

Drawing a Line in the Sand

Luke 11:14-28

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The scene of this study is not unfamiliar in the four Gospel accounts. Yet again, Jesus faces challenges among the crowd, who are being stirred up against Him by the Jewish religious leaders. This time, they question from where Jesus has obtained His miraculous power. But, as we've seen so often before, Jesus flips the question back on the corrupt religious leaders, and in the process, reminds us Who's power we are submitting to when we accept Jesus as our Savior.

The expression “drawing a line in the sand” is an phrase that refers to a decision you need to make; a direction you need to take that will affect your life in some significant way.

Legend has it that this phrase originated with the Spartans at Thermopylae, in 480 BC, where a line was drawn in the sand signifying they would not retreat from the opposing Persian army.

There is the legend of a Roman general, centuries later, drawing a line in the sand and daring an enemy commander to cross that line.

More recently, in 1836, Colonel William Travis, the commanding officer at The Alamo, is said to have drawn a line in the sand with his sword, allowing soldiers to either leave their post or stay and fight to the end.

“Drawing a line in the sand” represents, to this day, a significant moment of decision.

Several times now, in the public ministry of Jesus, we're told that great crowds are gathering; the crowds were growing in number (Luke 11:29); thousands of people were gathering to hear Him (Luke 12:1).

They're coming from everywhere, massing around this miracle worker—this radical teacher who claimed divine power.

We arrive at this signature event where the conflict between the kingdom of light and the kingdom of darkness takes center stage.

In Luke's Gospel account, as we arrive at chapter 11 and now at verse 14, Jesus effectively says to the multitudes, "I'm going to draw a line in the sand; it's time to decide who's side you're on." Luke records here in verse 14:

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

Luke 11:14

Matthew's Gospel adds that this demonized man was both mute and blind as a result of demon possession (**Matthew 12:22-23**).

The religious world of Jesus' day was already convinced that the power of restoring sight and the inherent power to exorcise demons belonged to God. Even the religious were sometimes unable to free the demonized person.

Add to that all the superstitions that were being taught. The rabbis were teaching people that demons haunted narrow pathways and rooftops and even outhouses—I can believe *that* one.

The rabbis taught there were morning demons and midday demons and nighttime demons. There were exorcists on the payroll of the temple; and they recommended protection by carefully following the law, reciting the Psalms, putting verses on their doorposts, burning incense, and muttering all sorts of superstitious incantations.

Adapted from Edwin M. Yamauchi & Marvin R. Wilson, *Dictionary of Daily Life* (Hendrickson Publishers, 2017), p. 421

Here's the point: they knew that only God had the power to simply command the demons without having to use incense or incantations.

So here comes Jesus—no incense, no mumbo jumbo, no hocus pocus—just the power of His word.

And more and more people are witnessing the power of His word.

So, this creates a problem: it's one thing to argue with His teaching, and the religious leaders were figuring out how to do that; but it's another thing entirely to ignore His power—His demon-controlling power.

Adapted from Ivor Powell, *Luke's Thrilling Gospel* (Kregel, 1965), p. 270

So now it leaves them with one option; here it is, at **verse 15**:

But some of them said, "He casts out demons by Beelzebul, the prince of demons."

Luke 11:15

In other words, we can't discredit what He's doing it, so we'll discredit how He's doing it.

He's doing it by the power of Beelzebul.

The name **Beelzebul** is a compound word made up of *Beel*, from the Canaanite god of fertility named Baal, which means "lord". *Zebul* means "exalted dwelling"; it could be rendered, "lord of the house."

The Israelites essentially came to mock this name by changing it to Baal-Zebub—used in 2 Kings 1—which means, “lord of the flies,” a reference to dung flies that laid their eggs in manure.

Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary: Volume 1 (Zondervan, 2002), p. 420

Over time, this title **Beelzebul** would come to refer to Satan as the vile lord of the demonic world, the prince of demons.

Matthew’s Gospel account of this event informs us that the Pharisees were the ones who threw this accusation at Jesus.

They can’t deny His power; they can’t ignore His miracles; they can’t explain how easy it is for Him to command the world of demons, so they do the only thing they can think of: they accuse Him of being in league with none other than the Prince of Demons.

This is terrible blasphemy and total, corrupt unbelief.

Now some in the crowd aren’t as convinced as the religious leaders, so Luke says here in **verse 16**:

*While others, to test him,
kept seeking from him a
sign from heaven.*

Luke 11:16

In other words, the Pharisees are convinced Jesus is in league with hell, so these people want Jesus to give them a sign that he’s in league with heaven.

Send us a sign from above.

It could be: a replication of the sun standing still in **Joshua 10**; or manna falling from heaven in **Exodus 16**; or the turning back of daylight in **2 Kings 20**; or fire falling from the sky to vindicate the prophet Elijah who challenged the false prophets of Baal in **1 Kings 18**.

That would settle it; *Do what Elijah did; show us you’re not in league with Baal by calling down fire from heaven!*

Jesus isn’t about to do any of that. They have already seen His miracles; they have just witnessed another demonstration of His power; they’ve witnessed one sign after another.

One author said they now want signs that the signs were signs.

Dale Ralph Davis, *Luke: The Year of the Lord’s Favor* (Christian Focus, 2021), p. 206

What Jesus does instead is make them think; He enrolls them in a crash course in logic, as if to say, “Why don’t you use your heads for a change?”

In his response, Jesus is now going to lead them into a logical cul-de-sac that effectively silences them.

For the sake of our study, let me put His response into three questions that Jesus essentially asks them.

Why would Satan empower Me to destroy him?

Now verse 17:

*But he, knowing their
thoughts, said to them,
“Every kingdom divided*

*against itself is laid waste,
and a divided household
falls. And if Satan also is
divided against himself,
how will his kingdom
stand?"*

Luke 11:17-18a

In other words, think about it: if Satan has turned, and is now in the business of casting out his own demons, then the demonic world is divided against itself. That's a formula for defeat.

Darrell Bock, [Luke: Volume 1](#) (Baker Academic, 1994), p. 1076

Think about it: don't be absurd!

Douglas Sean O'Donnell, [Matthew](#) (Crossway, 2013), p.

Why would Satan empower Me to divide his own kingdom.

You need to do a better job connecting the dots than that!

Satan might be evil, but he's not a moron.

Davis, p. 206.

And he would have to be a moron to empower Me to overpower him.

While they're standing there scratching their heads, Jesus asks the second question; let me put it like this:

**If Satan's the one empowering Me,
how do you know He's not
empowering all of you?**

Verse 18, the middle part:

*"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."*

Luke 11:18b-19

In other words, let your own disciples, your own spiritual descendants be the judge. Are they empowered by Satan or by God?

If Satan is empowering me, how do you know that Satan is not empowering them?

Now they're really scratching their heads.

Here's the third question:

**If Satan's kingdom is powerless before
My word, isn't it obvious that My
kingdom is more powerful than his?**

Verse 20:

*"But if it is by the finger of
God that I cast out demons,
then the kingdom of God
has come upon you.*

Luke 11:20

In other words, "You're in the presence of the true King; you're watching a demonstration of the power of My kingdom of light over the kingdom of darkness.

But since you know this means I have the right to be your King, you want to deny the obvious.

Jesus now gives an illustration here in verse 21:

“When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own palace, 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 spoil.

Luke 11:21-22

Let me tell you, by now, everybody in this multitude is getting the picture.

Satan is the strong man who seems in control of his palace; he’s in charge of his castle and nobody messes with him; but then Someone stronger than him shows up at the palace gate and easily overthrows this little lord of his castle, and it isn’t even a fight—just a word.

Right about now, the Pharisees are wishing they’d never brought up Beelzebul. Too late now.

Let me tell you what you’re seeing here; Jesus puts it this way back in **verse 20**: this is ***the finger of God***.

Oh, they would have immediately understood this allusion.

It would take them back to Exodus chapter 8 where Pharaoh’s magicians were eventually unable to duplicate the plagues and they finally yield to the supremacy of the God of Moses, and

they tell Pharaoh ***“This is the finger of God” (Exodus 8:19)***.

Jesus’s statement would take them back to Mount Sinai, where we’re told that the 10 Commandments were ***“written with the finger of God” (Exodus 31:18)***.

This would take them back to David’s great song where he declared that the heavens—the moon and the stars—were ***the work of God’s fingers (Psalm 8:3)***.

You know what Jesus is saying here? He’s saying, “Look, what you have in front of you today is a demonstration of the hand of God.

But it’s more than that, you have the Lord of the Kingdom performing this demonstration as if to say, “I am the physical, tangible incarnation of the finger of God.”

Connect the dots.

And because of Who I am, isn’t it time for you to decide who you are. Are you My follower or not?

I’m drawing a line in the sand, and you need to make a decision. ***Here it is verse 23:***

“Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters.”

Luke 11:23

You’re either with Me—working with Me to gather My followers—or you’re working against me.

Satan is scattering and destroying; Jesus is gathering and building. Warren Wiersbe writes an application from this text: We must make a choice, and if we choose to make no choice, we are actually choosing against Christ.

Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Compassionate: Luke 1-13* (Victor Books, 1988), p. 126

It's time to decide.

I think it's interesting that Jesus does the same thing Elijah did after defeating the false prophets of Baal, Elijah said: ***"How long will you go limping between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow Him; but if Baal, then follow him" (1 Kings 18:22).***

This rings true to this day. You are either following God or you are following Baal; you either belong to the kingdom of darkness or you belong to the kingdom of light.

There is no such thing as neutrality in true Christianity. Neutrality is unbelief.

Jesus effectively draws a line in the sand and asks the question of the ages which He is asking you today: who's side are you on? Are you with Me, or against Me?

Jesus can read their minds, as we were told back in **verse 17**: ***"that He knew their thoughts."***

He knows that many in the crowd are saying to themselves the same things people are saying today, maybe even in here this morning:

I respect Jesus, but it's too uncomfortable to follow Him so openly.

Right now, I don't want to be put in an awkward position in front of my religious leaders and religious heritage; my friends and my extended family to declare that I am a follower Jesus. I don't want to go too far in following Jesus, some of what He says is nice, but why does everything He says have to be necessary. Jesus shouldn't draw a line in the sand like this; He's asking too much!

However, I do need to clean up some stuff in my life; I know I'm not as good with God as I should be. So, I'll let Jesus be my example, but not my leader; He can be my Savior, but I don't Him to be my Sovereign.

He can be my friend without begin my King, can't He?

No, He can't.

I believe that's why Jesus goes on here to distinguish between moral reformation and spiritual regeneration.

Verse 24:

"When the unclean spirit has gone out of a person, it passes through 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 that person is worse than the first.”

Luke 11:24-26

Moral reformation without spiritual regeneration is worthless in combatting the kingdom of darkness.

In fact, to turn over a new leaf without being given a new life through faith in Christ puts someone in greater danger than ever.

Here is someone Jesus describes as morally upright—swept clean of evil actions, so to speak—religiously devoted, but the spiritual vacuum still exists.

The trouble is they are now deceived by their own sense of spirituality; they are now deceived by their own sense of religious devotion; they are now open to seven-fold deceptions, even more evil can sweep in and lead them further and further away from the kingdom of light and into the clutches of kingdom of darkness.

One author wrote on this text: you cannot leave someone’s soul empty. It is not enough to banish the evil thoughts and the evil habits and the old ways and leave the soul empty. An empty soul is a soul in peril.

William Barclay, *The Gospel of Luke* (Westminster Press, 1975), p. 149

I would agree; it is not enough to be morally reformed. It is not enough to be done with evil. “It is not enough to be emptied of wrong.” We must be filled with all that is right as we follow Jesus Christ.

Bruce B. Barton, *Life Application Bible: Luke* (Tyndale, 1997), p. 298

Now immediately after this, you have another response from the crowd, this one is closer to the truth, but it still misses the point; **verse 27:**

As he said these things, a woman in the crowd raised her voice and said to him, “Blessed is the womb that bore you, and the breasts at which you nursed!”

Luke 11:27

This was a backhanded compliment: “Your mother was so blessed to have a son like you.” Something my mother never heard when I was growing up. Take heart moms, it’s not over yet.

It was common both in Roman culture and Jewish culture to praise someone by congratulating their mother.

Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary, p. 42

Jesus doesn’t rebuke her. In fact, this is the same thing Elizabeth said to Mary when she found out Mary was carrying the Messiah: **“Blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb” (Luke 1:42).**

Jesus doesn’t scold her for this compliment; He just tells her she’s missing the point. He says to her here in **verse 28:**

But he said, “Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it!”

Luke 11:28

The original construction could be translated, “Yes, but blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it.”

Jesus doesn’t need to be complimented or admired or applauded; Jesus is demanding worship and obedience to His word.

His word which is the theme of these events.

His word which freed this demonized man.

His word that overpowers the Castle of Satan.

His word that fills the vacuum of your soul.

His word that brings true blessing and life.

His word—like a line drawn in the sand— invites you to cross over it and follow Him

into the Kingdom of Heaven or stay where you are and belong to the kingdom of hell.

I have read the results of a research project from Columbia University that took place a few years ago. The research found that the average person consciously makes around 70 decisions a day. That’s 25,000 decisions a year. Over an average lifetime of 75-80 years, that comes to 2 million decisions in a lifetime.

John Ortberg, [All the Places to Go](#) (Tyndale House, 2015), p. 8

But let me tell you, of those 2 million decisions, none of them will be as important as your decision to claim Jesus Christ as your Savior and Lord

To open the door to your castle, to admit your darkness and sin, to lay down your arms and surrender to this strong one— this omnipotent Lord, Who is the King of light and everlasting life.

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