who has the Holy Spirit indwelling them. Rather, that is a sign that you’ve been more and more filled and influenced by demonic forces—that you’ve played right into their schemes of deception, accusation, and temptation.

We cannot remain empty (or neutral), but we’re all filled or influenced by something.

The third principle is that belonging to the kingdom of Satan gets worse and worse.

That’s obvious when the tactic he uses is *accusation*, which leads to worse and worse despair. Constant discouragement or hopeless despair is a bottomless pit. And Satan loves to accuse us deeper and deeper into that pit.

But it becomes less obvious that belonging to the kingdom of Satan gets worse and worse when he uses other more subtle tactics like *deceit* and *temptation*. In fact, we think that things are getting better and better as we belong to his kingdom—at least for a time.

Imagine a child in a doctor’s office getting his tetanus shot or some other vaccine against some debilitating or fatal disease. As soon as he sees the needle, he starts freaking out and screaming and squirming. I’ve needed to hold my child down during those times. But imagine that there’s another man in the room whispering to my child: “See, your dad doesn’t love you. He’s putting you through so much pain. If I were your dad, I’d let you go right away.” And let’s say, my child has the choice of who to follow in that moment. If he’s deceived by the other man and chooses *him* over me, he’ll think things got better... until he one day steps on a rusty nail and dies of tetanus.

Remember, Satan is bent on oppressing people. He “disguises himself as an angel of light” (2 Cor. 11:14), but he comes to steal, kill, and destroy (John 10:10). He is *not* on your side.

He will gladly give you what you want—success, sex, money, comfort, power, prestige, possessions, relationships—if he knows it will destroy you in the end. He presents you with the *bait*, but he hides the *hook* (Thomas Brooks). And as soon as you're hooked, he pulls on that fishing line to drag you away.

Life does not get better and better in the kingdom of Satan, but sooner or later, it gets worse and worse until the last state is *not merely* demon possession but eternal condemnation for our sins.

Those in the kingdom of Satan are oppressed, but...

B. Those in the kingdom of God are blessed (vv. 27-28)

Verses 27 says this:

²⁷ 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!"

Here, after witnessing Jesus cast out a demon and now hearing him expose the flawed and inconsistent logic of the religious authorities, and explaining the nature of two opposing kingdoms, there's a woman in the crowd—presumably one who marveled at him earlier—that spontaneously blurts out this blessing upon Jesus' mother, Mary.

It may seem strange to bless Jesus' *mother* at this point, but this was really a blessing for both Jesus' mother *and* Jesus. It was common at the time to praise someone by praising the parents, so it would have sounded something more like: "What an amazing man you are! Your mother must be so blessed to call you her son" (cf. Prov. 23:24–25).³

Verse 28 then says this:

²⁸ But he said, "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it!"

It's true that Mary is blessed, but it's *not primarily* because she was his mother. It's *primarily* because she heard the word of God and kept it (Luke 1:38). In other words, you don't have to be the mother of Jesus to be blessed, but blessing is available to all who hear the word of God and keep it.

The word "keep" (*phyllassō*) is a strong verb for "obey."

So how is hearing the word of God and keeping it a blessing? It sounds more like a command, but in Scripture, God's commands and his blessings are all intertwined.

In Genesis 1, the very first words that God spoke to Adam and Eve were a blessing *and* a command: "And God blessed them. And God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply and full the earth and subdue it'" (Gen. 1:28).

God blessed them with a command because the blessed life is living in obedience to God. His commands are blessings to us because they direct us how to live in accordance with who he made us to be.

If a car is supposed to run on gasoline, but I pour water into the fuel tank, it's not going to move. If fish are supposed to swim in water, but I put it on land, it's going to die. And if human beings, who are created by God, are supposed to obey God, but we choose to go our own way, we will find our way *not* to the blessed life but to oppression and ultimately eternal death.

Hearing God's Word is a blessing because it informs us how to live the blessed life that God designed for us to live in his kingdom. Satan lied to Adam and Eve, deceiving them into thinking the obedience to God was to hold them back from experiencing true blessedness, but the truth is that blessing is found in obedience to God's word—to live the abundant and eternal life that God would have for us.

³ Mikeal C. Parsons, *Luke*, PCNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2015), 192.

That doesn't mean that we are saved by our works. Nobody enters the kingdom of God by our own works. When Jesus began his public ministry, he proclaimed the gospel (or good news) of God, saying "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel" (Mark 1:14-15).

The gospel is that God created us in love and blessing, and we were designed to live the blessed life in obedience to his Word. But we have all chosen to be deceived into going our own way, disobeying God's Word and finding ourselves oppressed and deserving of his wrath for our sin. But God, in love, came as the person of Jesus Christ to live in perfect obedience to God's Word and to die in our place for all our disobedience to God's Word, so that now, whoever repents of their sin and believes in Jesus as their Lord and Savior can be saved and become citizens of the kingdom of God.

Nobody is saved by their own works but only by the perfect work of Jesus Christ in our place. But if we believe in the gospel, we will live in obedience to God's Word and experience the blessed life that he designed for us to live.

And that blessed life gets better and better, so as the last state is far greater than the first.

Now, what do we mean by "blessed"? How are those in the kingdom of God "blessed"?

For myself, I became a follower of Christ when I was in university. I grew up going to church, but I left the church when I was in high school.

And throughout high school, I did well in school, but I drank and partied a lot, and that's what I continued doing as I entered university. I lived for myself, and I would say that my happiest moments were when I had a cold beer in my hands.

I knew I was a sinner, but I didn't think it was that big of a deal; after all, everyone is a sinner.

But through the persistent invitations of my roommates, I eventually joined them in different church gatherings. And through reading, hearing, discussing, and seeing the Word of God lived out in the life of the church community, one night, I was in my bedroom, and everything started to come together.

I felt a wave of guilt over my sin, but I also felt a wave of relief as I repented of my sin and put my faith in Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior. And I began to realize that, if God's Word is true and the good news of Jesus Christ that it testifies to is true, then there's no way that I can believe this and *not* have my life change. This should *transform* my whole life.

And by the grace of God, that's exactly what happened and is still happening in my life.

When I think about it *now*, it's so sad to hear myself say that the happiest moments of my life before then was having a cold beer in my hand.

If *that* was my most joyous time, how little and superficial was my joy!

At the time, it was all the joy I knew, but after having experienced the joy of my salvation and the joy of the Lord, nothing has ever come close.

- In Christ, no matter what I *do* or *don't* do, I know that I am known, loved, forgiven, and accepted—that my heavenly Father has adopted me as his child by the precious blood of Christ and nobody can ever snatch me out of his hands.
- I know that I am not a meaningless accident, but I was created to know God and to make him known—to glorify him and enjoy him forever.
- I know that the sufferings of this life do not compare to the eternal weight of glory that I have in Christ—that no matter what tribulations come, I can take heart that Christ has overcome the world. Because I am united to him by faith, my end will not be suffering and death, but it will be resurrection and glory.

How can I even begin to describe such blessing? It's infinitely more solid and permanent than the joy of a cold beer, the joy of a gold medal, the joy of a prestigious job, the joy of wealth and possessions, the joy of a spouse or child.

It can weather the worst storms of this life. Even at great personal loss, the Christian can say, “It is well with my soul” and “Blessed be the name of the LORD” (Job 1:21).

But that doesn’t mean that I don’t struggle; I do. I’m prone to be anxious and troubled about many things. I’ve been deceived into thinking that my identity is found in my performance. I’ve had the passing thought before that the people I love would be better off if I weren’t alive. I’ve had very low lows before.

But at the same time, I have tasted and seen that the Lord is good. I know what it’s like to have mercy and goodness follow me all the days of my life. Jesus, my Shepherd, has comforted me with his rod and staff, and led me safely through the valley of the shadow of death (Ps. 23).

And if you’re a Christian, then in any and every circumstance, you have the unshakeable blessing of an intimate relationship with our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ (cf. Phil 4:11-13).

And so, for all who are hearing the word of God right now, how will you respond?

Will you choose to be blessed in the kingdom of God or oppressed in the kingdom of Satan?

If you’re not a believer in Jesus Christ, I urge you to respond to his loving invitation to receive him as your King, to be filled with the Holy Spirit, and to know the love of our heavenly Father. Repent of your sins and trust him alone as your Lord and Savior.

And if you’re *already* a believer in Jesus Christ, we should humbly acknowledge that, in and of ourselves, we would easily be overcome by Satan and his demonic forces. But because “he who is in [us] is greater than he who is in the world” (1 John 4:4), we can “resist the devil, and he will flee from [us]” (James 4:7). We have the “stronger one” in us, who not only guards us through faith (1 Pet. 1:5), but also helps us to hold fast to Christ and every spiritual blessing that we have in him (Eph. 1:3).

And so, though Satan would like to *blur* the choices for us in our everyday, may we hold up these two opposing kingdoms side-by-side as the *only* options, so that we would clearly see and consciously *choose* the obvious choice each day—that it is far better to be blessed in the kingdom of God than to be oppressed in the kingdom of Satan.

Life Application

They’re just a few questions for us to reflect on in light of this passage.

1. Would you say that you’re neutral/indifferent towards Jesus, or that he’s the matchless King of your life?

If you’re not sure, what do you think others around you would say?

2. How might Satan be deceiving, accusing, and/or tempting you right now? What bait is he using to hide his hook?

3. What are the blessings in Christ that you can remember and hold fast to in your everyday?

The One Thing

***Choose either to be blessed in the kingdom of God
or oppressed in the kingdom of Satan.***

Conclusion

If you’re able, can we all stand as we respond to God’s Word together?