

## What Jesus Believed About Satan • Luke 11:14-28

Some people don't believe in Satan. They think the whole idea is silly. They think the concept is primitive, superstitious and that Satan is in the same category as werewolves, goblins, ghosts, wizards and witches. To them, modern sophisticated people really should know better!

At the other extreme are those who really believe in Satan. They are obsessed with him. They are not only convinced that he exists but that he is everywhere into everything with everybody. They interpret all human events in terms of Satan. They believe he is the primary cause of every crime, the strategist behind every war, the cause of every disease, the reason for every divorce, the explanation for every problem. They have promoted Satan to be an evil equal to God himself.

Of course, what we believe does not determine reality. A person can believe with great conviction and be totally wrong. Thinking that Satan exists does not make him exist. Denying his existence will not make him disappear. That is why it is good to check out a different and higher authority—JESUS! What did Jesus believe about Satan? We can get a pretty good idea from Luke 11:14-28 in Jesus' biography. There were many different names for Satan. One of those names is Beelzebub, a popular nickname in Jesus' day and the one used in this story:

*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. But some of them said, "By Beelzebub, the prince of demons, he is driving out demons." Others tested him by asking for a sign from heaven.*

*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 Beelzebub. Now if I drive out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your fol-*

*lowers 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 to you.*

*"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 the spoils.*

*"He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me, scatters.*

*"When an evil spirit comes out of a man, 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 man is worse than the first.*

*As Jesus was saying these things, a woman in the crowd called out. "Blessed is the mother who gave you birth and nursed you."*

*(Jesus) replied, "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it."*

The greatest period of demonic activity in the Bible was during Jesus' life. I am not sure anyone knows exactly

why. Perhaps it is because the more God demonstrations good the greater is the resistance and activity of Satan's evil. But one thing seems sure, Jesus not only believed Satan was real, he believed his own power was greater than Satan's power. Jesus was ready and willing to directly fight against demonic activity. This is astonishing. I would be terrified to tackle the greatest powers of evil head-on. But Jesus was not. He had a supernatural confidence that he could fight against evil and win.

Are such stories only for ancient times and

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distant places? I received a letter from a man I know who is living in Asia. Here is what he wrote:

The demon-possessed man was brought to five different Moslem leaders to be freed of the spirits that tormented him day and night. These leaders prayed and used various magic practices to cast out the tenacious demons, but nothing worked.

Finally, one of the men said, "Let's bring him to the Mosque leader (in another village). I have heard that he has new power, what he calls the Spirit of God."

"No, no, we cannot do that!" shouted someone in the crowd. (He) reads another holy book now called the New Testament and he has become a follower of Christ."

After much arguing the decision was made to bring the possessed man to (the leader of that village). (He) is a well-known and respected leader. He came to Jesus Christ through our ministry about a year ago. (This man) prayed in the name of Jesus Christ over the possessed man and the demons came out, leaving the man in his right mind. To this day he is still free of the demons.

Three other such possessed men have been brought to (this leader) since the first man was freed. All three were released of their demons and have a new respect for (this leader) and for Jesus Christ.

(Another man) who was also a leader of his village mosque was so impressed with the new power that he saw release his four friends that he committed his life to Jesus Christ. Over the last six to eight months, we have seen over 100 confessions of faith.

This was not just something that happened in Jesus' time, this is something that is occurring in our world today.

The specific case in Luke 11 was a man who had lost his ability to speak because an evil spirit had taken it away from him. The point here is not that everyone who cannot speak has a demon or that every demon causes people to become mute. Rather, the point is that evil can take hold of individual lives in a multitude of ways.

Jesus drove the demon out of the man and the man talked. The crowd was amazed. They probably did not think Jesus could do that. But while they all agreed that the mute man was cured, some insisted that Jesus healed the man by the power of Satan. In other words, they were saying, "Yes, Jesus did it with supernatural power, but it was evil supernatural power."

In my opinion, this was a very dangerous accusation to make. Jesus clearly claimed to heal by the power of God. To credit someone else risked an ultimate insult against God.

During the 1996 Olympic games in Atlanta a security guard tried to help victims of a bomb blast that went off in Centennial Park. Later, he was accused of planting the bomb. He was a hero charged with being a villain. His good was interpreted as evil. And that is what happened to Jesus.

We must be careful to never give God's credit to anyone else. When God does something great do not credit prayer, do not credit the church, do not credit the doctor and certainly do not credit Satan. That is stealing from God the credit and the honor that rightly belong to him. We need to give God the credit he deserves!

But back to what Jesus believed. Jesus believed that his power was greater than Satan's power. Jesus was convinced that he could take evil and demons head-on and be victorious. And so he said in Luke 11:20, ". . . *I drive out demons by the finger of God . . . the kingdom of God has come to you.*"

Then he went even further, describing Satan as being like a very strong man guarding his evil empire. But Jesus insisted that he is even stronger: "*When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own house, his possessions are safe. But when someone stronger attacks and over powers him, he takes away the armor in which the man trusted and divides up the spoils.*" Jesus is stronger than Satan or evil. That is what he thought. That is what he said. That is what he believed.

Do you agree with Jesus? Do you believe that Satan is real and his power is great, but that Jesus is greater? Do you believe that Jesus can take on the evil in our world and in our lives and win? Those who believe have great hope. Those who do not believe have great despair.

Jesus decided to answer the accusation about being in Satan’s service. That is interesting because he did not always answer the criticisms leveled against him. But in this case he insisted that the charge simply did not make sense. If Jesus were on Satan’s side, why would he fight against Satan’s evils? Certainly Satan is not that stupid, seeking to defeat himself. “*A house divided against itself will fall.*” If Satan wanted the man mute, Satan would not have empowered Jesus to let him speak.

While Jesus was on the topic of the difference between evil and good, Jesus and Satan, he made a very bold declaration: “*He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me, scatters.*” In other words, there is no neutrality in the war between Jesus and Satan. A person is on one side or the other.

This is not the way we usually think. Most people would say that those who are on Satan’s side are the evil few of this world—the serial killers, sociopaths, dictators ordering genocide, child molesters and worse—and that those who are on Jesus’ side are the super-religious minority who read the Bible every day, pray frequently, never miss church, give generously and even sacrificially and otherwise are super-spiritual. On Satan’s side are the Adolph Hitlers of history and on Jesus’ side are the Mother Therasas of history.

Jesus saw things differently. He insisted that you are on one side or the other. There is no middle ground. You are either committed to Jesus or committed to Satan. There is nothing in between. What is so scary about this is that so many of us like to think we are middle-of-the-road . . . not too fanatical. Jesus says all such people are on Satan’s team.

Jesus said that. Jesus believed it. He believed that we are either on God’s side or Satan’s side. What do you think? What do you believe? Whose side are you on?

He adds a third belief to his list. Jesus believed that getting rid of evil is never enough. This belief is so fascinating and significant that it is worth re-

reading in Luke 11:24-26:

*“When an evil spirit comes out of a man, 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 man is worse than the first.”*

That really runs counter to popular beliefs and practices. Our general assumption is that getting rid of the bad stuff in our lives will solve most of our problems. Get rid of addictions. Stop cheating. Quit committing adultery. End animosity. Cease lying. Cut out your critical tongue. Never steal again. Get rid of all the bad stuff and life will be good. But, according to Jesus, the exact opposite is true. Get rid of all the bad stuff in your life and before long you will be worse off than you were before because, when you get your life cleaned up, you make space for more bad things to come in.

Jesus’ point here is plain and simple: bad must be replaced by good. Yes, kick Satan out; but bring Jesus in. Get rid of evil, but replace it with good. When hatred leaves, love must enter. When addic-

tion is kicked out, loyalty and zeal for God much take first place. When we forgive those who have hurt us, we must fill the place where animosity used to be with genuine goodness and kindness.

This is a powerful and transforming truth

to understand and live. Solving our problems and getting rid of evil is never enough. God and good must fill and control our lives instead.

The more we think about Jesus’ teaching, the more it makes sense. We all know stories of people with bad friends. Maybe the description fits you. Bad friends are a bad influence. They drag you down; they reinforce the worst; they hold you back; they encourage your bad habits; they destroy your life. So, you decide to break off a bad relation-

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ship. It is the hardest thing you have ever done—giving up your best friend. But, if you do not replace the bad friend with good friends you risk getting the bad friend back with seven more bad buddies.

As important as it is to rid get rid of the evil in our lives, it is more important to fill our lives with good. There is a great New Testament line in Philippians 4:8 that says, “. . . *whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.*” In other words, get rid of the bad and fill your head with what is really good.

Jesus believed that his power was greater than Satan’s power. Jesus believed we are either on God’s side or Satan’s side. Jesus believed that getting rid of evil is never good enough.

At the end of Jesus’ teaching a woman in the crowd shouted to him, “*Blessed is the mother who gave you birth and nursed you.*”

In some ways this woman was really strange. In other ways she was profoundly mistaken. She was obviously impressed with all Jesus had done and said. She wanted to praise him, but she badly missed the mark. She was saying, “Jesus, you are really terrific. You must have a wonderful mother and she must be really proud of you.” This would be like telling Einstein that it is nice to see an immigrant succeed or telling Pavoratti he must come from a family with nice singing voices or Michael Jordan that his parents must have been tall. All of this may be true, but so what?

Jesus was not being mean or publicly reprimanding her, but he did use the occasion to teach an important point. The point he was making had nothing to do with Mary, his mother. Of course he had a good mother, but that was not the point. So Jesus said, “*Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it.*” Jesus taught that the happiest, most blessed people in the world are not those from good families, not those with great mothers, not those born to Mary, not those with famous family names or blue-blood backgrounds. The very best of the best are those who hear what God says and then do it. To put it bluntly, would you rather have Mary for your mother or Jesus for your Lord?

The battle between good and evil, between God and Satan, is not limited to long ago and far away. When the horrible massacre took place at Columbine High School in suburban Denver I was in Denver. I was shaken by the evil that was done there.

One local youth pastor in the Denver area reported that at Columbine High School that year a group of students had been meeting every week to pray for their school. He said that at the beginning of the school year there were 60 Christian students who had committed to pray for their school and their fellow 1800 students at Columbine. Through the year the group grew to 100 or more. They sensed they were on the edge of a great spiritual awakening when the powers of evil burst forth in their presence.

At the time of the shootings Rich Van Pelt, a national youth leader based in Denver, said, “I am believing that what Satan intended for evil, God will use for good.”

I agree with Jesus. I believe that Jesus’ power is greater than Satan’s power. I believe that we are either on God’s side or on Satan’s side. I believe that getting rid of evil is never good enough. We must have the good of God through Jesus Christ in all of our lives.

*“Blessed are those who listen to the word of God and obey it.”*

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