

Title: The Last State
Text: Luke 11.24-26
Theme: The danger of partial faith
Series: Luke
Prop Stmnt: Relief from consequences is not the same as repentance from sin.

There are 24 chapters in Luke. The Triumphant Entry of Christ is in chapter 19. That means that about ¼ of Luke's gospel focuses on the last week of Christ's public ministry. Almost 1/3 of Matthew, and more than 1/3 of Mark and John are given to the last week. Therefore, when you read the gospels, you should know that you are reading either the introduction to the passion week or the passion week. Everything is headed for the cross and resurrection. The death of Christ was not an unfortunate result of a mob that got out of hand. Jesus was lied about, and conspired against. His arrest, trial and death were the result of a deliberate, willful and calculated plan. So, while the gospel accounts are about Christ, they are tragedies. And they are tragedies of epic proportions. There is a direct connection between the rejection of Christ and the destruction of Israel by the Romans. Israel did not have to experience this. But when she rejected her true King and Savior, she rejected the only one who could save her and protect her.

But why was Christ hated so much? What did he do that generated such an intense, personal and violent reaction? Historians and commentators will review events, wars and games and point out where the tide turned. This is one of those pivotal points in Luke's gospel where the music changes, the mood changes, and we feel the heat being turned up. What happened? Jesus healed a man who was demon possessed and the healing resulted in the man being set free from the demon and having his speech restored. The Pharisees scoff at the miracle and declare that Jesus did this by the power of Satan. If you are reading this account carefully, then you would be stunned by this accusation and find yourself wincing.

Jesus warns them and makes it clear that his power and authority are from God. He then draws a line. "*Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters.*" Jesus did not say this at the beginning of his ministry because he was giving people the opportunity to see who he was. It is now obvious who he is, so he makes it clear where he stands and now where his opponents stand. He calls them out and exposes them for what they are. But he is not done. He now appears to address the man who was healed but his audience goes beyond this man.

Read Text:

Being from demonic possession does not mean one lived happily ever after. Being set free is not the end of the story, nor the ultimate goal. If this man does not become a follower of Christ, he will not be free for long. The absence of the evil spirit must be replaced by the presence of the Holy Spirit. Whoever is not with me is against me. There is no middle ground.

Science has been helpful in many ways, but science does not know what to do with demons. It can see affect, but does not understand cause nor cure. There is a world in our world and

outside of our world that science is not able to define but is as real as anything you see. Jesus talks directly about Satan and demons because he sees it all. Demons, or unclean spirits are nothing to joke about. They are real and are devoted to the doomed mission of taking down the kingdom of God. But Jesus is not giving us a lesson on demonology here as much as he is warning about the danger of incomplete belief. These 3 verses have to be understood in relationship to what he just said in v.23. If you are exposed to Jesus and even believe in him, at least to a point, and benefit from his teaching and example, but you fail to commit your life to him, then you are setting yourself up for some serious consequences. Partial faith opens the door to a danger that is beyond remedy. This man, who had just been freed from a demon was still in danger, just like some of you.

1. Partial Faith (24a)

This man has experienced the benefits of Christ, but that does not make a follower of Christ. He is now freed from this demon and is standing before Christ. Jesus is telling him and everyone else that the demon that left is looking for someplace to go and if he doesn't find a place to go, he will come back. We do not know how this man got himself into this situation in the first place, but the warning is clear. You are not out of danger. You have received the benefits of God's power, but that does not make you a believer and you cannot be neutral. This man and these people have all seen the power of God at work. Now, what are they/you going to do with it? That is what I mean by partial faith. Partial faith is not saving faith. It is enough faith to believe in God, but not enough faith to actually trust him. It is an intellectual faith that says, "I believe in God." For those of you like this, you are tempted to think that at least you believe in God. That has to count for something, right? Look again at v.23. "*Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters.*" Your partial faith is like a vaccine. You have enough exposure the faith to be inoculated against it. But you cannot hide forever.

I went to a large public high school. There were several kids from my church who were students there. I was not a bad kid, but neither was I always outspoken for Christ. The school had a talent contest and some of the kids from my church thought it would be a great idea to form a singing group and do a song about Christ. They wanted me to be part of it. Yes or no. In or out. There was no, "maybe." What was Jesus to me? Was he just a good idea? Someone to pray to when I was in trouble? Or was he God? King and my Savior? "*Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters?*" Those friends of mine did not realize that they were forcing me to make a decision. I had to think about what I really believed and it had to be my decision. If I really believed in Christ and trusted my soul to him, why wouldn't I profess him publicly? Wouldn't he be worth it? But if I had a partial faith, then Jesus would not be worth the inconvenience and potential embarrassment. That is a potential weakness of being raised in a Christian context.

A. Cultural Christian

Many of you have been raised in a Christian context. Your parents or grandparents were 1st generation believers and like the ice breakers in the spring, they created a path for your boat to

travel. You cannot remember a time when you did not know about Jesus. You know the stories, songs, and verses. You've gone to VBS, camp, and retreats. Some of you have helped out at these events. Maybe you were homeschooled, or Christian schooled, or classically schooled. There have been many sins that you have not committed simply because you did not have the chance. Your "Christianity" has given you a smugness, a complacency, a sense of being a little better than so many of those in the world. You're tempted think that because you don't vape, or do weed, or get hammered, or high that you are above the dangers that trap others.

Christianity is your culture. It is your lifestyle. It what you are raised with. It is what you are familiar with. Christianity is like the lane markers on the road that you keep you from going into the ditch. Beloved, cultural Christianity is not authentic. It is a fraudulent imposter of the real thing and will damn you. Cultural Christianity cannot save you, but it can deceive you. It can give you a false comfort that you are okay, even though you really don't actually know God and love him. Cultural Christianity is appealing because there are benefits to a partial faith.

B. Enjoy the benefits of God

You can enjoy the benefits of God without actually knowing God. You can see the evidences of God (like seeing a man healed) but not trust Christ with your life. It's like saying, "I'd like about \$10 worth of God. I don't want enough to change my heart, just enough to get out of hell. I don't want enough to make me uncomfortable, but enough to be comfortable. I don't want enough that my kids might go to the mission field, but enough so they don't get pregnant before marriage, or do bad stuff. I don't want enough so that I would serve or be committed, but enough so that my doctor gives me the all clear." Let's say that you get a DUI and this is going to ruin your life as you know it. Your attorney tells you that your only prayer to get a reduced sentence is to join a recovery group at a church and plead guilty. So, you do. You start coming here and connect with some people in our recovery ministry and you discover what we all know and that is, we have some really, really wonderful people here who care about others. They give you rides. You start hanging out with them. You meet them for lunch at Coney Island, you go to their homes, play euchre, watch ball games together and you make some good friends. In fact, you start attending the Sunday morning worship service. You weren't raised with this, and you aren't used to people making this much fuss about God, and Jesus and this gospel (whatever that is), but it's cool. It's upbeat. The music grooves and the people seem so sincere. It makes you feel good on the inside. What is going on? You are enjoying some of the benefits of God, but that is not the same as actually trusting in Christ alone as the only One who can save you and follow him as the King of your soul. All you are doing is trying to use God to get your life back or get a reduced sentence. Your attorney told you that your judge is religious and responds well to letters from churches. You come to me and ask me if I will write a letter for you to the judge because you are "doing so well." And I do. And the judge does indeed reduce your sentence and you avoid prison and serious consequences. What just happened?

It's like the unclean spirit has just left. You've been relieved of the immediate problem you were dealing with. Now what are you going to do? Is Jesus just a crutch to get you out of trouble? Did you just game the system or is Jesus your King and Savior whom you love and trust forever? The

one is partial faith that lets you dabble in the benefits of God. The other is genuine faith that actually saves your soul forever. The first gives you the illusion that you are okay. But only genuine faith saves you.

I could give you more examples of partial faith such as knowing the content of the Bible, but not actually loving God. Doing things for God, so that he will do big things for you. Looking good to others so they can assure you that you are okay. Partial faith stops short of giving Jesus the keys to your life. Genuine faith signs a blank check of your life to God and lets him fill it in however he wants. This man and some of you, have a partial faith. A partial faith...

2. Opens the door to danger (24b-25)

The evil spirit is unable to find a suitable place to rest so that it can carry out its mission of evil. It is restless and relentless. So, he decides to see if his former place is an option. He returns and he finds the place he left all neat and tidy. Evil spirits are horrendous. They destroy and wreck things. Before, the house was a disaster. Now the house is organized. It's like those before and after pictures advertising some organizational magic. So, the idea that the house is neat and tidy means that someone had to put the house back in order. But this is like a scene from a horror movie part 2. The neat, tidy, empty and unguarded house is like failing to close the door all the way. What happened? The person who was relieved of the evil spirit is now all cleaned up. He looks like he got his life back and now has this false sense of assurance that everything is fine. The house is in order, but no one is home. No one is guarding the house. Why isn't someone guarding the house? Because the owner has a false sense of security.

Jesus is describing the person who was delivered from some of the consequences of evil, but did not put his faith in Christ. He is relieved for the moment, but is no match for the evil that awaits him. If he fell once, he can fall again. If your life is not intentionally given to Christ, then you will be ruled by someone else. Think about that for a minute. Who is worth you giving your life to? Do you know anyone who can actually forgive you of your sins? Do you know anyone who is life and can actually give you life? Do you know anyone who is truth and will always tell you the truth and can give you wisdom? Do you know anyone who can defend you and provide for you? Do you know anyone who can prepare a place for you in glory, forever? Do you know anyone who is the King of an eternal Kingdom who offers to share it with you? Do you know anyone who gave up his life for you and died for you because he loved you that much? Do you know anyone who rose again from the dead and promises to share his resurrection with you? Why would you not trust in Christ? Christ literally, physically, personally, intentionally gave up his life on the cross to secure your salvation. He died one the most painful, humiliating, violent and repulsive deaths not only because he was crucified, but because he was crucified as the sacrifice bearing our sin. He chose that. Our sin is that costly that it required his sacrifice. And he did it, willingly. He did it so that you could be reconciled to God. He did it so that you could live the good life of walking with God and enjoying him and the people of God, forever and ever. Why would you not trust in Christ? And don't kid yourself, \$10 of him won't do. He demands all of you, because your joy is at stake. What are you waiting for? Is there any other legitimate option? If your life is not given to Christ, you are incapable of guarding it from evil.

For those of you who are tempted to think that you can take care of yourself, that you don't need Christ, do not forget the audience here. That is exactly what the Pharisees thought. We don't need Christ; we can take care of ourselves. Is that who you want to be and be with for ever? Partial faith opens the door to danger...

3. That is beyond hope. (26)

The evil spirit finds the home empty, but he doesn't move back in, not yet. Jesus says that "*it goes and brings seven other spirits more evil than itself, and they enter and dwell there.*" It sounds like there are other demons who are also wandering and looking for a place to inhabit. I do not fully understand this. Back in chapter 8 when Jesus cast the legion of demons out of the man in the Gerasenes region, you may remember that the demons begged Jesus to be sent even to a herd of pigs, rather than be sent to the abyss. We get the sense that these demons are desperate to avoid the abyss and are looking to invade anything or anyone in order to carry out their schemes. In our text, the one spirit finds these others who are looking for a place and they go with him. Jesus says there are 7 others. That may be literally 7. It may also be a term of completion. We use expressions like "on a scale of 1-10." They would say, on a scale of 1-7 because 7 was the top number. Either way, the point is the same. Jesus is giving a warning that if this man leaves his life unguarded that he is in danger of being so completely overrun that he is rendered powerless to do anything about it at all.

The warning is clear. The same sun that melts butter hardens clay. The Pharisees who witnessed the power of God in person and refused to embrace Christ put themselves into a darkness and bondage that will drive them to justify all sorts of hatred against Christ and then literally kill the Son of God. His resurrection 3 days later which was testified to them by the soldiers did not change them at all. Their last state was worse than the first. There was nothing that would convince them that they were wrong.

What is the point that Christ is making? I think it is clear. You need to commit to Christ, now. Right now, you have a moment of clarity. Right now, you see the importance and even necessity of trusting in Christ and identifying yourself with him. I understand the importance of counting the cost for following Christ. But once you count it, what are you waiting for? It is easy to assume that you can always commit to Christ tomorrow. But you may not have the clarity tomorrow that you have today. Sin is deceitful and sadly, our hearts are willing to be deceived.

I sat across from a table with him and listened to him try to rationalize his choices. Then I reminded him of what God said and asked him what he was going to do. He said, "I'm going to take my chances." He did, and like so many others, he did not win the game. We are tempted to think that we can try it our way for a while and if it doesn't go well, then we can always turn around and go God's way, except that, we can't always turn around because, as Jesus explains, the clarity, the desire and the opportunity are buried in the fog of deceit.

Jay and I grew up together. He was an excellent athlete but went down a very dark road and got himself into some circles that one doesn't just walk away from without serious repercussions. He was on the inside of some guys who played for keeps. One summer, Jay came out to a camp that I was working at partly to sober up as well as put some separation between himself and the group he was in. In the middle of the night he was standing on the road in front of the camp. He told me the next day that if he looked west on the road, he saw everything and everyone he was involved in. If he looked east, there was Jesus. He said that he knew that he had to make a choice and he felt, in that moment, that this was his last chance. That may have been the case, but Jay went to Jesus that night and never went back.