

# **Dr. Daniel K. Darko, Gospel of Luke, Session 18, The Beelzebul Controversy, Luke 11:14-36**

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This is Dr. Daniel Darko in his teaching on the Gospel of Luke. This is session 18, The Beelzebub Controversy. Luke 11:14-36.

Welcome back to the Biblica e-lecture series on the Gospel of Luke. I thank you again for following our lecture series. In the previous lecture we talked about Jesus teaching on prayer when one of the disciples came to him and asked him to teach them how to pray.

Jesus basically taught them or ran them through what we know as the Lord's Prayer, but Luke's version is slightly different from that of Matthew's. In Luke, as Jesus emphasizes, Jesus goes on to tell a parable in which a friend visits at a very unusual time, but the friend is able to come in and help because of persistence. Jesus uses that parable as a segue to emphasize that his disciples could ask and keep asking, seek and keep seeking, knock and keep knocking, and they will find a father who has their interest at heart, supplying their needs and answering their prayers.

Now, Luke opens another discussion here where Jesus is going to get into a situation where he's going to be involved in exorcism, and that in itself is going to prompt a reaction that will require some more discussion. Scholars have referred to this as the Beelzebul controversy. And so, let's take a quick look at that from Luke chapter 11 from verse 14.

When we look at the text, as we read through the text, we have these four things at the back of our minds, and we will go through them more closely. Look at how the crowd will react to the power encounter in the ministry of Jesus. And then look at how skeptics and those who are going to question Jesus will be ascribing his work to that of an evil spirit, namely Satan.

Also, you want to pay close attention when we get to verses 17 to 26 and see how Jesus will answer by showing a two-kingdom concept and some of the things he wants to emphasize. Lastly, you will see that after Jesus answers, he will turn this into almost a rebuke by talking about a generation that looks for signs, and the only sign that they can see and experience is the sign of Jonah. So now let's read the biblical text as it goes from verse 14.

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

But some of them said he cast out demons of Beelzebul, the prince of demons, while others, to test him, kept seeking from him a sign from heaven. But he, knowing their thought, said to them, every kingdom divided against itself is late waste, and a divided household falls. And if Satan also is divided against himself, how will his kingdom stand? For you say that I cast out demons by Beelzebul.

And if I cast out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore, they will be your judges. But if it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. When a strong man fully armed guards his own place, his goods are safe.

But when one stronger than he attacks him and overcomes him, he takes away his armor in which he trusted, and divides his fall. Whoever is not with me is against me. And whoever does not gather with me scatters.

From verse 24. When the unclean spirit has gone out of a person, it passes through the waterless places seeking rest. And finding none, it says, I will return to my house from which I came.

And when it comes, it finds the house swept and put in order. Then it goes and brings seven other spirits more evil than itself, and they enter and dwell there. And the last state of the person is worse than the first.

Let's begin to look at this, and I'll pick up from verse 27 later on, and then we pick up from there looking at this Beelzebul controversy. First, let's look at how the crowd will react and what is going on here. We find a very interesting situation here.

Jesus did what he had already done before in the Gospel of Luke. We know that even in a Jewish synagogue, Jesus cast out demons. So, this is not a new thing in the ministry of Jesus in Luke so far.

Jesus had been involved and will continue to be involved in dealing with evil spiritual activities. But here, what emerges from the crowd is what sets the scene for the discussion that will ensue. The fact that the man was mute for a while was supposed to be understood as a disease that was taking hold or occupying this man's life.

But when Jesus comes in, Jesus deals with that particular condition as a spiritual condition. I should clarify here that in ancient Jewish culture, it is not unusual to associate physical ailment with spiritual cause. So sometimes somebody will be sick, and it will be that because it will believe that the person is sick or something, the person has sinned or has done something against God, and it is the reason these consequences are unfolding.

Here, though, what is going on is very interesting as Jesus moves from Galilee towards Jerusalem on this trip. The people's instinctive response is to ascribe his work to an evil spiritual being. I am not even saying that Yahweh is perhaps causing this because somebody has sinned against Yahweh.

So, let's observe some things in terms of the amazement and the crowd response. First, we see here that the crowd had no doubt about the spiritual link of the muteness that was taking place. There was no question raised in the account about the success of exorcism because Jesus had indeed cast out the demon and the person had been restored to a normal condition.

What the crowd was astonished about was the dramatic nature in which this took effect. There, we find some skepticism. So, you see, the people who are around also believe and know about one particular name in the pagan tradition.

A spiritual head, if you like, Satan, referred to as Beelzebul, deriving from that god that we know about from the pagan tradition Baal. Some of these fertility gods have come to influence the system. They say Jesus is awakened by the power of this spirit, which later on, as Luke explains, will be characterized as the awakening of Satan in that regard.

That is to say that the work of Jesus is ascribed to the strongest and most powerful evil spiritual agent known. They projected magic and satanic activity on what Jesus was doing. In so doing, they are challenging who Jesus was as the Son of God and the source of his power to perform miraculous deeds.

This is a big charge indeed. Elsewhere, Jesus would even go as far as in other gospel evangelist writings, Jesus would go as far as to say that people should stop making such charges because those who sin against him could be forgiven, but those who dare sin against the power of the Holy Spirit relative to the power of God to actually bring such exorcism will never be forgiven. But that's what this crowd is doing here in Luke.

Luke will not bring that part of the narrative into the discourse, but he will draw our attention to the fact that this is indeed a major issue here. Implicit in this particular account is what Jesus tells them that we should know about. Jesus tells them that they are aware that their own children, their own people, do cast out demons, but they do so using the powers that are not of God.

In other words, exorcism was known, but it was not unique to the ministry of Jesus. What is unique here is the source of power that is being enacted to bring into effect this healing that is taking place. Jesus answers them by telling this story about the two kingdoms because they have provoked him to a point he would not like to tolerate.

They have provoked him into saying that he is working against himself because the kingdom of God and the enemies of the kingdom of God, if you remember I mentioned in these lectures, are threefold. It is sin, Satan, and death. Here they are accusing him that he is working on behalf of Satan, and Jesus is not going to take it.

In verse 20 of chapter 11, he says, But if it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own palace, his goods are safe. But the one stronger, indicating a power that is stronger than the power they are referring to, when he shows up, he overcomes the so-called strong man.

He then goes on to enumerate how his power should be looked at and defined. In effect, Jesus is talking about these two competing kingdoms. The kingdom of darkness, the kingdom of the devil, the kingdom ruled by abysmal Satan, you name it.

And the kingdom of God and the power at work in the kingdom of God. Just immediately before this pericope, Jesus had already said that if the children of God ask of him whatever they want, the Father in heaven even has the pleasure to give them the Holy Spirit. So Jesus had already talked about the Holy Spirit, and then subsequent to that, he performed miracles, and the audience began to say he was actually working on behalf of the other spirit.

We are recording these lectures in America, where these things are not that sensitive. But in some of our African countries, when you have a situation where God is at work, and somebody attributes to some of the demonic powers, you could see the reaction because the understanding of spiritual warfare is strong and permeates every fabric of the society.

The spirit of evil cannot work on behalf of the spirit of good. And Jesus is ballistic, if you like. Now, I should say Jesus is a nice man.

He wouldn't have said he is ballistic. That is my word. Just not happy about that.

He needs to draw the lines clearly. Two kingdoms are at stake, he enumerates. These two kingdoms operate in defining clear terms.

One is a strong man, and one is a stronger man. He is working on the side of the stronger, not the strong. And here, he talks about how the stronger one can come in; he can attack the head of the other, Satan, and take hold of his possession and enter his territory and take custody of things that otherwise would belong to him.

Here, he uses the imagery of a castle where one breaks in and takes hold of that which is there. Jesus, in clarifying some of these logistical features in the spiritual realm, is underscoring what the kingdom of God is all about. The kingdom of God cannot be equated with the kingdom of darkness.

In the kingdom of God, people are set free. If you remember, earlier on in these lectures in the Nazarene Manifesto, Jesus talked about the spirit of the living God is upon me, and he has anointed me to set the captives free. Here, somebody is mute, and the person is healed.

The point is not power demonstration per se, but the point here is that Jesus' ministry includes setting people free and healing those who have diseases. But the audience got it wrong. This is an important subject.

Why? Because it has everything to do with what Jesus is all about in his ministry. He cannot, and his mission cannot be identified with that of the devil. He defeated the devil in the temptation scene in chapter 4. He has consistently been dealing with evil spiritual activities in his ministry.

Controversy can emerge, but understanding the two kingdoms, the kingdom of darkness and the kingdom of God, and the fact that the kingdom of God will prevail is paramount. But I like the language Jesus used here. If by the finger of God, I cast out demons, appealing to the fact that he is operating in the power of God right here.

He is not operating in the power of Beelzebul. But what does the finger of God mean? The finger of God is one of those terms that is used in Exodus. In the case of the Exodus scene, the finger of God refers to the power of God at work. This reference shows up also in Psalm 8. But the finger of God also sometimes refers to something that originates from the handiwork of God.

Something that is written or originating from God. In Matthew 12, the finger of God has the resonance of the spirit of God. Some of us lean towards the use of the word here to refer to the first.

If by the finger of God, I cast out demons to mean if by the power of God, I am doing this, and you attribute to demons, do you understand the mistake you are making? You see, as Timothy Johnson puts it, a stronger finger than Satan is making war on him and establishing his sovereignty on earth, namely the kingdom of God. Thus, the application of the parable. If those who listen do not now join the people forming around the prophet, namely Jesus, they too will scatter because someone stronger than Satan is here.

Jesus plainly lays out what his ministry is all about. That brings me to the discussion continuing from verse 27. Jesus turned to them, and as he said these things, there

was a woman in the crowd who heard all these things going on; the woman was so excited.

He said, Blessed is the womb that bore you and the breast at which you nest. But he said, Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it. This is not the time to be sensational.

This is not the time to talk about what is true and affectionate. But it is time to return to the serious business of what true discipleship means. True discipleship does not include attribution of the work of God to the works of demons.

Jesus continues quickly to talk about this generation and their problem. Because this is a generation full of problems, Jesus would say. You know, you do this, they say that.

The real thing is happening in front of them, and they attribute it to something else. They demand for a sign for everything. Okay, if they want a sign, the only sign that is suitable to them is a sign of Jonah.

The way he portrays the sign of Jonah is not going to be good news to their hearing, from verse 29. And I read.

When the crowds increased, they really came together. He began to say that this generation is an evil generation. It seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah.

For as Jonah became a sign of the people of Nineveh, so will the sign of man be to this generation. The queen of the south will rise up at a judgment with the men of this generation and condemn them. For she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and behold, something greater than Solomon is here.

The men of Nineveh will rise up at a judgment with this generation and condemn them. For they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold, something greater than Jonah is here—verse 33.

No one, after lighting a lamp, puts it in a cellar or under a basket, but on a stand so that those who enter may see the light. Your eye is the lamp of your body. When your eye is healthy, your whole body is full of light.

But when it is bad, your body is full of darkness. Therefore, be careful lest the light in you be darkness. If then your whole body is full of light, having no part dark, it will be wholly bright, as when a lamp with its rays gives you light.

In other words, if your sight is really good, see what you are supposed to see. But what does Jesus mean by the sign of Jonah? Let me quickly clarify some things from the sign of Jonah here. What Jesus, in effect, is saying in this Biblical controversy is this.

As he explained the situation of two kingdoms and more crowds came to him, he reminded them that, as a generation, they had not been very good. The very things in front of them are not seen for what they are. Because as Jonah preached, so is the son of man there preaching to this generation.

But the generation is so corrupt they will not hear. The queen of Sheba will one day stand and condemn them, or the queen of the south, whom we know as the queen of Sheba who came to hear Solomon's wisdom, will stand and condemn them because someone wiser than the queen has come in the person of Jesus. He is giving wiser words, and this generation will not listen.

It is in front of them; they don't have to travel anywhere, and they will not heed what he is saying. The men of Nineveh repented when Jonah preached, but this generation will not repent. They will listen to the son of man and still create all kinds of scenarios about the workings of the son of man.

Jesus will challenge them. You see, if they are looking for a sign, the sign is the one preaching before them, preaching words of wisdom that require repentance, and they are not listening. Two witnesses will rise against them on the judgment.

One is the queen of the south, and two are the men of Nineveh. These witnesses will rise in the tradition of two or three witnesses bearing the most credible witness, they will stand to judge them because they have heard what they are supposed to hear and failed to understand and followed suit. In the light and darkness, contrast or imagery, Jesus is, in effect, trying to tell them that if they can see so clearly, they can see the son of man at work.

If they can hear so clearly, they can hear the son of man speak the words of wisdom, the words of God coming to them. And yet the duration is so hardened, the duration is so skewed in their thinking that they seem to be expecting something else, and they are always calling for one more sign when signs are being performed in front of them. After all, what is the issue here? A major sign has just been performed.

A mute person has received healing as Jesus exercised. One part of the crowd, before the others joined, was already ascribing what was going on to that of evil spiritual power. Jesus is here laying out the markers clearly.

The audience deserves this harsh message because, indeed, the kingdom of God is here, and the power of God is here. When the power of God is here, let us not be so

obsessed with miraculous deeds. No, the point is that when the power of God and the kingdom of God, when God's reign is at work, lives are transformed, the sick receive their healing, those who need repentance receive repentance, a generation that is going backward and trapped in darkness find light in the realm of Jesus Christ.

Jesus calls on all who were listening to him at that time to heed the call and desist from the trappings of the generation that keeps the children of Yahweh away from Yahweh because of wrongful expectations. My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, I don't know where you are and what your thoughts are on this subject matter, but you see, you probably could hear in my voice as I read through this I am beginning to process the feelings of Jesus in the midst of somebody attributing his work to that of Satan and how legitimate and decisive his response would be. But do you see the power of God for what the power of God is? Do you see and hear the word of God for what the word of God is? Or are you waiting for a sign like that of the sign of Jonah? You see, in the case of Jonah, the men of Nineveh repented.

Are you and I willing to repent at the hearing of the words of Jesus, the queen of the south, who traveled from far away to come and hear wisdom? And yet, the word of the living God is right in front of us. Do we have the ears to hear? I am convicted as I read this text. I am convicted about how sometimes I attribute the work of God to the work of man or to the work of a wrong agent.

And I pray that you and I will embrace the content of the teachings of Jesus today so that we may look at him for who he is. We may accept what he's doing for what it is. We may receive his words for what they are.

We may believe his preaching for what he aims to share with us. And we may embrace him into our very lives as the Lord and Savior. And I pray and I hope that as we do, we will experience the life-transforming power of the Holy Spirit.

We will see the work of God at work in our lives. We will see God dispel the forces of darkness and the air control so that a spirit of misery, or whatever name that spirit will be, will have no reign or sway over our lives. But we will see the power of the living God at work in every aspect of our lives.

You see when the kingdom of God comes, it is God who reigns. It is the Prince of Peace who is at work and is the saving and loving grace of the Lord Jesus Christ that becomes the embodied experience of those who believe and trust in him. Thank you so much for following the lecture so far.

And I don't know if I'm too passionate, and I should apologize to you for being passionate. But you see, I believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and the message of the gospel. And I want to seek and experience the power of God for what it is.



And I pray and hope that you join me in that pursuit that we refuse to be complacent but are willing to yield to be faithful disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Thank you and God bless you for following. Thank you.

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