

No Middle Ground

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 22 February 2026

Preacher: Ryan Akers

[0:00] Our scripture reading tonight comes from Luke chapter 11 verses 14 to 28. And Luke writes for us, Now Jesus was casting out a demon that was mute.

! When the demon had gone out, the mute man spoke, and the people marveled. But some of them said, He cast out demons by Beelzebul, the prince of demons, while others, to test him, kept seeking from him a sign from heaven.

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? 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 palace, his goods are safe.

[1:13] But when one stronger than he attacks him and overcomes him, he takes away his armor, in which he trusted, and divides his spoil. Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters.

When the unclean spirit had 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 it brings seven other spirits, more evil than itself. And they enter and they dwell there. And the last state of that person is worse than the first. 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 breast at which you nursed.

But he said, Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it. This is God's holy word. As Corey mentioned, we've been doing a series on discipleship on Sunday nights.

And leave it up to David and Corey to leave me a passage about casting out demons. I typically think of that as maybe year two of discipleship. But we won't be talking as much about exorcisms tonight.

[2:28] But as I was thinking about this passage, I was thinking about there was a period of time not so long ago where there was just a pressure on churches and ministries to come out and make a public statement about everything that was going on in the culture.

And so churches and ministries were scrambling around trying to say, Oh, do we say something about this? Do we need to put this on our social media? Or make some kind of public statement? What do we say? Because there was this idea that if you weren't doing that, it was basically silence means consent.

Did you guys have that here? Or was that just in the States where that was going on? But it was one of those things where if you're not for me, you are against me.

If you're not actively saying how much you're against this, that must mean that you are for this. Now, whether or not that's true in political issues and things like that, it's certainly true when it comes to following Jesus.

And that's what this passage does talk to us about. Now, this is one of those hard passages where if you try to get into explaining exactly what Jesus is talking about with the demon possession and what it means when a demon leaves and comes back, it can be one of those hard, even kind of weird passages.

[3:46] And many of us really maybe have only heard this passage when someone famous has quoted it. Like in history, Abraham Lincoln quoted the, you know, how can a house against itself cannot stand kind of thing.

But it is one of those passages that tells us a lot about discipleship. And essentially it tells us that with Jesus, there is no neutrality. There is no middle ground.

So let's look at this passage and see what it tells us about discipleship. But Jesus up until this point, as what we've been looking at in discipleship in the book of Luke, Jesus has been teaching us about discipleship.

Started out where he sent his followers out to do ministry. They sent them out in twos. He sent the 72. That idea, when Jesus called his disciples, he said things like, follow me and I will make you what?

Fishers of men, right? There's this active ministry that I'm calling you to do. And he shows us that in Luke chapter 10. He also then, we had a Sunday night, we talked about Jesus telling us about loving our neighbor.

[4:55] And who is our neighbor? That includes even our enemies. And Jesus shows us that we are the ones in need of help. And we view people like that as well, so that we can actually even help our enemies.

Because that's what Jesus did for us. We talked about those that sat at the feet of Jesus versus over-anxious working and serving. And how Mary chose the better part instead of having an anxious heart of serving.

And then we also talked about prayer. So all these things, we're talking about discipleship. So when we come to the passage tonight, the religious leaders have been challenging Jesus.

So I wanted us to first look at the different points of view that are given here in this passage.

Starting with Jesus, we see that he was casting out a demon.

Now, this shows that Jesus has power over the supernatural. Okay? Even the demons, the supernatural beings are obedient to him.

[5:58] Then we see, as Corey read, that Jesus knew the thoughts of the people and the questions that they were asking and how they were trying to test him.

Jesus has the power over the natural, over our minds, knowing what our thoughts are. And in that, Jesus didn't give in to their demands. They were asking for a sign from heaven.

And he did not give in to their demands. But instead, he actually patiently dealt with them in their questions. This would be one of those times where you might want to turn over the tables and say, I know what you're thinking.

You can't hide it from me. Stop. But instead, he patiently answers their questions and deals with them in a way that they didn't deserve. And then also, what we see in this passage, that Jesus makes references to him being the Messiah.

We'll talk about that more in just a minute. All this points to the fact, with Jesus having power of the supernatural over the natural, knowing their thoughts, commanding the demons, all these things point to the fact that Jesus is the Lord of all creation.

[7:07] He is the Messiah. And he treats people with undeserved kindness. Okay? So how do you properly respond to someone like that?

We'll answer that in just a minute. Let's look now at the point of view of the people here in the story. It says in verse 14 that the people that observed what were going on, they marveled.

There was something unique about Jesus. We see in verse 19 that there were some other people who were casting out demons. So there was something absolutely unique about what Jesus was doing.

What was different? In this account, the same account in Matthew chapter 12, it says they were amazed. What was different? Well, one of the things that we see, especially in the gospel of Mark, when Jesus is performing these miracles, casting out demons, and even his teaching, the thing that made him stand apart from all others was his authority.

He had authority over the demons. He had authority in his teaching. And they marveled at this.

They marveled at his authority so that even in Matthew chapter 12, those that were marveling even said, could this be the son of David?

[8:16] Is this the Messiah who we have been waiting for? But others accused Jesus of being evil. Matthew tells us that this is the Pharisees. Mark mentions the scribes. So basically, it was the religious leaders that were questioning Jesus, in a sense, calling him evil, that you cast out these demons through the power of the prince of demons, Beelzebul.

So some were suggesting that Jesus was the Messiah, but yet some were even the opposite, saying that he was working the works of the devil. Beelzebul can translate into something like master of the house.

And so the prince of demons is what it mentions here. They are saying that you are, in fact, evil. Okay? And then there are others who were skeptical.

And it says they kept seeking a sign. So after Jesus has performed many miracles, this one here, casting out the demon of a mute man, he speaks.

[9:20] They recognize that there's something unique about him. But yet others are saying, show us another sign. Show us a sign from heaven. They are testing Jesus, it says.

And so when they say a sign from heaven, maybe it's something like the story of Elijah, when he's battling the prophets of Beel, and he calls down lightning from heaven. Maybe that's what they're talking about.

But essentially, they're saying, we need to see more proof. We need to see more. And the imperfect tense here, that translate into they kept seeking a sign, many scholars are saying that that's referencing the fact that there's really nothing Jesus can do that could ever convince them.

There's no proof that will ever be enough for them. But instead, they keep testing him. They want to sit on the fence and wait for something more.

We see similar responses to Jesus today. There are actually people that will marvel at Jesus. They're fascinated by him. Maybe it's his message of love.

[10:24] Maybe it's all of his talk about forgiveness. Maybe it's his lifting up the poor and marginalized, like had never been done before. Or turning leadership upside down on its head.

Maybe it's the way he treated women. Or how he talked about loving his enemies, loving your enemies. Maybe it's the way that he critiqued hypocrites, hypocrisy, his emphasis on forgiveness. Whatever it is, people today will marvel at Jesus. You're familiar with the show, The Chosen? It is now in 175 countries as of 2025.

The numbers are incredible. And they found that one third of viewers are non-Christians. There's something that is just fascinating about Jesus. People marvel at who was this person, this good teacher, whoever he was, who is he?

People will marvel at him. But yet there are others that would accuse him of being evil. He's intolerant. He's exclusive. He teaches on this thing of eternal punishment and hell.

[11:30] He has this outdated sexual ethic. And he didn't disrupt the Romans in their love for slavery. They will accuse him of things that are even evil.

We see that today. And then there are some people who are skeptical and keep wanting a sign. Show us more. They don't want to commit because they want more proof.

Give us proof. Evidence is not enough. We need you to prove it. Even at, like the people in this passage, ignoring reason. They've seen what Jesus has done, yet they say, give us another sign. Show us more. They've seen him feed 5,000. But yet, show us more. And that's the way many people are today. And then you've got at the end of this passage, this woman who blesses Jesus. Blessed is the womb that bore you and the breast at which you nursed. And Jesus said, blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it. There are many that would bless Jesus by saying, oh, he's a great teacher.

[12:34] Even a prophet. They will say these things, but they do not recognize that he can't just be a good teacher. He's either a liar, a lunatic, or he is the Lord as he claimed.

So we have people today who will give us a similar response to Jesus as we see back 2,000 years ago. They responded to Jesus in the same way. So we've seen the point of view of Jesus.

We've seen the point of view of the people. Real quickly, just to kind of not address much, but just here we see the enemy. We see that the enemy has forces and he is active.

That is a reality in our world today. But we also see that he is vulnerable and that God is greater. So what God is doing is actually tearing down Satan's strongholds, sacking his fortifications, bringing in his kingdom.

His kingdom is coming, and the kingdom of Satan is crumbling. The reality is, discipleship is engaging in spiritual war.

[13:47] In fact, I started to let that be the title of the sermon tonight, discipleship engaging in the battle or engaging in war, because this true discipleship, if you are following Jesus, we are pushing back the forces of darkness.

We are actually battling against the enemy. And through discipleship, God is taking back his kingdom. What is rightfully his. So again, I think the big question in discipleship that this passage forces us to ask is, how do you properly respond to Jesus?

How do you properly respond to someone like this, that the demons even obey, that they believe, as we heard this morning, they know all these truths about Jesus, and they shudder.

So how do we properly respond to Jesus? It's not just intellectual assent, like Corey talked about this morning. Because, again, even the demons know who he is and recognize his divinity, recognize who he is.

So what is the proper response to Jesus? Before we answer that, a couple more things just to point out that I think are pretty important for us to understand in this passage. So, Jesus is demonstrating that the kingdom of God is coming upon them because the king has come.

[15:07] Why do I say that? Well, when you look at verse 20, Jesus explains what happened as the finger of God. If the finger of God has done this, you know that the kingdom has come, or the kingdom is coming.

Okay? That phrase, the finger of God, is a phrase that's used a couple of times in the Old Testament. One time, first, it was used when the magicians of Egypt couldn't reproduce the plagues that God was doing, and they said, this must be the finger of God, because they couldn't do what he was doing.

The second time was when God was being credited with writing the law on the two stone tablets. It was by the finger of God. So when Jesus is using that phrase that is by the finger of God that this has happened, that's a sign that the king has come, and that God himself is doing this work.

Okay? So that's one thing. How do you properly respond to the one who is doing the very works of God? Well, Jesus tells us in verse 23, when he says, whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters.

Whoever is not with me is against me. In discipleship, there is no middle ground. There's no neutrality. How do you properly respond to Jesus? It's with wholehearted devotion, commitment.

[16:37] It's following him with all of our heart, with loving him with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. And if you don't do this, if you're not following him in this way, Jesus says, you're against me.

That's how to properly respond to Jesus. Discipleship is about following Jesus, learning to love what he loves, hate what he hates, obeying his commands out of love, because we know he first loved us.

When you think about a wholehearted obedience and what that means, you can think about Peter and Andrew, his brother, when they were called by Jesus, we mentioned this earlier, he said, follow me and I will make you fishers of men.

What did they do? They dropped their nets. They left their livelihood. They left it all to follow him. And then right after that, you have the call of James and John.

It says they left their boat and their father. What do they mean by that? They left the family business. They left their future career. They left their livelihood in order to follow Jesus.

[17:50] There's no middle ground when it comes to Jesus. Discipleship is learning how to follow Jesus with all my heart, how to love him with all my heart, soul, mind, and strength, and to love my neighbor as myself.

Out of obedience, out of love. Is Jesus calling you to leave your career? Probably not. But would you be willing to if he did call you to leave your career?

Would you leave your family, move your immediate family overseas, or to, well, sorry to say, that wouldn't have been funny.

I'm going to scratch what I just, another city, a different place, that maybe is your Nineveh, right? That maybe is the place, please, Lord, don't take me to that place.

Would you be willing to go there? There's no middle ground when it comes to following Jesus. You're either for him, or you're against him.

[18:49] And then, Jesus says something really interesting, when he continues that. Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me, scatters.

Why this language? Why did he use that? Whoever does not gather with me, scatters. Well, scholars tell us, that he's referring to the gathering of sheep, God's people.

It is a shepherding image, that was used in places like Ezekiel chapter 34, using covenant and messianic language here. In this passage, Ezekiel 34, the leaders of Israel are rebuked, because they've taken advantage of the sheep, and even prayed on the sheep, instead of taking care of them.

I'll just read a few verses in that passage. Ezekiel 34, 4 and 5. He's rebuking them, saying, the weak you've not strengthened, the sick you have not healed, the injured you have not bound up, the strayed you have not brought back, the lost you have not sought, and with force and harshness you have ruled them.

So they were scattered, because there was no shepherd, and they became food for all the wild beasts. My sheep were scattered. And then we drop down to verses 23 and 24.

[20:08] Then God says, I will set up over them one shepherd, my servant David, which that would mean the Messiah, and he shall feed them. He shall feed them and be their shepherd, and I, the Lord, will be their God.

And my servant David shall be prince among them. I am the Lord. I have spoken. Jesus is saying, if you aren't with me in gathering the lost sheep, you're scattering.

If we aren't on mission with God, with Jesus in this mission, we're scattering. There's no neutral ground here.

We might think we're kind of taking a sideline view, but Jesus says it's not that way. In discipleship, you're either on mission gathering with me, or you are actively scattering.

This is significant to understand. And the consistent witness of the New Testament is that when you become a follower of Christ, you're now called to be on mission with him. Now, this doesn't mean that we're all going to be evangelists or full-time ministry or missionaries or anything like that.

[21:22] Some of you might. Are you open for that? Corey just talked about, we're starting to pray and think about the next church plant. Would you be willing to say, here am I, send me?

I look at some people out here who are here tonight who are a part of those that said, we'll go and plant other churches. In fact, there are a lot of people here tonight that have done that. Would you be willing?

Ephesians 2.10 says, for we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which he prepared beforehand for us to do. There have been good works that we are supposed to do as his workmanship, as he created, some would say the poem, the masterpiece of God, that we have been given good works to do.

2 Corinthians 5.20 tells us that we are ambassadors for Christ. We're his representatives out into the world who have been given the ministry of reconciliation, the message of reconciliation, saying, be reconciled to God.

So as a follower of Christ, in discipleship, the question is not, are you an ambassador? If you are a follower of Christ, you are an ambassador. The question is, are you a good one? Are you an obedient one or not?

[22:42] If you're not gathering with him, you are scattering. I mean, so we even have Acts 1.8 that talks about that you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you and you will be my witnesses.

And he's not just talking to the 11 apostles. He's talking to the church. You will be my witnesses. There is no neutrality here.

No middle ground. All the things that Corey said this morning, I hope if you weren't here, go back and listen to it. At one point I was like, hey, we're preaching the same sermon. This is taking the pressure off me.

So that was good. But he talked about how faith demonstrates itself in good works. And that's a wide range of things from like Abraham, who was willing to sacrifice his one and only son that he loved to the person that just simply meeting a need that's put before them.

Rahab, hiding the spies. So when it comes to Jesus's mission of gathering sheep, we all have a part to play. You might ask someone, what are you doing?

[23:48] Are you just setting out teas and coffees? It's like, no, I'm preparing the space for God's people to fellowship. That's no small thing. I mean, like we've got these bookmarks.

Like if all that you did, you say, well, at least maybe I can write 10 names and pray. You think that's a small thing? We just read Psalm 127, one, the whole motto for the city of Edinburgh, unless the Lord builds the house, we labor in vain.

Laboring in prayer is no small thing. And anyone can do that. Start there. Start with writing 10 names down and start praying every day for those 10 names.

It doesn't have to be this massive thing like willing to move your family overseas. It could be just walking across the hall and talking to your coworker, inviting your neighbor to church, helping somebody in need.

Jesus said, if you give a cup of cold water to one of his, you're ministering to him in his name.

[25:03] A cup of cold water. We can do that. If you are not actively gathering the sheep, you're scattering.

And we all have a part to play. And there's so many ways that we can be a part of that. And Jesus just wants our heart in it. And that is the call of discipleship.

There's no middle ground. Being a disciple of Jesus changes everything. It changes how I spend my time, how I spend my money. Paul even says this in 1 Corinthians, you're not your own for you're bought with a price.

So glorify God in your body. That's the way we think as disciples of Jesus. I'm not my own. I've been bought with a price and I'm going to honor him. I'm going to glorify him with my body. When you think about the implications of being a disciple, however, you do understand what Jesus was saying when he says count the cost.

You don't go to war. A king doesn't go to war without counting the cost. So it is when you're following Jesus, we do count the cost. And we find that it's worth it. Jesus is worth it.

[26:09] There's no middle ground. There's no neutrality. I started not to share this so that I don't show my age. But some of you may remember a book.

Okay, so it came out in the 50s, a little booklet that I wasn't around then. But it was big with like InterVarsity, which is UCCF and the CU's little booklet called My Heart, Christ's Homes.

Anybody remember that one? No? Good. Okay. All right. There's a couple of headdots. So I didn't even have to preface that and I would have sounded a lot cooler. But so in this little booklet, My Heart, Christ's Home, it gives a story of imagine that your heart is like rooms in the house that Jesus is coming in.

You've invited him into your life. He is now your Lord. And it's this imagery of Jesus walking through the house. And he finds first the study, which is your thought life and what occupies your mind and how he wants to replace that with the word so that everything you do is from the word of God, informed by the word of God.

Then he goes to the dining room, which is your appetites and desires. And he's wanting to know what are you really longing for? What do you think really satisfies you? And he wants to replace that with the will of God.

[27:27] And then there's the living room, which is where your fellowship happens, relationships, and Jesus is sitting there waiting and no one shows up. And the question is, you know, where's your prayer life?

Are you trying to meet with the Lord? And then he goes to the workshop and all the tools and things and asks, what are you making? And it's like, oh, well, I'm making toys and things for fun.

And he wants to fix that so that you're doing things that have eternal value. And then as he's walking through, there's a terrible stench that's coming from somewhere. And he, Jesus says, I want to go to that room.

And he says, you know, no, I've given you all the other rooms. Let's keep this one private. I just want to keep that one to myself. But when Jesus comes in, he demands the deeds to the house. And so he goes to this hall closet where there's a smell of something dead. And that's where we have hidden sins or things that you want to control and say, not this one.

[28:24] Let me just have this one. And Jesus says, I can't make this my home until I clean it all because it's all mine. And it's this vivid imagery of Jesus coming into our life and taking control of every corner of our lives, every corner submitted to him where we're gladly offering our lives, saying, nevertheless, not my will, but your will be done.

And it just forces us to ask the question, is there an area of your life that we're wanting to keep locked away from Jesus? Is there a dream? Maybe an ambition.

Is there a relationship or bank account? Like what would be in our life that we're trying to say, I want to keep this one, not this one, Lord. Just let me keep this and you can have all the others.

But in discipleship, there is no middle ground. There's no neutrality. If you're not for me, you're against me. If you're not gathering with me, you are scattering, Jesus says.

And the reality is, as we mentioned, we're engaging in war. There's a spiritual battle going on. And discipleship is actively engaging the war, pushing back the darkness.

[29:41] A guy named Robert Coleman wrote a book called The Master Plan of Evangelism. And The Master Plan of Evangelism was really a lot about discipleship. And I don't memorize quotes like from books.

I memorize movie quotes. But I don't really memorize many book quotes. But this is one that has stayed with me for over 25 years now. And Robert Coleman says in that book, we are engaged in warfare, the issues of which are life and death.

And every day that we are indifferent to our responsibilities is a day lost for the cause of Christ. And the idea is, we play a part in this battle. And that's what we're called to in discipleship.

To push back the darkness and to be with Jesus on mission with Him, gathering the sheep. And the question is, when Jesus says, blessed rather of those who hear the Word of God and keep it, are we obeying the Word of God?

Are we treasuring it up in our hearts so that it changes our lives? So that we're trying to say, whatever it is, I will obey, I will do, because I love you. Are we looking for ways to participate in Jesus' mission?

[30:52] And luckily, we've just given you one tonight. And there are many others. And to just understand again that it's not just setting out chairs. It's preparing a space for the worship of God.

It's not just greeting people at the door. I think, I don't know if it was David, but one of the psalmist said, it's better to stand at the doorway of the house of God than to be in a thousand places elsewhere, right?

A thousand days elsewhere. Totally botched that one. But you know what I'm talking about. Where there's just no small thing in God's kingdom. You might feel like this is being a part of, you hear God's mission, and it brings some things to mind that you're like, there's no way that could be me. And Jesus is saying, yes, it can. And if you're following me, it will. Whoever is not with me is against me. Whoever does not gather with me scatters.

And so one of the big takeaways tonight is for us to be with the psalmist that says, give me an undivided heart that I may fear your name. Another translation says, unite my heart that I may fear your name.

[32:05] Following Jesus, there's no middle ground but about wholehearted obedience. Let's pray. God, we thank you that you have called us to follow you.

That you have given us your spirit, you've given us your word, and it tells us that we have all that we need for life and godliness. So you've equipped us in every way to do the work that you've called us to do.

May we trust you. I pray that you would help us to be actively, daily examining our lives to see if there's anything that we're trying to not give over to you.

Not saying, not my will, but your will be done. May we have daily repentance over our sin. May we step into what you're calling us to as a way to gather the sheep as a way to be on mission with you. May we take that seriously, Lord. Help us to love what you love and hate what you hate. For that is the call of discipleship. And may we obey your word.

[33:19] And as Jesus said, blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it. Let us be not hearers, but doers. We pray all this in Jesus' name.

Amen. Amen.