

“A Weak Man, a Strong Man, and the Stronger Man” // Luke 11 // *In Step #10*

I want to open up today by leading us into a time of prayer, around 3 really important issues:

- First SOL Sunday: This is a nationally recognized Sunday on which lament the terrible tragedy of abortion. The date for this Sunday is always whichever Sunday is closest to Jan 20 when the Supreme Court legalized, in 1973, the killing of children in the womb. Summit, we want to be a place that is clear about the tragedy and unqualified injustice of abortion, but also a place that extends forgiveness and healing and who seeks to understand that often those decisions are made in a lot of pain and confusion. We want to not only be clear on right and wrong, we want to be a help and resource to those who feel like they have nowhere else to turn. I'll actually be preaching a message on this next week, but today we want to acknowledge it because, as I said, this is national Sanctity of Life Sunday.
- Second: Monday of this coming week is MLK Day. That's a day in which we express gratitude for the progress that has been made in becoming a more just and fair society, a day in which we affirm the dignity of all peoples, and a day in which we acknowledge the ongoing work that needs to be done in this regard and recommit ourselves to it, and so we want to pray for that, also
 - (BTW, we don't commemorate these two dates together because we believe you can't talk about one without the other, but simply because both are nationally recognized days on our calendar)
- Third, I want us to pray for our nation. What a difficult couple of weeks. Probably more than ever, we are aware of spiritual forces at work in our society seeking to divide, to sow anger and hatred. What a great time for us to be giving ourselves to 21 Days of Prayer and Fasting
 - And regarding the events of last week let me just say this: I urge you to avoid any temptation to excuse evil as a means of accomplishing good. The Apostle Paul warns in Romans 3 of God's wrath on those who say, "We must do evil that good may come." Some of you have legitimately righteous things that you are worried about in this election, many of which I share. But we as the people of God must avoid the temptation to wink at, excuse, or justify evil, lies, slander and the like as a means of accomplishing that. There is a time to vote, even a time peacefully to protest; but there's never a time to excuse evil in the name of good.

And, there's always a time to pray, so let's do that now: **PRAYER**

It's hard to believe that this year will mark 20 years since the 9/11 attacks. They say that those attacks rewrote the book on how nations think about warfare. In previous wars you had a defined entity like "Germany" or "Japan," but the 9/11 attacks were carried out by citizens of countries who were our allies, some by people who lived right here within our own borders. After the attacks, Congress felt a declaration of war was appropriate, but they weren't even sure what to call it. Previous wars were "The War with England" or "The War Against the Axis Powers," but this was a War against... Terror. So the media dubbed it "The War on Terror." And the strategies for fighting it were different. You couldn't just build up an army and go after the enemy. There were no territories they really called home. So, we started to hear about things like "sleeper cells" and "radicalized operatives." These realities required different strategies for fighting and different security protocols, and of course that gave rise to new dangers, like the invasion of privacy or "racial profiling."

Many of the hit drama shows of the time--shows like 24 and Alias--played on the premise that this new war was very dangerous, and we'd better learn the new rules of engagement or we'd never survive.

I share that because I think you'll find parallels in how Jesus instructs us to approach the Christian life in **Luke 11**. He says that if we don't recognize the real nature of the enemy, we'll be ill-equipped to survive the battle. You see, just as in the War on Terror, our Enemy in this battle is not one entity we can isolate and identify. He doesn't have a headquarters somewhere like Hollywood, or big business; he's not at work only in one particular culture, nor is he isolated to one political party. You'll certainly find him at work in each of those things, but he's also at work in our churches and in our families--and even in our own hearts. And that requires different strategies of engagement.

BTW, in illuminating these things for us, Jesus also answers a question that a lot of us ask, particularly around the New Year--and that is **WHY WE STRUGGLE SO MUCH TO BRING REAL CHANGE INTO OUR LIVES**. Most of us have things we'd love to change, but many of us are discouraged at our persistent inability to do so. Some of you didn't even make a resolution this year because you don't need anything else to feel guilty about failing at! Amen?

Jesus is going to explain that that's because spiritual forces are at work in us. And, apart from his power, any attempt to change is doomed to fail--even if for a little while it looks like we succeed.

Let's take a look: **Luke 11:14: Now** (Jesus) **he was driving out a demon that was mute.** (or that was making the man mute). Let's just stop right here because some of you may say, "Really? Jesus actually believed that some physical and psychological problems were caused by demons?" Short answer, yes. And that's consistent throughout the Bible. There's a lot more going on behind the scenes in these things than we realize.

And maybe that strikes you as naive. We now know, you say, that diseases have viral causes; emotional and spiritual problems can be explained by psychological and physiological causes. Or the result of past trauma. And, btw, I don't think Jesus would disagree with you. That's not inconsistent with what the Scriptures teach about this, and it's why God gave us the scientific method. But Jesus would say that if you think **ALL** of life's issues can be explained by merely physical factors, maybe you are the naive one. **Do you really think that at the root of the Holocaust was just a man with chemical imbalances?** Do we really think that the strife and division we experience in our own society now simply owes to differing political ideologies? When we see the rage that animates the discussions we are in, how can we not see evidence of evil spiritual forces at work, whose intent is to divide and destroy? Today, when we look at our society's disregard for the lives of innocent babies in the womb and the dogged determination to celebrate our right to discard them, how do we not see the evidence of spiritual forces at work? When we think about the tragic history of our blindness on racial injustice, how do we not recognize the hand of the enemy?

Yes, evil in our world has physical explanations, but if you think that physical factors explain all human evil and suffering, perhaps you are the naive one. And that's why **the vast majority of people throughout history**--even today--have recognized the reality of supernatural spiritual forces at work. That's not because everyone else around the world is so naive and we alone are so sophisticated.

Now, to be clear: this is not to say that every problem is directly connected to demonic activity--not at all--just that according to Jesus--these things are sometimes at work)

Back to vs. 14: When the demon came out, the man who had been mute spoke, and the crowds were amazed. 15 But some of them said, "He drives out demons by Beelzebul, the ruler of the demons."

Now, quick note here: Beelzebul means "the ruler of demons" or "lord of dung." (Scholars say it was a bit slang--calling someone the "lord of dung"--but using the curse word for "dung."). Calling Jesus "the lord of demons" was a way the religious leaders could explain away his power. He obviously had supernatural powers, but they didn't want to acknowledge that he was from God. So the only alternative was to say he got his supernatural power from Satan.

17 Knowing their thoughts (BTW, have you noticed how many times this phrase occurs in Luke? It's another hint by Luke that Jesus is God--he always knew what everybody was thinking. So), **he told them, "Every kingdom divided against itself is headed for destruction, and a house divided against itself falls. 18 If Satan also is divided against himself, how will his kingdom stand?"** Now, this is as logically simple as it gets, right? How does it make sense that Satan would empower Jesus to destroy his other works? If Satan is the one behind certain diseases and afflictions--if he loves to spread dung into people's lives in the form of disease and death and strife--why would he empower Jesus to clean up those things? Satan's works go the opposite way of Jesus'.

Vs. **19 And if I drive out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your sons drive them out? For this reason they will be your judges.** Here's his second piece of reasoning: If I cast out demons by Satan's power, then by whose power do your sons cast them out? By what standard do you say my power is from Satan and theirs is from God? If mine are from Satan, maybe yours are, too? He's showing them the inconsistency of their accusation. This is not an honest intellectual objection--they are just making up objections because they don't like Jesus.

BTW, I've found this same insight really helpful when talking to people about the gospel today. A lot of people come up with objections, but they are not real objections because they'd never apply those same standards to themselves. Many Muslims, for example, apply a historical cynicism to Christian history they would never apply to their own. They believe all these conspiracy theories about the Bible but would never look at their own history through that same lens. Or, on your college campus, you'll hear professors apply a cynicism to the historical evidence for the Resurrection that they wouldn't apply to any other event in history. They assume for this one event that there was some elaborate, almost inexplicable historical ruse. **Or they'll raise objections from Christian history like, "What about the crusades?"** and imply that those things invalidated Christianity itself. And when you respond with, "Yes, the Crusades were a tragic chapter where Christians departed from Jesus' teaching... but I'll see your crusades and raise you Mao Tse Tung's China and Stalin's Russia which--in the name of atheism--committed genocides exponentially larger than anything that happened in the crusades." But when you say that, they respond, "Well, that's got nothing to do with the intellectual integrity of atheism." And Jesus would say, as he says to these people, *"Why do you apply a cynicism to me you'd never apply to yourself?"*

Perhaps your cynicism has less to do with intellectual honesty and more to do with a dislike of Jesus and his claim of authority over your life.

Jesus continues, **20 If I drive out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.**

This “finger of God” image here is a reference all those religious leaders would have recognized. The “finger of God” was a phrase the Egyptian sorcerers used to describe the power Moses displayed in the Exodus. In the Exodus, God did a series of miracles to convince Pharaoh to let the Jews leave Egypt. Remember this? Well, for the first couple of plagues, the Egyptian magicians used some trickery to replicate some of them. Moses threw his staff on the ground and it became a snake, and the Egyptian magicians had this little trick rod where they could make it look like they had that power, also. It doesn’t tell us if it was merely an optical illusion or there was some kind of sorcery involved. Either way, in Exodus 8, Moses raised the stakes. He threw his staff into the dust, and as the dust poofed up it turned into what? Gnats. And from there, gnats multiplied and covered the land. Well, the Egyptian magicians couldn't duplicate that. Creating an optical illusion where it looks like a staff turns into a snake is one thing, but this--creating gnats out of dust--they can't touch that. And so they told Pharaoh privately (Ex 8:19)-- "*This is the finger of God. We can't do this.*" Even the pagan magicians knew the finger of God when they saw it! Jesus is saying, "Your Jewish exorcists can do some impressive things, but they can't do anything like what you're seeing here." And it's safe to conclude that if the finger of God is present, so is the Messenger of God. The power of the Kingdom indicates the presence of the King.¹

Jesus continues: **21 When a strong man, fully armed, guards his estate, his possessions are secure. 22 But when one stronger than he attacks and overpowers him, he takes from him all his weapons he trusted in, and divides up his plunder.** Now, **in this analogy, who is the strong man?** Satan. And who is the stronger man? Jesus. Jesus is the stronger man that overpowers Satan and plunders his possessions. **And in this parable--and this is important--who are you?** You're the property. First owned by the Strong Man, and then liberated by the Stronger Man.

The implication is, and this is important: You are either going to belong to one or the other. You can't be free of the strong man until you're under the control of the Stronger Man. See what he says in vs. **23? Anyone who is not with me is against me, and anyone who does not gather with me scatters.** Neutral toward Jesus is not an option; And so, if you are not actively pursuing and serving Jesus, you are against him, because you are still under the control of the strong man.

We'll come back to that, but first let's finish the parable, because Jesus makes the point even clearer: **24 “When an unclean spirit comes out of a person, it roams through waterless places looking for rest, and not finding rest, it then says, ‘I'll go back to my house that I came from.’ 25 Returning, it finds the house swept and put in order.** Jewish Law demanded rigorous cleaning techniques after you'd gotten rid of any kind of disease or defilement. It even applied to your property. For example, if you had a mold problem in your house, you

¹ John MacArthur, "The Vilification of Jesus, Part 1" sermon preached via John MacArthur Ministries on April 18, 2004.

couldn't just clean it with soap or a bottle of Clorox. Leviticus said you had to remove that whole section of the wall. And if the mold came back, you had to burn the whole house down!² Jesus uses this as a picture of the person who tries to use the law to clean their life up. They get rid of their bad habits, get their addictions under control, get rid of bad relationships, and turn over a new leaf. They are serious about change.

But vs. 26 Then (that unclean spirit) goes and brings seven other spirits more evil than itself, and they enter and settle down there. As a result, that person's last condition is worse than the first." The demons don't mind the clean-up--in fact, they like it, and it certainly doesn't stop them from coming back. In much bigger numbers. The use of the number 7 is meant to imply completion. That's what it means in Hebrew. It's like saying "the last state of that man is infinitely worse."

Listen: **Religion and self-improvement apart from Jesus opens the door to more deceptive and more dangerous demons.** Religious change, or self-improvement, is often accompanied by pride and judgmentalism and self-sufficiency and those things are infinitely worse than alcoholism or a bad temper. **Tim Keller uses this illustration:** A little boy falls down and scrapes his knee, and let's say he really is being overly emotional about it. His dad comes over. "Son, get up. Be a man. You don't want to be a little pansy, do you? Stop crying." OK, here's my question: Can that motivation help this little boy stop crying? It can. His dad's word can help him sweep his house; tame his emotions; get some control. But what has happened now? The little boy didn't just take himself back from being overly emotional. No, now he's given himself to a new master, the fear of looking weak. And say that becomes a driving force in his life: *Never look weak*. Because weakness makes you deficient as a person, so cover it at all costs. **Now imagine this guy's marriage.** You can't have a healthy marriage if you're always scared of looking weak, refusing to be vulnerable, or shutting off your emotions. So yes, through the dad's motivation the little boy was freed from being overly emotional, but he did so by giving himself to a new master, a worse one. The medication had worse side effects than the disease.

You conquered alcoholism but developed a judgemental arrogant spirit. That's 7x worse. You overcame your insecurity by becoming a driven, domineering, and self-sufficient person. That's 7 more demons. You avoid conflict by retracting inward and just not having friends anymore. That's 7 more demons. You avoid pain by never committing to anyone. 7 more demons.³

Jesus is the only Master who can free you from your demons and make you whole again. It's ironic, but freedom in the Christian life only comes from giving yourself fully to Jesus!

So then, let's ask. What does this passage teach us about how to change--both ourselves and others?

Jesus teaches us in this passage that there are two conditions for real spiritual power. Number one is in vs. 23. Write down:

² Leviticus 14:33-47

³ Timothy Keller, "The Power to Change" sermon preached via "Gospel in Life Ministries" on February 7, 1993.

1. Total Surrender

Again, **23 Anyone who is not with me is against me, and anyone who does not gather with me scatters.**

- Until you are under the full possession of the Stronger Man's authority, you are powerless to fend off the domination of the Strong Man, Satan.
- Clean-up, or self-reform, or pledges to do better won't do it. You're either all-in with Team Jesus or you're still on Team Satan. (And to be on Team Jesus means that you have surrendered 100% of who you are--all your hopes, dreams, ambitions, ideas--to him.)
- Now, you say, "Hold on, hold on. No way. I may not be a fully committed Christian, but I don't belong to Satan." Yes you do.
- **Devil owns the fence** illus.
- Listen, you are either fully surrendered to Jesus, or you are still a possession of Satan. He doesn't care if you recognize that--you still belong to him. You say, "I wouldn't be like those religious rulers who call Jesus "the ruler of dung" and crucified him."⁴ Yes you would. There's only two teams. **Like we often say: In every heart there is a throne and a cross ...**
- Christianity is not about self-improvement, it's about surrender. So, the only question is, "Are you fully surrendered?"
 - **It reminds me of C.S. Lewis' analogy.** We come to Jesus like people whose house is in disrepair--it's dirty, smelly, the carpet is worn out--and we hear he can fix it so we ask him to help us clean it up. And he does, but then he starts knocking down walls. And you say, "Wait a minute, Jesus, I just wanted a clean up--I wanted help tidying up my room, my marriage, my habits, my career, my kids, etc." And Jesus said, "I can help you with all those things. But to get that help, the house has to belong entirely to me. I don't come just as your divine servant to help you become a more and better you, I come as the owner. I'm not here to take requests, I'm here to take over."
 - And so it means if you come to Jesus the only way to come is in total surrender--to say, "All I am, all I have; all I ever hope to be I now and forever offer to you."
- We don't come to God, Lewis said, as bad people who need to be made into better people. We come to him as rebels to lay down our arms.
- We're not here to turn over a new leaf; we come in surrender to receive a new life.

Total surrender.

Before we go to our last point: COMMUNION. Does this represent total surrender to the Stronger Man?

2. Prayer

This second way to access this divine power is through prayer. Earnest, unrelenting prayer. We didn't read it, but in the passage right before this one--the first 13 verses of this chapter, Jesus had been teaching about the power of prayer. And he told a story about a man who had unexpected visitors in the middle of the night and

⁴ John MacArthur, "The Vilification of Jesus, Part 1" sermon preached via John MacArthur Ministries on April 18, 2004.

needed bread to feed his guests so goes over to his neighbor in the middle of the night and knocks and knocks and knocks until his friend gets up and gives him the loaves he is asking for. "This," Jesus says, "is how you should pray." He concluded this teaching by saying, "If you... know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit (the Stronger Man) to those who ask him?" (Luke 11:13)

Then Jesus tells the stories about the demons. If you want the power of the Holy Spirit--**the Spirit of Jesus, the Stronger Man--in and through your life, you get it not only through surrender but also through desperate, urgent, unrelenting prayer.**

Jesus reinforced this in another place, btw. Mark 9, a man had brought his son, who was afflicted by a demon that caused convulsions, to Jesus' disciples, but the disciples couldn't cast the demon out. So they brought the father and his son to Jesus, and Jesus cast the demon out. **After the incident was over**, the disciples said, "Hey Jesus, why couldn't we drive him out? Why wouldn't the ball go in when we shot it?"

"And he told them, 'This kind can come out by nothing but prayer.'" (Mark 9:29) (btw, some MSS add 'and fasting')

God unleashes the power of the Stronger Man through us into the lives of others through **desperate, urgent, unrelenting prayer.**

Listen: **What your friends, and your kids, need, is not your "sweeping and cleaning" efforts in their lives.** What they need is the presence of the Stronger Man. Your cleaning efforts cannot expunge the demonic activity from them. It takes the power and presence of the Stronger Man, and that comes only through prayer.

So, why then, do we spend so much time thinking about how to talk to men about God and so little talking to God about those men?

This is the reason we have begun this year with **21 Days of Fasting and Prayer.** We want to see the finger of God in our community. Amen? We want to see it in our church. Our families. Amen? Do you want to see that? These only come out by fervent, unrelenting prayer.

The good news is that the strong man, more powerful though he may be than us, is no match for the power of the Stronger Man. Vs. **22 But when one stronger than he attacks and overpowers him, he takes from him all his weapons he trusted in, and divides up his plunder.**

It's a rout! Jesus plunders him. Humiliates him! I both love how the book of Revelation depicts the last battle, and I'm a little disappointed at the same time. Because it's kind of anti-climactic. You have all these battle forces arrayed against Jesus and his people and you think you're in for an epic Lord-of-the-Rings-style battle. But Jesus walks onto the scene and just speaks and all his enemies basically evaporate. I wanted a little more action. But the point is: their power is no match for his. He's the Stronger Man. He's the finger of God.

The good news is that God has called you and I to bring the power of the Strong Man into other people's lives. Again, **vs. 22** when the STRONGER MAN takes over he *divides up his plunder*. What is Satan's plunder? The souls of people around us that Satan holds captive. Our children. Friends headed toward destruction. Friends in decimated marriages. They are held captive by the Strong Man. We want to bring to them the power of the Stronger Man.

Friend, Jesus wants to do more than help you survive or endure the Christian life. He wants to use you to plunder Satan's Kingdom. He didn't come just to give you peace like a river in your soul or warm fuzzies on a cold night; he wants to use you to PLUNDER the works of the enemy around you.

But when one stronger than he attacks and overpowers him, he takes from him all his weapons he trusted in, and divides up his plunder... if you then know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit (the Stronger Man) to those who ask him? (Luke 11:22, 13)

- Missionaries at work in places all around the world where Satan holds people captive under earthly governments that keep people in bondage from hearing the gospel: *This promise is for you.*
- For those of you at work in our city in places where there is poverty and injustice; in pregnancy centers where women consider what to do with a precious unborn baby that Satan wants to destroy. *This promise is for you.*
- To parents discouraged by the influence of the world on your children. Husbands concerned with what is happening in the life of your spouse. *This promise is for you.*
- To those of you who know someone that you sense is afflicted, physically, emotionally, spiritually, by our Enemy. *This promise is for you. He's ready to use you, but these kinds go not out but by prayer and fasting.*

Two part invitation:

- Are you surrendered? Ready to? Did during communion? Raise your hand, For salvation **text READY to 33933**.
- Who do you need to pray for? Prayer counselors are in place. Come. For prayer, you can click the "request prayer" button and a live host will pray with you right now in a private chat... OR if you're watching on-demand you can email prayer@summitchurch.com and someone from our team will reach out to you.