



“...choosing a side.”

Luke 11: 14-28

by Pastor Tim Dodson

at JF Believers Church

in Menomonie, Wisc

on April 16th, 2017

Luke 11:14 -28 And He was casting out a demon, and it was mute. So it was, when the demon had gone out, that the mute spoke; and the multitudes marveled. 15

But some of them said, "He casts out demons by Beelzebub, the ruler of the demons." 16 Others, testing Him, sought from Him a sign from heaven. 17 But He, knowing their thoughts, said to them: "Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and a house divided against a house falls. 18 "If Satan also is divided against himself, how will his kingdom stand? Because you say I cast out demons by Beelzebub.19 "And if I cast out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they will be your judges. 20 "But if I cast out demons with the finger of God, surely the kingdom of God has come upon you. 21 "When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own palace, his goods are in peace. 22 "But when a stronger than he comes upon him and overcomes him, he takes from him all his armor in which he trusted, and divides his spoils. 23 "He who is not with Me is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me scatters. 24 "When an unclean spirit goes out of a man, he goes through dry places, seeking rest; and finding none, he says, 'I will return to my house from which I came.' 25 "And when he comes, he finds it swept and put in order. 26 "Then he goes and takes with him seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter and dwell there; and the last state of that man is worse than the first." 27 And it happened, as He spoke these things, that a certain woman from the crowd raised her voice and said to Him, "Blessed is the womb that bore You, and the breasts which nursed You!" 28 But He said, "More than that, blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it!"

During the years of World War 2, there were several nations they attempted to do what eventually proved impossible: *they tried to remain neutral*. Such was vividly portrayed in the daylight bombing of Schaffhausen, Switzerland on the first of April 1944. In that particular case, it was the US Air force that apparently erred in their logistics. But the fact remains that throughout that war...as well as seemingly so many others, those who attempted to straddle the fray and remain ‘in the middle’ just became pawns of both sides and were doomed to ultimately be a loser. This truth was because *someone* was going to win, and it sure wasn’t going to be them, because they weren’t on a side thus they *couldn’t* win.

What thinking is behind such an attempt no doubt varies. But perhaps such occurs when there are those who fail to grasp the reality of the war, the facts behind it, or maybe they simply refuse to acknowledge that there is a right and a wrong on stage together. When the bombs dropped on neutral Schaffhausen, the destruction was just as real and just as painful as it was for those who had chosen a side, but for Schaffhausen it was ultimately even more painful because they had no ‘dog in the race’ and thus nothing to win. There’s was however a certain loss. And with 40 fatalities, numerous injuries, and great property damage, they felt the pain and how empty it was! The losses were void of meaning and purpose. The deaths were empty. No brave stories or heroic sacrifices. No reason at all.

Jesus however was totally invested in the war that He was involved in, and He had everything riding on the outcome. If there was indeed a 'cape fluttering in the wind' it would have been His, for no marvel comic book hero could hold a candle to this superhero! Jesus was fully engaged in the battle, and yet it seeming took place also in a 'neutral country'...a population that for the most part were ambivalent...unwilling to surrender their lives to this 'king Jesus' and unwilling to throw their hat into the ring with either Rome the occupying nation, or the true enemy *Satan*. They wanted to live their nice peaceful religious lives even as the war raged all around them and they ...like Switzerland in WW2, were essentially under siege and therefore, *practically speaking*, under 'house arrest.' Prisoners in their own homes!

Jesus, Paul the apostle, and essentially *all* the scriptures speak in length concerning the war that rages around us and uses language that is clearly that of vested involvement in the lives of every believer throughout history. Certainly our generation is no exception. One has to wonder if the enemy truly advances more on the coattails of his loyal troops or just passively on those how believe themselves to be neutral. How can we forget the legendary quote of Edmund Burke "The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing." It works the same no matter who does nothing, for evil still triumphs!

Perhaps it all stems from one crucial point of doctrine involving default position. The world you see so often sees Christians trying to get them to get into the game...to join the fray, to 'join their side.' And the average joe doesn't want to join *any* side! They believe that a person can join the Christians or join the 'evil force' or just stay out of the whole mess. But God tells us that *by default* we are on the opposing team. No choice in this case IS a choice, because in Christianity, *there is no Switzerland*. To error here will cost the game. It's a 'no show' and by default you then lose. All the entirety of theology doesn't matter if you are unwilling to acknowledge what is an obvious reality: *you're a sinner*.

Though they denied it, it seems that the people in the day of Jesus's ministry seemed to inherently know something was amiss. But oh the cost of acknowledging such! To admit the obvious and declare it would be the crossroads of their lives as well as their eternity. On that day of confession, there would be no going back. What they saw could never again be 'un-seen.' Thus that was an acknowledgment that man fears to make.

And yet they also by nature wanted nothing to do with the affirmation of evil. They weren't willing to throw their hat into the ring for Satan either. They generally liked the idea of 'good' and 'moral' as long as such served their desires at the moment, for social protocol, and if not, the situation therefore called for varying degrees of fudging the line. I want to be good, but not *too good*!

Now Jesus...never one to be nebulous or vague, does what He did so often and so well, and that was to *clarify*. The problem with scripture for most folks truthfully isn't that it is hard to understand or conflicting or vague, or any other of the accusatory aspects that are so commonly attributed to such. The problem is in fact that it simply is too starkly black and white! It's *too* emphatic! Too extreme in its position.

How many folks spend their lifetime looking for the loophole? They become like Indiana Jones and comb the world looking for illusive answers! In this case, *a way out*. We try to tunnel under, climb over, and slip through the audacious claims of scripture. We claim interpretive issues, cultural and historical differences, social mores and situational loopholes. We say we don't believe in what is being said, but we also can't seem to let them go. And then Jesus comes along and draws a deep and distinct line in the sand for which there is seemingly no way out: "*If you're not with me, you are against me....if you are not gathering with me, you are scattering.*" So I ask you: *are you gathering for Christ?*

What was occurring in this scene was just so typical that it could have happened yesterday. Like children on the playground, when your back is against the wall or your hand is caught in the cookie jar, the thing to do is *blame shift*. They didn't deny that Jesus had done these incredible things, they just denied the power that was behind it. Just like the work that was done on us. It's hard to deny what has happened here. The lives that have been transformed and restored. The journey from a hotel conference room in 1990, to a small storefront, to this church as it is today. Its multi-ministries, its overseas ministries, local missional outreaches, media and campus ministries. Such cannot be denied. It's real. It's *here*. But they *can* claim alternate empowerment.

Today such manifests itself in social media and 'back-pew-smack-talk' where they use essentially the same language that the Pharisees used. Terms like 'cult' and 'radical', and attribute advancements in ministry to the powers of Satan. Jesus, once reflecting on such, called for eyes to open to the facts — *the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised to life, and the Good News is being preached to the poor*. In this case before us, demons were cast out of a man and now He was set free. The ultimate question of course, is that wouldn't such be counter-productive if Jesus was working for the dark side? Why would Satan cast out Satan?

And today, if God is not seriously working, then why are people saved and being baptized? Why are marriages healed and lives restored? Why would glory be given to Jehovah God if Satan was running the show? Ironic that so often nothing has changed in 2000 years! And most often the "pointed finger" comes not from the opposing team, but rather those who are trying to 'stand in the middle.' Those who perceive themselves to be the 'nice people'...the Sunday church crowd. The publically moral. The flag waving socially conscious.

They will write you a check for the 3rd world needy. They will wave hello to their neighbor, and pay their taxes without cheating. But can we please get rid of this messy issue of the cross and the blood? Why must we get so involved with "those" people? No need to be so radical! No reason to be so blunt! Let's stop using words like sin and repentance, and being so literal on scripture: *after all it was written 2000 years ago! Times have changed after all!* Why must we wear our faith on our shirt-sleeve? Such can be so offensive to others, you know. Let's just respect other religions and avoid controversy. And such is happening to God's churches around the world...

I recall some years ago, I attempted to reach out to another church in town...a church of some substantial size, and invited them to attend an event here where some speakers from Outpost Ministries in Minneapolis...a ministry operated by and for people coming out of homosexuality, were slated to speak. The pastor however wanted nothing to do with such...claiming they 'avoid such controversial issues.' Really? You mean issues like sin, death, hell, and Jesus dying and being resurrected? You mean stuff like that? Because where I'm sitting Jesus was the quintessential extremist. That's what love and passion does to a person I guess. And in kind, what the true absence of such does.

Jesus reminded them that if they weren't "*with Him they were against Him...if they weren't gathering, they were scattering.*" Thus our standing is not merely measured by *position* but even by *activity*. If we are '*with Him.*' **ARE** you 'with Him?' If you answer yes, I ask you then "where effectively IS He today?" And finally "are you THERE?" Where is He? He is on the front lines of the battle. Loving, engaging, risking, sacrificing, speaking truth and fighting the enemy. He 'had no place to lay His head' for He was fully immersed in His mission...in His identity. **Is that where you are?**

Some have noted the apparent conflict with Luke 9:50, in which Christ seems to contradict this passage. But in Luke 9, Jesus was speaking concerning those who were serving the kingdom in groups other than the one to which the disciples belonged. But this passage speaks of those who are not watching, laboring, or serving the kingdom at all, believing that such a position is acceptable to their Redeemer.

Jesus herein then shared a poignant story...one that should strike fear into the hearts of all those who dance in this realm of religion. He tells the story of a person who affectively find's his way to this world of faith and 'cleans up.' It's not a hard thing to do and certainly not an unusual one. They want a different life than the one they have, so they "sweep the house clean" and "put things in order", but they fail to realize a very *very* important factor in all of it: mankind is inherently a natural vacuum. We were never designed to be an "empty house."

So unless the Holy Spirit comes and lives in that house, it is only a matter of time before the vacuum begins to suck in the world around it, and all that stuff and more comes rushing back in and bringing with it 7 times more junk than we endured before. In the end, we are worse than we were before...lost, blind, and seemingly incapable of finding our way back out again. It would seem so hard to believe if I hadn't seen it with my own eyes innumerable times over my time as a pastor! Hebrews 6:4-6 warns us "*For it is impossible, in the case of those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, ⁵ and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, ⁶ and then have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt.*"

You see, faith and Christianity is never about cleaning up and getting rid of all the bad stuff in our lives. There is indeed that aspect, but such never comes first. For "unless a man be born again" he will never see the kingdom of God. Not in the eternal and not in this present life. A born again life with Christ is being filled with a new presence...a new spirit. God comes to live in us and we become, *inexplicably*, His new temple! Being all spit-shined and moral means nothing unless Jesus is in the house. If He lives there, HE will clean up and set things in order. And He will do so according to His plan for you. *He* will change you. *HE* will set things right! With His presence, we cannot help but be transformed! This critical truth is failing to find its way into the hearts and lives of so many today. Untold numbers of half-hearted religious seekers each Sunday "sweep up" a little and still go home empty.

Like the woman from the crowd that day, the religious world wants to praise the accepted public persona of Christ...the religious mantra...the cultural "yea Jesus! What a great guy!" But **His** personal take was much different. He answered back to this woman and furthermore effectively to every similar position that would follow: "*blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it!*" Because Jesus didn't come to this world to instruct us on a new moral stature nor to affect the civility of the culture in a positive way. He came to die for a desperate humanity...to save that was lost, to make new men and women out of old. To bring life where there was only death. And that would be and yet IS, *a war!*

There is no middle ground today. There is no neutral ground. There is only born again spirit filled Christians, and the lost. There is no 'kind of' saved, or 'somewhat Christian.' There is the radical passionate and sold out, and those who are not. You may be 'swept clean' and your life may be all "put in place." But you are still lost if the Spirit of the living God has not come home to roost. If we are "with" Jesus then He is "with" us. He is "IN" us. And remember who He was when He walked this earth. He was not Switzerland. He was fully and absolutely invested and engaged. So if He is truly in you, *so are you.*

Religion and morality will count for nothing in judgement. Church attendance and religious activity is meaningless. These are not my words or the radical position of this church. It is the radical position of Jesus Christ. Your tithing and service won't matter. Taking communion and reading your bible sometimes won't matter. Because if the house is empty, so is your life and so is your eternal future.

Choose a side. Do it, or Satan will do it for you. Because failure to truly 'jump into the pool' is a choice in itself. And it is a position fraught with peril.