

Part 41: Kingdom Power and Permanence

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I just want to give us a bit of a road map of what to expect in the next few months here at Sovereign Hope. Next week we are beginning our Advent series which will run through the month of December. Then starting in January we are going to be doing an eight week series that helps us understand our Bible's better.

As Bible reading plans start up again, we want to help you by giving you two things: 1. A clear sense of the Bible's single story line and 2. The tools and perspectives you need to read the Bible devotionally for transformation and not just information.

But that means today is our last sermon in the book of Luke until late February and we are entering a portion of Luke's gospel where the author is beginning to highlight the opposition to Jesus and his ministry.

As Jesus continues to do amazing things and teach revolutionary truths about himself and the Kingdom of God many people marvel, but many others respond with skepticism. If you remember all the way back to the parable of the sower we are reminded that there are always varied responses to the preaching of the gospel.

But in today's text we see scoffers respond to Jesus' miracle with the question: "How do we know you actually did this? How do we know this isn't a scam?" This is a good question for us to consider as we look at this text today: "How do you assess and understand the validity of a work?" How do you know if something is authentic or a false bill of goods?

In football there's often posts of players "randomly" being drug tested the day after they have a massive game. Why is this ironic? Because the assumption is—it must be steroids. The IRS has means and ways of red flagging people's tax returns when tax deductible donations rise significantly from year to year. Why? "Must be fraud." Co-workers might be skeptical at you if you come to faith in Jesus. "They must have had a close encounter with death, that's all." Maybe you are skeptical of anyone who has a season of apparent spiritual growth or a greater zeal for scripture. "Must be legalism," we consider to ourselves.

But how do you discern a true work of God? This is something Jesus is going to answer for us in our text in Luke chapter 11. He's going to give us things to look for when it comes to understanding the effects of the Kingdom of God in our lives. But more than simply looking for these things in the life of others, we ought to consider where these works are present in our own lives.

This is going to be our main point today: **The gospel of the Kingdom comes in power and in permanence.** We are going to see this in two parts today. First in Luke 11:14-23 we are going to see that **Jesus comes not just in division but domination** over the powers of darkness. Then in verses 24-28 we are going to see that **Jesus comes not only in renovation but in revolution.**

To begin today let's encounter our opening bit of context this morning: **Luke 11:14-17a.**

It shouldn't be lost on us where our passage ended last week and where we pick up this week. Right after Jesus teaches his disciples how to pray, he opens the mouth of a man who was mute on account of a demon.

All the things Jesus asks of us he provides for us in his own power.

Some people were amazed at this, a miraculous work had been done. Yet some of the crowd responded with two challenges.

The second question is one that we will address more when we return to Luke in February. This challenge seeks further validation from Jesus. They want a sign from heaven that Jesus is legitimate. The irony of this request is that standing in front of them is the world's greatest sign. It is far more earthly, far more casual for a demon to be cast out of a man, far more plausible that rocks would turn to bread, far more understandable that a lame man would be healed than it would be for the eternal Son of God to take on flesh and dwell among us as fully God and fully man. Yet this is what Jesus did. But they want more. They can't see it.

But the first challenge, is the one Jesus responds to at length in our text today. That is the challenge of: "He casts out demons by Beelzebul, the prince of demons." Beelzebul was a nickname Jews gave to Satan. These people in the crowd think that these demons must be a plant in a parlor trick. Have you ever been to a magic show, or a conference event where there is so apparently, "a plant?" That is someone who tries to look like part of the audience, but who is actually part of the show and their job is to validate and support the performer.

Maybe that's what this demon was. Jesus worked for the devil, and he planted this demon who came out of this man in order to continue to promote Jesus' false claim. Don't we see here the length an unbelieving heart will go to in order to deny the truth of the gospel? I once heard a philosophy professor say that even if the sun stood in place and all of the heavens to pause, she would be more likely to believe an alien life force had intervened than think it to be the power of God. This is how warped this claim is.

But as readers we already know how silly this is. How so? Because as these men pondered in their hearts if Jesus was legitimate or not, Jesus being fully divine already knew what they were thinking in their hearts. And having this divine validation he begins his first point of teaching: **Jesus comes not just in division but in domination.**

Read with me **Luke 11:17-20.**

Jesus begins by an appeal to simple logic to refute the claim of these scoffers. What's his logic? Division never helps.

Anyone who remembers their childhood knows this fact. What is the first thing you do after you ask your dad something and he says no? You go and ask mom. Why? Because if you can divide them, you win.

Military manuals have been written throughout the centuries outlining the ways in which they divide and conquer the enemy. Whether it's through a physical separation of troops, a political insurrection or seeding of civil war, or even love interests—division doesn't result in peace but problems.

How significant is division? So significant that Paul warns us in the church of the danger of division in shocking language. Look at how he puts this in **Titus 3:10**. The church, generally speaking, in the Bible is to be a place where grace is offered over and over and over again. But here the danger of a divisive person, one scheming to bring strife and discontentment into the church, they are to be put out from the church at a fairly quick rate.

The church would fall if they failed to obey this command.

Jesus says, "Are you so foolish enough to think that Satan would divide his own forces like this? Do you really think that by taking a big loss, it would help the cause of Satan? You might make great skeptics, but you're lousy strategists!"

Then he appeals to some of the Jewish exorcists that are working in the area as well. He challenges these Jewish doubters with their own people. If I cast out demons by Satan, then by whom do your sons cast them out?

This presents a problem. Either the Pharisees say: "By the power of God," which then would give legitimate grounds that Jesus also did it by the power of God, or they say, "by the power of Satan," which would then invalidate their own ministry. Jesus, who is always smarter than us, then pushes in to make his point: **Luke 11:20**.

If Jesus does this work, by the finger of God—then the Kingdom of God has come upon you.

That phrase, "the finger of God" not only communicates God's immense power—his finger is stronger than Satan's demons. But it also is a phrase that is steeped in Biblical weight. The "finger of God" was not merely a part of God, but it was representative of the Spirit of God. Don't forget that right before this Jesus spoke for the first time about the Holy Spirit. In Matthew's account of this very encounter he substitutes, "The Spirit of God," in place of "The Finger of God."

In other words this is not a disconnected act associated with God but this was in fact the power of God the Father, flowing through the Holy Spirit and wielded by Son. It was an immensely Triune power which came to bear in this moment.

But even more than that, this calls us to remember another demonstration of God's power. Back in Exodus there were Egyptian priests who were able to match some of Moses' miracles but after they were not able to duplicate the third plague look at what these pagan priests said to Pharaoh: **Exodus 8:19**.

Jesus is subtly saying to these skeptical Jews that even the pagans of Egypt recognized the work of God when it happened, and you can't because of your own blindness of heart.

As we saw last week it was the powerful display of God's finger which lead the Israelites to sing after the Exodus, "Who is like our Lord among the gods...awesome in glorious deeds, doing wonders?"

God's power reveals his identity. And Jesus here says that if he is in fact doing this by God's power than something greater than the Exodus is happening. In the Exodus account God removed his people from a

foreign kingdom, but if Jesus is doing this work right now then God is bringing his kingdom in the midst of his people.

It's not just that the person of the Kingdom is there in Jesus Christ, but the full power and presence of the Kingdom of God has invaded in real history, the broken reality of our world. A foretaste of what will be in glory was being displayed in full color before their eyes.

Jesus develops this theme more with another short parable: **Luke 11:20-23**.

You see Jesus came not just to divide between two equal parties. But with the dominion of the Kingdom came the domination and plundering of the forces of darkness.

He gives this illustration which depicts the forces of Satan as a strong man. Not only is this man strong in and of himself, but he is fully armed, he's got lots of weapons. What does he do with those weapons? He guards his palace. And as a result his goods are safe.

Now in this illustration, if the forces of darkness are the strong man, what are his goods? We are! It was a man that was under the dominion of darkness and skeptics blinded by the power of Satan who prompted this teaching. When talking of Israel's spiritual blindness notice how God puts this in Isaiah and see if you can find the echoes in this text: **Isaiah 42:22**.

Those who are blind to God are a people held as plunder by the might of a strong men. But did you notice the experience of those goods in Luke 11:21? They are safe.

Notice how Jesus puts it. He doesn't say the strong man is safe. He says his goods are safe. Let us be wary of a security that sits well in our lives which is no security at all. Not all safety is good safety. Just because your life seems to be at peace is not indication that you are truly safe. What matters not is the peace you hold in your experience but the character of the one who holds your life.

There is a worldly safety, a worldly security which experientially blinds us to the danger we are in. So long as you're comfortable, whispers the Devil, they'll never know. It is as Isaiah says, a people trapped with no one wise enough to say, "Restore, and rescue us!"

But look at what Jesus says in **John 10:10**. Behind the seeming safety of life can be the thief who thinks only of your demise. But here comes the stronger man. The hope of those who sit in the false comfort of spiritual blindness will be awakened by the fearful encounter of the stronger man who works for their deliverance.

So disruptive is this man that he takes away the false security of your captors and takes us captive for himself. He doesn't merely come to save us, but to keep us. To divide us amongst himself for his own possession.

How do we apply this to our lives? We must be on guard against the devil as Peter calls us to in 1 Peter 5. We must be wary of false comforts as Proverbs 30 warns us of. But we must remember that despite our responsibility to resist and to be wise that the devil and his demons are real and they are really stronger than us.

If you remember back in chapter 8 we encountered a man who was possessed and his whole town was not strong enough to do anything about it. Your logic, your birthright, your education, nationality, and income cannot save you when darkness sits in your watchtower.

If you are spiritually blind—if you are one who cannot see the need for Jesus in your life—you don't need a nudge in the right direction. You don't need a door left slightly ajar for your escape. You need a rescue by from sin and death by the only man strong enough to do it—Jesus Christ.

The scales of history are not those of mere division. It's not that some people choose Jesus and follow him, and others don't and follow whoever or whatever they want. It's that Jesus, being the Lord of Armies himself, has come to put evil in its place once and for all. This is not a battle of two equal sides. This is not a debate between competing world views or moralities this is a battle between those who would be delivered by the powerful work of God in Jesus Christ and those who will be overcome by destruction in his judgement against all who stand against him.

Whoever is not with him, is against him and whoever does not gather with him scatters. Has the power of God come upon you in the message of this man, Jesus Christ? Paul tells us the power of this man is manifested for us in one place—faith in the gospel. It is the power of God.

The gospel is nothing if it is not powerful. Powerful enough to cast Satan to the curb and to one day seal him away for all eternity. Has that power invaded your life? Have you come to Jesus in faith?

If so, what can we expect from our lives? This is where Jesus continues with our second point this morning: **Jesus comes not only in renovation but revolution.**

Read with me our next few verses **Luke 11:24-26.**

Now this is an odd text if we don't read it carefully. In fact this might be a text of great paranoia if we miss the point of all of this.

Have you ever been paranoid about your own salvation? Have you ever woken up and wondered today if God actually does love you?

There are many people I've met with who have never had these experiences because they have a false confidence of their salvation. They assume they are good because they are good, the house is clean, there's no major criminal investigations going on, no skeletons in the closet, no stains on the carpet, perhaps even their parents and grandparents were Christian. They boast in their natural cleanness.

But then there are others who may look around and see certain signs of cleanliness, but also fear the very thing Jesus just described. Will it last? Will I always have faith? Will the work of God always be enough? Or at the end of all things will I be worse than before?

Well, we must understand that what this passage shows first of all is the danger of anything less than Jesus' salvation.

In contrast to what we read in verse 14, it's not clear that Jesus cast out this demon. What we see is that the demon just left, potentially by its own volition. And what happened in the void? The man got his life

back in order. He cleaned up, swept, put things back where they needed to be and slapped some paint on the walls.

Now remember, we just saw a man who was mute, begin to speak. In Luke 8 we saw a man who was naked and out of his mind with a demon healed, sitting clothed and in his right mind by Jesus. To a certain degree what Jesus describes here looks dangerously close to what we have witnessed in the lives of people Jesus himself has healed—superficial restoration.

Have you ever heard about the unique similarities between a coral snake and a king snake? At first glance the two seem to be almost identical. They are red bodied snakes with bands of black and yellow that break up the red. But there's a difference. A coral snake is venous and deadly and a king snake is not.

The difference is in the slight distinction of their patterns. The coral snake's pattern is red touching yellow, the king snake is red on black. There was a little jingle I heard: "Red touches black, you're ok, Jack. Red touches yellow, you're a dead fellow."

Here is the subtle danger of anything less than Jesus' salvation. Moralism looks safe. Cleaning up your life, boasting in your Bible reading, being generous, exercising and having good finances looks a lot like a clean house. But on its own it's deadly.

Look back at verse 25 and notice Jesus' description of this house. What is it? Clean, swept, orderly. But what else is it? How is it contrasted with the palace we just read about above? It's empty, it's unguarded.

But how did Jesus describe his power? If it was by the finger of God he did this then what has come? The Kingdom of God. The rule, the presence, the power, the reign and dominion of God has come.

What did Jesus just conclude with last week: **Luke 11:13**.

What's the point? True conversion is not a renovation by human standards. It's a revolution of who occupies the throne of your heart. True converts need not be anxious about this parable because the stronger man has set up shop. The Holy Spirit may take time to clean up the stains on your carpet but the first thing it does in the life of a believer is stand guard at the door.

We don't need the power of God because we need a boost in the right direction. We don't need the power of the gospel because we need to be saved from singleness. We don't need the Kingdom of God because we need a better life. We need the Kingdom of God because we need the presence of its King. We need our lives to not only have what is dangerous removed, but to have what is lovely reign supremely in our hearts by faith.

Jesus is the strong man who comes in power and lasting permanence.

What does this look like? Consider the final portion of our passage: **Luke 11:27-28**.

So here a woman celebrates the power of Jesus by praising his mother, Mary. But Jesus turns this blessing on its head. True blessing is not according to worldly lineage or support, but it's for those who hear the word of God and who keep it.

How do we know the strong man has been defeated by the stronger? How do we know our house is full? Hear the word of God, hear the message of the gospel, and keep it. This has long been Jesus favorite three part description of discipleship: come to me, hear my word, do something with it.

That Greek word "keep" in verse 28 is the same word translated "guard" in verse 21. In other words just as the forces of darkness attempt to guard our lives as their treasure, believers who have been freed by the work of Jesus guard and keep the word of God as their treasure.

There was another important Old Testament use of the phrase "finger of God." In the plagues it was used as a reminder of God's power. But on Mount Sinai it was used as a reminder of God's permanence in the lives of his people. Look at **Exodus 31:18**.

God, by the power of his finger, wrote the law the new standard of living on tablets of stone so that the people he saved by his power might continue to live by his power. While Jesus has fulfilled the whole of the law for us, look how Paul puts this in **2 Corinthians 3:3**.

How do we walk in the power and the permanence of God? How do we know if God has done a powerful work in us? How are we lead not only to rejoice in our own blessedness but to praise the one who has done it? We are saved by Jesus, and we live our lives for Jesus in every area of our lives.

We leave no room for the devil because Jesus stands guard at the door and Jesus fills our lives with the fruit of obedience.

You see the illustrations Jesus uses are tied up in this phenomenon of demonic possession. You might say: "I'm not possessed. I don't know anyone who is possessed, so I'm good in this area." Demon possession is a real thing, but in God's providence it isn't something we see often in our world today. In fact as the gospel goes forward, demon possession seems to diminish as freedom comes through Jesus Christ.

But the biggest threat in this passage isn't demon possession is it? It's not the possessed man who is the problem, it's the ones whose oppression is more subtle. It's those who are spiritually blind to the message of the gospel and the power of Jesus.

It's the ones who think that they can clean up their lives enough, obey God enough, and assess the validity of salvation enough on their own that they do not need Jesus. But what we need is not only the power of God to save us, but we need the permanence of change that comes by aligning our lives with the Kingdom of God through his word. This opens blind eyes, this unseals muted mouths and unshackles clueless prisoners.

Hear this word, and keep it. Submit your lives to it and find the freedom of peace that comes when the stronger man sits on the throne of your heart.