

Title: Damning Unbelief
Text: Luke 11.14-23
Theme: The irrationality of sin
Series: Luke
Prop Stmt: Rejecting the authority and reign of Christ is lunacy.

The Lincoln Memorial in Washington D.C., the USS Arizona Memorial at Pearl Harbor, the Holocaust Museum, the Flight 93 National Memorial, Gettysburg, Vietnam Memorial, the Holodomor Museum in Kiev, Ukraine, the Killing Fields Memorial in Cambodia are all just a sample of sites dedicated to remembering and honoring tragedy, loss, heroism and suffering. These sites feel sacred and when you visit them, you do so quietly and somberly. That is the sense of this text. Luke describes a scene that is tragic. It is almost unbelievably tragic. The event itself is difficult to read and heavy to process, but the shockwaves from this reverberate to this day.

Read Text:

There are three different kinds of people in this account. 1) There is the man who was unable to talk. In his case, his physical limitation was the direct result of a terrible spiritual condition. He was under the influence of a demon. He was trapped and after Christ cast the demon out of him, he was able to speak. The mute man, was no longer the mute man. He was now, the man who used to be mute. He was a changed man. His life was completely changed by Christ and the change was evident on two levels. The evil was gone and the physical change was obvious. 2) Many of the people who witnessed this marveled at what had happened. They were amazed by Christ and impressed by his authority. We see this reaction by the crowds who witness miracles that Christ performs. But it does not mean that they are believers.

But the reason why this text is such a tragedy is because of the third group. This third group is defiant against Christ and they dominate the text. The first two groups are mentioned in v.14, but the rest of the text focuses on the damning unbelief of this group, whom Matthew identifies as the Pharisees. If you are familiar with the life of Christ, you are probably not a fan of the Pharisees. But we need to tread very carefully. We probably have way more in common with the Pharisees than what we want to admit.

Typically, I would wait until the end of a sermon like this and ask you to try to determine which of the 3 types of people you identify with the most. This morning, however, I want to press on all of us, our tendency to be Pharisees so that we take to heart the weight of this text and let the tip of the spear of its message go into our hearts. Beloved, there is an eternity's size gap between the demon-possessed man and the self-righteous Pharisees. At the end of this account, the demon-possessed man who appeared to have all of the problems was set free and his life was changed by Christ. But the self-righteous Pharisees were in bondage and I suspect that for many of them this was the moment when the cement of unbelief hardened around their hearts and they confirmed their judgment. Here is the difference. The one had a need and knew it. The other had a need but refused to admit it. The one admitted his despair,

the other pretended to be the judge. The one knew his life was all wrong; the other refused to admit that he could be wrong. What do you think describes you? Are you willing to consider the possibility that you don't have it all together and you really need God? In fact, are you willing to admit the reality that you don't have it all together and you really need God? Or, are the arms of your mind crossed, and you look at Jesus, his Word and his people with some distance, even skepticism? If you are like that, it is so difficult for you to see what God clearly knows and that is, this text is for you. It is all about you. It is also helpful to know that basically from this point on in Luke's gospel, the hostility between the Pharisees and Christ breaks out into the open. The Pharisees are declaring war on Jesus. Why? Why the refusal to believe what is so obvious? Some of you need to face that.

I've structured this sermon on the weight of the text. There are 3 descriptions of the rejectors and 2 related take-aways. 5 points in all. Description #1 is v.15. There were some who were acting smug.

1. **Acting smug** (unimpressed) (15)

It is undeniable that a significant miracle had just taken place. A man who could not talk was now talking. A man who had been demon possessed was now set free. The text does not say this, but I am guessing that this man is now able to describe what his life was like before he met Jesus and what he is like now. But, "some of them" are not buying it. They cannot deny the miracle, but they refuse to give it the credit and glory that it is due.

Let's say that you are a diehard cheese-head (Green Bay Packers fan). You hate the Lions. And let's say that one of Detroit's wide receivers makes a spectacular catch that becomes an instant highlight classic and wins the game for the Lions over the Packers. The people you are watching the game with are screaming, "Did you see that? That was amazing! Oh my goodness!" And what do you say? You scoff, "He's on steroids. He's not that good." You refuse to admit you are wrong. Or let's say that you are on medical school and one of your colleagues always seems to score just a little higher than you, all the time. It just drives you crazy. The other students fawn over him or her, and it just grates on you. 20 years later, this fellow student went on to develop a rather amazing technique for dealing with stroke patients that reduces the side effects by 60%. If you learn this technique, you will be able to help your patients significantly, but that means that you have to attend the seminar that your former fellow student is leading. Why wouldn't you go? What possible reason could you give to justify your attitude of being unimpressed?

In this case, they responded to the obvious miracle of Jesus by claiming, "He casts out demons by Beelzebul, the prince of demons." Many in the crowd reacted in amazement, but before the idea that Jesus could be the Christ had a chance to be considered by them, in comes the truth-killers. And notice, they do not ask questions in order to learn. They issue a decree. This is not what it appears to be. This man is evil. He is only doing good by the power of evil. They hate Jesus so much that in spite of his power and compassion they want to destroy him.

Beelzebul means “master of the house.” It was a title used to refer to Satan and Jesus acknowledges this in his response. But even in their response they are acknowledging that the man who had been demonically controlled was now set free and they are admitting that Jesus set him free. But how? They can’t argue what is seen, so they have to accuse what is unseen. They are not done. They act like they are in charge of him by acting superior (v.16).

2. **Acting superior** (in charge) (16)

Now they are telling Jesus to show another sign as if what he just did was not enough. The truth is, nothing that Jesus will do will ever be enough because they refuse to believe what is right before their eyes. They think that Jesus has to prove something to them. They think that they get to sit in judgment of Jesus and grade his efforts and what is worse, make judgments about the source of his power. They are the inmates who think they are in charge of the asylum. This is so wrong on so many levels.

Here is a foundational truth for all of life. God is Creator, we are creation. Jesus is King and Ruler, we are the ones who are ruled. We answer to him. We are under his authority. We do not make the rules. If you fail to understand that and live according to that, you will be banging your breakable head against the unbreakable concrete of God’s reality. Your refusal to believe God, does not change God. Think about this. Can you imagine seeing this man who was so demonically oppressed that he lost the ability to communicate? His life was pathetic and scary. You are looking at what can actually happen to someone. But now, Jesus confronts the demon and Jesus wins. The power of evil over this man is broken. This man is set free before your eyes. His life is at peace. His anguished and tormented body is now whole. And he talks. This was a public miracle. This was not a rumor, this was public. This was good. This was life. This was wholeness. This man who may have terrified his family is now able to go home and have dinner with them. This is an incredible scene. There is no way that the Pharisees could pretend that this did not happen. This man was not putting on an act.

This miracle is a picture of the life and ministry of Christ. Christ came to us and he came for us. We were trapped in our sin, both bondage to its rule and bondage to its condemnation. We could get release. Jesus came and by offering up his sinless life as the full and final payment for our sin, he paid the wages of sin with himself. His death broke the power of death. Every person who trusts in Christ is set free from sin’s penalty and has the power to live a holy life. This man who was a terror to others is now in this moment given life and should be a cause for rejoicing. But Luke does not focus on this man. In fact, he is not even named. Why? Because the response to this event is wrong and so evil that it defies reasonable logic to explain it.

So, get this. They just witnessed one of the most personal and powerful miracles of Christ that releases a man from the darkness of soul and alienation from others and they accuse Jesus of doing this by the power of Satan. Jesus is in league with Satan! How perverted must you be to think that? How lost, blind, twisted and desperate must you be to look at what has just happened in front of you and say that? How much evil must there be in you to come to such a

conclusion? Seriously, did they really believe that? There is more hope for a demon-possessed man than for a self-righteous one.

3. **Making no sense** (17-22)

Look at how v.17 begins. They accuse him of knowing what the secret to his power is, when in reality he knows their very thoughts. Jesus states a basic rule of life: No city or house that is divided against itself will stand. I tell couples all the time that Satan's main objective is to turn them against each other. Your spouse is not the enemy. Satan is. But what is true about a city or house is true about a kingdom. Most empires are not destroyed from without as much as they are destroyed from within. A foundational tactic in warfare is to get your enemy to engage in civil war. Help your enemy destroy itself. But this is not a secret. Everyone knows this. So, Jesus is saying.... Do you actually think that Satan is ignorant of that? Satan's plan is worldwide domination. He is not interested in losing territory, he is interested in gaining it. So (Jesus is saying), how could I be in league with Satan if I am taking territory from him? Well perhaps, you are only pretending to be against him. What you are doing is actually a foil to make us think that you are the good guy, when in reality you are evil. But, again, this does not hold up because Jesus has been casting out demons over and over and over. Jesus was engaged in a war against the kingdom of Satan and everywhere Jesus went he was taking back territory. You do not make sense. Besides that, you are not consistent.

Look at the middle of v.18 (read). Jesus is saying, "Let's pretend that you are right." You are saying that I, a mere human cannot overthrow a demon and that I have to be in league with the supernatural forces of darkness in order to exert authority over them. If, that is the case, then what do you say about your sons who claim to have cast out demons? (Sons could be a reference to literal sons or it could be a term for disciples of the Pharisees.) Either your sons are leveraging evil against evil, or they are relying on God's power. Why are they not suspect, if I am?

But Jesus does not let the point rest at merely exposing their hypocrisy; he drives deeper. There is another edge to the sword. You cannot logically say that Jesus is in league with Satan given the power of this miracle. What power is greater than Satan? It is God's power. Therefore, Christ must be working in the power of God. *"But if it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you."* Every Pharisee would know what Jesus is saying when used the phrase, "the finger of God." This phrase *"the finger of God"* first appeared in Exodus 8.19 when Pharaoh's magicians told Pharaoh that the 3rd plague was indeed, "the finger of God." This is clearly from God. The verse ends by saying, *"But Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he would not listen to them."* Here in Luke 11, Jesus is making a point that the Pharisees are now in the same place as Pharaoh. They see the miracle. It is clearly from God. But they have hardened their heart and refuse to believe it. Right there, in that moment, Jesus was telling them that the kingdom of God has come upon you. The King is here. The entire story of Israel was leading to this event. The Messiah had come and they hate him. At this point, Jesus presses the seriousness of what is happening even further.

Read v.21. The only way you can go in and take whatever you want from a well-guarded fortress or palace is if you have neutralized the forces guarding the palace which is the power of the palace. The fact that Jesus takes back whatever he wants from Satan's domain, anytime that he wants is proof positive that he has first, bound Satan. Satan is powerless before Christ. He cannot stop Christ from taking back any person that Satan has initially bound, because Satan, himself, is bound. The obvious conclusion is that Christ is not in league with Satan. Christ is the power of God. Christ is the Messiah and the Kingdom of God has come to you and you are standing in utter defiance of the very thing that you claim to be for.

4. **Exposed** (the dividing line) (23)

Now Jesus lays out the truth. You are either all in for Christ or you are all in for Satan. There is no middle ground. There is no more need for evidence or argument. It's all there. You don't need more information, or time to ponder it. "Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters." Jesus does not have secret admirers and secret followers. Following Jesus is not a secret. It is public.

I knew a man who was the manager of a group of workers. A new position in the organization had been created and two of his employees interviewed for the job. He feared the one and respected the other. If he gave the job to the one he feared, it would be a disaster. If he didn't give the job to the one he feared, work would be ugly and stressful. On the day when he said that he would announce his decision, he said, "I have decided not to decide." We all knew that by failing to decide, he had decided. And that is what Jesus is pointing out to the Pharisees and to anyone who refuses to identify with Christ. If you are not with Christ, you are against him. To be against Christ is to be an enemy of God.

There is no way to sugarcoat this. If you refuse to identify yourself as being with Christ, you are standing in opposition to Christ. You are on the other side. If you are with Christ, then (using a farming analogy) you are one who is helping to gather others as in a harvest. And if you are not gathering others, then you are scattering the harvest. You are being destructive. No one is an agnostic. You either believe or you reject. Yes or No. Friend or Enemy. Heaven or Hell. There is no maybe.

Do you think that the Pharisees initially set out to reject God and hate the Messiah? Did they spend years of their lives studying the OT, memorizing vast amounts of it, discussing, debating, instructing so that they could find more reasons to reject God? No. So what happened? How did they get to this point, where the very Son of God is standing in front of them and they hate him? It is simply this. "Following God" was their ticket to respect, influence and power. It was how they were going to get esteem. The life and ministry of Jesus exposed that as being wrong. We don't follow God in order to be affirmed in what we want, we follow God because we realize that left to ourselves and getting what we want would be empty, vain and tragic.

How do I know if I am a Pharisee? What is your internal playlist? Do you wake up and live with the goal of getting what you want from your world and trying to get your world (including God)

to go along with it? Or do you wake up and live with the goal of making much of God and trying to get your world to join you? That is why growing up religious or just being religious can be a great smokescreen for unbelief. If you think your justification is based on what you know, what your reputation is, how well behaved your children are, how healthy, successful, disciplined, athletic you are, or how much you know about sports, or stuff then you find yourself trying to make others aware of that to. What you are trusting in to justify yourself is what you have to defend or promote to prove your worth. And if the people you respect, respect you, it can be deceiving because