

**THE RADICAL RABBI:  
“A RADICAL ACCUSATION”  
(Luke 11:14-36)**

**INTRODUCTION**

During the message we shared last week, we briefly talked toward the end about countdowns, about how our lives are limited, with a number of days of which we do not know; in fact, nobody knows that number. Along with that, we also mentioned that the church likewise is living limited days, with a number equally unknown before Christ comes and gathers all his worldwide believers home in an event we call the Rapture.

But as I was prepping for this week’s message, the Lord reminded me that Somebody Else was operating on a limited number of days — his Son. The moment Jesus hit the hay of that manger in Bethlehem, he was living an equally preordained number of days. His three-plus years of ministry were likewise on a countdown to their end. But I was also reminded of that moment as recorded in Matthew, Mark and Luke where Jesus dramatically ID’d himself for his disciples; remember? *When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say the Son of Man is?” They replied, “Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” “But what about you?” he asked. “Who do you say I am?” Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God” — Matthew 16:13-16.*

But it’s what Jesus said next that has special relevance to our time together today; he said: *“Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it” — Jesus Christ, Matthew 16:17-18.* Jesus was going to build something he called his “church,” built on his identity as the Messiah, the Son of the living God. This identity was a revelation from God himself, and it would be the foundation of his church — an identity and foundation so strong and so true that, whatever Satan thought to throw at it — whatever plots, whatever efforts — it would fail. Jesus himself would see to that.

So as his time on earth was winding down, all his teachings and revelations need to be understood not only personally, but also understood in the context of the church — the church becoming the presence of Jesus on earth once his physical presence returned to heaven. And he had hand-picked followers who would be taking leadership roles in building and extending that presence. So, for instance, the centrality of God’s word, as displayed by Mary’s choice when Jesus visited in Bethany, needed to be just as central to the church as to each individual follower. The disciples’ quest to have Jesus teach them to pray so they themselves could learn to pray effectively needed to be just as central to the church as well.

It’s that understanding of dual relevance — for the individual and for the church — that we need to consciously, intentionally proceed with as we follow our radical rabbi as his time on earth gradually comes to an end. So let’s begin that conscious, intentional effort right now with **a time in prayer.**

## TEXT

***Jesus was driving out a demon that was mute. When the demon left, the man who had been mute spoke, and the crowd was amazed — Luke 11:14.***

Luke writes this so quietly, so matter-of-fact, that the amazingness of the miracle is almost overlooked. But what can't be overlooked is that this is a powerful, real-world example of Christ's words to the disciples when he announced both his identity and the founding of his church: ***"[T]he gates of Hades will not overcome it [meaning the church]" — Jesus Christ, Matthew 16:18b.*** A man possessed by one of Satan's demons was freed — and it was no contest. The Greek tells us that the demon was expelled, literally "ejected," and sent away — gone. As evidence of that ejection, the man who had been unable to speak now spoke. And upon seeing this, the crowd was amazed; they marveled at what Jesus had done. But not everybody was impressed.

***But some of them said, "By Beelzebul, the prince of demons, he is driving out demons." Others tested him by asking for a sign from heaven — Luke 11:15-16.***

OK; first things first — "Beelzebul" was actually a rather negative variant of the name of the Philistine/Canaanite god Baal-zebul." The name literally means "lord of the flies," i.e., a pile of dung. The Jews would often use this name to reference Satan. So they are accusing Jesus of being in league, literally in partnership, with Satan, the head of the demons — literally, the "devil gods."

Now this accusation was not new; we heard it in Matthew 9 and again in Matthew 12. But it is a profound, jaw-dropping charge. I mean, think about it: A miracle has brought somebody release from demonic imprisonment; they are now free. What should have been a time of rejoicing, especially from the religious leaders to see God working so clearly in their midst, instead became an attempt to turn this amazing moment into an opportunity to charge Jesus with being associated with Satan. How blinded by hate do you have to be that you cannot even tell the difference between a work of God — standing right there in the flesh in the person of Jesus of Nazareth — and a work of Satan!

And then, to top things off, some others in the crowd are not satisfied to simply see a so-called miracle on earth. They want to see some sign from heaven, a sign from God himself, that affirms Christ's association with him — essentially a sign to counter, to their own satisfaction of course, the charge that Christ is in cahoots with the devil. Basically, "OK Jesus, we think you're doing Satan's work. If we're wrong, we want to see something from God himself that proves we're wrong."

***Jesus knew their thoughts and said to them: "Any kingdom divided against itself will be ruined, and a house divided against itself will fall. If Satan is divided against himself, how can his kingdom stand? I say this because you claim that I drive out demons by Beelzebul — Luke 11:17-18.***

By the text saying that "Jesus knew their thoughts," it means that he knew and understood their motivations for the things they were saying and the charges they were making. Obviously they never could have kept their thoughts and intentions away from him. Anyway, Jesus attacks their accusation clearly, quickly and very cleverly. First off, it didn't even make sense to say that he is partnering with Satan when he just freed somebody from Satan. If that's how he's working, Jesus is saying, then Satan and his kingdom are finished. And notice that, by arguing as he does, Jesus is acknowledging that Satan is real, his kingdom is genuine, and his power is substantial.

His second point: ***Now if I drive out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your followers drive them out? So then, they will be your judges. But if I drive out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you — Luke 11:19-20.***

So, if Jesus was driving out demons in concert with the head demon, so to speak, how were Jewish exorcists driving out demons? These religious leaders needed to face a harsh reality: If in fact Jesus was driving out demons by his own divine power — “the finger of God” — then it was God’s kingdom they were witnessing, not Satan’s.

And the phrase “the finger of God” should have resonated with the religious leaders who were so strongly pressing their case, because it came from their own history: When God began the process of bringing his people out of Egypt, he did so through a series of signs and wonders that he performed through Moses. And that process began like this:

First, his brother Aaron’s rod became a snake. But Pharaoh’s sorcerers and magicians replicated that sign. Then Moses commanded the waters of the Nile to become blood. But Pharaoh’s sorcerers and magicians were able to replicate that sign also. With each of these moments, Pharaoh’s heart was hardened, and he refused to let the people of Israel leave Egypt. Next came a plague of frogs overrunning the entire nation but, once again, Pharaoh’s sorcerers and magicians were able to replicate that sign as well — and Pharaoh continued to refuse.

But then this happened: ***Then the Lord said to Moses, “Tell Aaron, ‘Stretch out your staff and strike the dust of the ground,’ and throughout the land of Egypt the dust will become gnats.” They did this, and when Aaron stretched out his hand with the staff and struck the dust of the ground, gnats came on people and animals. All the dust throughout the land of Egypt became gnats. But when the magicians tried to produce gnats by their secret arts, they could not. Since the gnats were on people and animals everywhere, the magicians said to Pharaoh, “This is the finger of God” — Exodus 8:16-19a.*** In other words, this was power far beyond them, a power of God — just like now, just like Jesus.

And then Christ continued: ***When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own house, his possessions are safe. But when someone stronger attacks and overpowers him, he takes away the armor in which the man trusted and divides up his plunder — Luke 11:21-22.***

The third and final point Christ makes is that, by their admitting that he was actually capable of driving out demons, they are admitting to his power. The only way he could drive out a demon of Satan is if he was more powerful, if he was greater than Satan. He presents this through the vehicle of a short parable, where he compares Satan to a strong man as well as an armed man, guarding his house and his property. But Jesus has attacked and overpowered Satan precisely because he is the stronger one. He has stripped him of his strength, his armor and his possessions. Satan is defeated.

And then Jesus declares one of those “black and white” statements for which there really is no counter: ***Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters — Luke 11:23.***

Jesus basically draws a line in the sand. Either you can stand on his side or stand on the other side. There is no neutral zone; there's no "waiting this one out" or any other option. We either stand completely with Jesus, or we stand completely opposed to Jesus.

It also creates a very clear picture of the difference between how Satan works and how Jesus works. Satan scatters and ultimately destroys. Jesus gathers together and builds. While declaring of Satan: ***"[T]here is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies"*** — *Jesus Christ, John 8:44b*, Jesus declares of himself: ***"I am the way and the truth and the life"*** — *Jesus Christ, John 14:6a*. While Paul writes that *Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light* — *Paul, II Corinthians 11:14b*, Jesus says of himself: ***"Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father"*** — *Jesus Christ, John 14:9b*.

Jesus then uses a brief parable to illustrate the dangers of neutrality when it comes to him: ***When an impure spirit comes out of a person, it goes through arid places seeking rest and does not find it. Then it says, 'I will return to the house I left.' When it arrives, it finds the house swept clean and put in order. Then it goes and takes seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there. And the final condition of that person is worse than the first"*** — *Jesus Christ, Luke 11:24-26*.

When the demon in this story leaves the person, instead of filling his now vacant life with Christ, he leaves it empty — neutral. When the demon chooses to return, this time with other spirits even worse than the first one, that person's life becomes far worse than it was previously. The point? Our lives are going to wind up filled by somebody. Do we want to be possessed by sin, or by the holy, perfect life of Christ? Those are the only items on the "menu."

And then Jesus responds to somebody's compliment: ***As Jesus was saying these things, a woman in the crowd called out, "Blessed is the mother who gave you birth and nursed you." He replied, "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it"*** — *Luke 11:27-28*.

Saying the right things, having the right words in church, is not enough; it never has been and never will be. Speaking holy words, listening to Bible stories, enjoying the fellowship of others, is nice, but it is not the foundation of Christ's church. Rather it is obedience, submitting to the words of Scripture by reflecting them in our lives, that is the foundation of Christ's church. As James would write: ***Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues in it — not forgetting what they have heard, but doing it — they will be blessed in what they do*** — *James 1:22-25*. Christ makes something else part of the foundation of his church — doing what the word of God says to be doing. It's not about speaking, it's about obeying, that distinguishes Christ's followers.

***As the crowds increased, Jesus said, "This is a wicked generation. It asks for a sign, but none will be given it except the sign of Jonah"*** — *Luke 11:29*.

Jesus, and certainly the disciples, would have noticed the crowd increasing in size. But Jesus still had some critically important points to share with that crowd, so large crowds

were not going to make much of an impression. So Jesus addresses the second challenge he received at the beginning of this moment — asking for a “sign from heaven.”

Jesus says: ***“For as Jonah was a sign to the Ninevites, so also will the Son of Man be to this generation. The Queen of the South will rise at the judgment with the people of this generation and condemn them, for she came from the ends of the earth to listen to Solomon’s wisdom; and now something greater than Solomon is here. The men of Nineveh will stand up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and now something greater than Jonah is here” — Jesus Christ, Luke 11:30-32.***

Now these were well known references from their own scriptures that most in that crowd were have been very familiar with. Jesus had already declared what the prophet Jonah’s story meant in his context: ***“For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth” — Jesus Christ, Matthew 12:40.*** Jonah’s story displayed the pictures of death — being thrown into the ocean — burial — being swallowed by the “great fish” — and resurrection — being spit up onto dry land — that Jesus had declared to his disciples would be a part of his earthly journey — death at the hands of the Jewish leaders, burial and then, miraculously, resurrection. It would be the resurrection that would prove that Jesus of Nazareth was truly the long-promised Messiah, the Son of God. And it would be the resurrection that would be the foundational centerpiece of the early church as it preached this message from Pentecost Sunday onward.

And despite their pagan, idolatrous ways, the passion with which the miraculously rescued (“resurrected”) Jonah preached to the city of Nineveh was used by God to bring city-wide repentance, from the throne room of the king to the lowliest slave. It would be those Ninevites that Christ is saying would bring judgment upon that generation who were experiencing something so much more than the prophet Jonah — God in the flesh in the person of Jesus of Nazareth.

And likewise would be the testimony of the Queen of Sheba, who is thought to have traveled possibly as far as some 1,400 miles (possibly from modern-day Yemen) to simply be in the hearing of the world-famed wisdom of Solomon. That “wicked” generation to which Christ is teaching is hearing so much more wisdom than Solomon — again, God in the flesh in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. By continuing to ask for a sign, they were communicating their contentment in being in the spiritual place in which they were found. Very probably not even a “sign from heaven” would have budged their stubborn hearts.

What’s interesting about both of these examples — the people of Nineveh (Assyrians) and the Queen of Sheba — is that they were all Gentiles, and yet God graciously gave them an opportunity to experience him. Now think of the unspeakably wondrous privilege that the Jews of Jesus’ day — actually watching him speak, hearing his words, watching the passion flash in his eyes before them — and then connect all that with their virtually complete lack of response. No wonder “Jesus wept” — twice — for their lack of opening their hearts to his words of love and life.

And then Jesus completed this particular teaching moment: ***“No one lights a lamp and puts it in a place where it will be hidden, or under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, so that those who come in may see the light. Your eye is the lamp of your***

*body. When your eyes are healthy, your whole body also is full of light. But when they are unhealthy, your body also is full of darkness. See to it, then, that the light within you is not darkness. Therefore, if your whole body is full of light, and no part of it dark, it will be just as full of light as when a lamp shines its light on you” — Jesus Christ, Luke 11:33-36.*

The idea of God providing divine light for our benefit was not a new idea, as the psalmist had made so clear: *Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path — Psalm 119:105.* And certainly the wisdom of Solomon had also made note of that: *For this command is a lamp, this teaching is a light — Proverbs 6:23a.* But for God’s wondrous word to do us any good, it must enter our lives internally, becoming a literal part of our DNA and the rhythm of our heartbeats. That’s why the psalmist said so eloquently: *The unfolding of your words gives light; it gives understanding to the simple — Psalm 119:130* because, as Solomon had observed: *[C]orrection and instruction are the way of life — Proverbs 6:23b.* But, as preacher and teacher Warren Wiersbe has said so well: *“The brightest sun cannot enable a blind man to see”* (The Wiersbe Bible Commentary — NT, page 175).

So what happens when somebody’s life is surrendered to Christ? Along with salvation, an “eye operation” has been performed: Our spiritual eyes are opened by means of the now indwelling Holy Spirit, the light of God’s truth now shines in, and we become “children of light,” being able to spiritually see the ways and wisdom of God.

## APPLICATION

Over these last several weeks, we can see a picture emerging of what are to be the priorities of the church that Jesus said he would build: (1) The centrality of God’s word, (2) the centrality of prayer, and (3) the centrality of teaching the priority of obedience. And all of these things are in place due to what Jesus so emphatically and clearly stated in today’s lesson: *Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters — Luke 11:23.*

There is no “middle ground” when it comes to Christ. But as we read, study, preach and teach God’s word, it makes clear who Jesus is: the one and only Son of God, the Messiah appointed to offer salvation to the world, the only means by which anybody can be saved, and the basis for God’s future judgment. The world opposes Jesus because they desire the attractions of this world, not understanding that not only the attractions of this world but this entire world itself is running out of days. So we present the word. And then for those God draws to himself through the witness of Christ’s church, prayer is the means of being enabled by God’s Holy Spirit to surrender to him through his Son.

And obedience is the means by which we show ourselves, and the church shows itself, to be followers of Jesus; as he himself said: *“Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me. [But then listen to the outcome of that obedience:] The one who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love them and show myself to them” — Jesus Christ, John 14:21.* Wow! And of course, walking in the word, in prayer and in obedience is how we will prove ourselves to be ambassadors for God through Christ. And that’s what the church remains here for; that is the work we are called to do — to show the Son to the world through the witness of his Holy Spirit in our lives.

## CONCLUSION

As we close, I heard an interesting comment yesterday from one of the organizers of the rally that took place at the Washington Monument regarding the desire for Congress to enact gun legislation, the idea being that tighter regulations would help curb what has been a very violent last few weeks. The person being interviewed said (to paraphrase): “This is not an antigun rally. This is a peace rally.”

I appreciate the intentions, but what’s ridiculous about all that is that, essentially, we are expecting the same species who created the problem to solve the problem. That can never happen. If mankind has not solved the problem of peace at the most basic, internal level — the human soul —how in the world can mankind ever think there can be hope for an external peace?

Folks, there cannot and will never be any peace, at any level, for any length of time, outside of Jesus Christ. That’s the plain, “I don’t care if you don’t like it” truth of the matter. Outside, external strife is just a reflection of inner strife. That has created the unfathomable anger and resentment that has allowed these horrific incidents to take place. Now Jesus Christ promises peace — not as the world defines peace but rather eternal, founded in his word, secure in his strength, everlasting peace. Jesus Christ promises a peace that will stretch from this moment right on into eternity. But that peace originates at a cross standing right outside of Jerusalem, where the blood poured out 2,000 years ago to obtain the greatest peace of all, between God and every single person on the planet, is still good; it still works. The opportunity to surrender your life is still available.

Folks, that’s what we’re in business to preach, teach, imitate and promote — not ourselves but Christ crucified. Every moment of every day, people are going into eternity outside of the salvation available through Jesus Christ. Does that matter to us? And every moment of every day, we have opportunities to present the story of that salvation to somebody who needs to hear it. We are not here to be content. We are not here to be normal or ordinary. We are here to be extraordinary, to be ambassadors, to be witnesses, to be Exhibit A, of the wonders of salvation found through Jesus Christ.

What are we doing for the kingdom? That’s the peace we are privileged to offer, showing the path to the way, the truth and the life which is Jesus Christ. Let’s pray!