

Something Greater is Here  
Luke 11:14-36  
August 15, 2021  
Rev. Dave Dorst  
CenterPoint Church

Read Text

*“Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.”* (Matthew 4:4b)

### **Introduction**

Severus Snape is one of the most interesting characters in the Harry Potter books and movies. The reader (or viewer) is intentionally pulled back and forth during the seven books and eight movies in trying to decide whether he is a good or an evil character. On the one hand, he is the head of the dark house of Slytherin, he is very mean to Harry and his friends, and it is revealed that he was once guilty of serving Lord Voldemort; even giving him the prophecy that led to Harry’s parent’s deaths. On the other hand, wise Professor Dumbledore trusts him completely and he is often shown to act in ways that help Hogwarts and Harry and the good side. But his motivations and loyalties are mysterious and complex, and like many double agents in literature and film, we don’t find out who he really is until the end.

Our Scripture passage this morning shows us someone else who dealt with evil forces and had people wondering where His motivations and loyalties lay. The verses describe the feeling among the crowd that they couldn’t really decide whether Jesus was good or evil. After He drove out a demon, half of the crowd thought He was demonic himself, while the other half thought that He could have been sent from heaven. What did Jesus have to say about all of this? Did He choose to clear up all of their misconceptions, or did He rebuke them for their ignorance? If we understand nothing else in this passage, we should know that everyone has enough information to make up their minds about Jesus’ identity, and then choose a side.

We’ll break up the passage into four different sections, using the organizing phrase “greater than” to help us understand it. The first 13 verses show that Jesus is

#### **I. Greater Than Satan (vv. 14-26)**

*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. 15 But some of them said, “He casts out demons by Beelzebul, the prince of demons,” 16 while others, to test him, kept seeking from him a sign from heaven. 17 But he, knowing their thoughts, said to them, “Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and a divided household falls. 18 And if Satan also is divided against himself, how will his kingdom stand? For you say that I cast out demons by Beelzebul. 19 And if I cast out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they will be your judges. 20 But if it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. 21 When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own palace, his goods are safe; 22 but when one stronger than he attacks him and overcomes him, he takes away his armor in which he trusted and divides his spoil. 23 Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters. 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.’ 25 And when it comes, it finds the house swept and put in order. 26 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.”*

Many of Jesus' exorcisms of demons have been described by Luke in detail, shedding light on each incident. But here, the exorcism is quickly described (a demon kept a man mute who was then able to speak when the demon was gone) so that it can provide the setup for the conversation that happened afterwards. The very nature of spiritual warfare and Jesus' motivations and origin are the subjects of debate and discussion here. It seemed that half of the people saw Jesus casting out demons and said, "Wow, that power must be from hell," while the other half said, "Wow, that power might be from heaven, but show us more so we know for certain." Jesus challenged both of those reactions.

Jesus injects a little logic into the thinking of the first group: Why would Satan be divided against himself and empower someone to cast out his demons? That makes no sense, divided kingdoms can't stand. And if you're going to apply that standard to me, are you willing to apply it to your own people who also claim to cast out demons? As you come to terms with that logic, you'll have to admit that it's by God's power that I cast out the demons. But what if we don't want to admit that it's God overpowering Satan? Again, Jesus brings logic: in order to overpower a strong man it takes a stronger man. Who is stronger than Satan? Only God, not man. And if the crowds admitted that, then they needed to come to see that Jesus had brought the kingdom of God with Him, and that it's by God's hand that He cast out demons.

The last three verses are concerned with what happens when a person who had a demon inside of him is freed of the demon but does not fill that void with God's presence? The demon could come back and bring other spirits "*more evil than itself*" with it, and the person would be that much worse off. This is Jesus' way of saying that if you do not fill your life with God and His Spirit, you open yourself up to great harm. You cannot just sweep your life clean and make moral adjustments that seem like you're becoming righteous. You actually have to fill your life with godliness.

The result of all of this logical thinking and teaching is verse 23: you're either for me or against me. Figure it out and choose your side. I don't think that most people who are not Christians would say that they are against Jesus. Clearly, some do feel that way, but a lot of people are either indifferent and don't care enough to even think about Jesus, or people think that He was a good man, but not worth following as God. Jesus draws the line in the sand: you either believe that I am God or you reject me; there's no middle ground. We're about halfway through the Gospel of Luke, and Jesus didn't have a lot of time left in His earthly ministry. He will be calling people to radical commitment, forcing people to make a choice for who He is. And that call is no less urgent today. None of us knows how many days we have left. Jesus is calling for your loyalty, He is urging you to commit. If you're on the fence, it's time to come down and pick a side.

One person in the crowd responded very favorably to Jesus, but even she didn't get it completely right. The next two verses teach us how we can be

## **II. Greater Than Mary (vv. 27-28)**

*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!" 28 But he said, "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it!"*

Well, at least one woman in the crowd was really following what Jesus was saying and wanted to affirm Him. This was her version of an "Amen!"<sup>1</sup> Jesus didn't correct her – it's true that His mother, Mary, was blessed. Not to the extent that the Catholic church has taught that she does saving work

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<sup>1</sup> Thabiti Anyabwile, *Exalting Jesus in Luke* (Nashville: Holman, 2018), p. 194.

to bring people to God, but as an obedient woman who was used by God in a mighty way. St. Augustine said it this way: “Mary was more blessed in accepting the faith of Christ than in conceiving the flesh of Christ.”<sup>2</sup> But Jesus replied that hearing the word of God and obeying it would lead you to be truly blessed. This is very similar to what He said back in Luke 8:21: “*My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it.*”

There’s a real emphasis in Scripture that the people of Jesus’ day - the crowds, His disciples, and His family - were all very fortunate to be able to see Jesus in the flesh and be part of His story. How amazing to be part of His actual family, to have been witness to all of those miracles and to hear the truth from His lips. But there’s a continual emphasis on the fact that those who come later have just as great a chance to be blessed in Him. “*Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed*” (John 20:29) and “*whoever believes in me will also do the works that I do; and greater works than these will he do, because I am going to the Father*” (John 14:12). Every single believer today, every ordinary Christian sitting in this church can be used by God for great things if they are willing to be obedient. Commit to understanding God’s word and doing what it says, and God will use you greatly.

The next section comes back to understanding Jesus’ identity:

### **III. Greater Than Solomon and Jonah (vv. 29-32)**

<sup>29</sup> *When the crowds were increasing, he began to say, “This generation is an evil generation. It seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah.* <sup>30</sup> *For as Jonah became a sign to the people of Nineveh, so will the Son of Man be to this generation.* <sup>31</sup> *The queen of the South will rise up at the judgment with the men of this generation and condemn them, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and behold, something greater than Solomon is here.* <sup>32</sup> *The men of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold, something greater than Jonah is here.*

I want to teach you one of those cool words that we learned in seminary, though many of you might know it. (I don’t want to insult your intelligence, but I also don’t want to assume too much.) The word is typology, and it basically refers to when there are things or people in the Old Testament that foreshadow something in the New Testament. And much of the typology is pointing to Jesus’ life and ministry in some way, hints and patterns of things that would take on greater meaning with Him. So things like the sacrificial system and the high priest are types of Christ, meaning that they represent sacrifice for sin in a limited way what Jesus will embody in a perfect way – dying for all of the sins of His people.

Human beings can be types of Christ, as well, and we have two examples of typology in these verses: Solomon and Jonah. You remember their stories, right? King Solomon followed his father, David, and became the wisest and richest king of Israel. His fame and accomplishments spread all over the world, and people came to see him. People like the Queen of Sheba, or the Queen of the South, in 1 Kings 10, who came to Jerusalem to experience Solomon’s riches, accomplishments, and wisdom for herself. All of her expectations were exceeded and she ended up saying, “*Blessed be the Lord your God, who has delighted in you and set you on the throne of Israel*” (1 Kings 10:9a). Jonah, of course, was the reluctant prophet who, when he was ordered to go to Nineveh by God went the exact other way. Until he was thrown off the boat he was on and swallowed by a large fish for three days before being belched up on the shores of Nineveh after all, where the people believed and repented.

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<sup>2</sup> Augustine, “Holy Virginitly” in *Luke*, ed. Arthur Just Jr, *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, NT 3* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2003), p. 195.

According to verse 32, this generation of unbelieving Israelites will have two people rising up to condemn it when they stand before God in judgment: the Queen of Sheba and the citizens of Nineveh. Why those two? Because they saw two imperfect men that God had placed in front of them, and decided to believe in God based on some pretty limited information. But the people of Jesus' day got to see the perfect Son of God when He ministered all over and preached the clear Gospel of God's love and judgment. They've had the much greater exposure, the fuller truth of who God is than either the Queen heard from Solomon or Nineveh heard from Jonah, but they're still unwilling to believe and obey. Not to mention that the Queen and the Ninevites are pagans, outsiders, making God's people look really bad for their unbelief!

As much as Jesus said that this generation didn't deserve any more of a sign because it already had more than it needed to make up its mind about His identity, He actually relented and agreed to give one sign. One that should blow everyone's mind, but would not convince many who refuse to believe. That sign is His resurrection. You may say, "Wait, I don't see that in the text!" The sign of Jonah was that he had been in the belly of the fish for three days before being spit up on the shores of Nineveh, and then he called them to repentance, and they repented and were saved. Matthew 12:40 spells out the parallel more clearly: "*For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.*" Jesus would be in the grave until He rose on the third day; the sign of Jonah is the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Even if the Israelites had failed to believe in Jesus with His life and ministry, they will have a chance to believe after His resurrection proves His true divinity and mission as Savior.

The final part of this passage urges people to seek out the light while they can. The light of Christ is **Conclusion: Greater Than Darkness (vv. 33-36)**

*<sup>33</sup> "No one after lighting a lamp puts it in a cellar or under a basket, but on a stand, so that those who enter may see the light. <sup>34</sup> Your eye is the lamp of your body. When your eye is healthy, your whole body is full of light, but when it is bad, your body is full of darkness. <sup>35</sup> Therefore be careful lest the light in you be darkness. <sup>36</sup> If then your whole body is full of light, having no part dark, it will be wholly bright, as when a lamp with its rays gives you light."*

The meaning of these verses is not easy to figure out. It's easy to confuse it with a different Gospel passage about not hiding your light under a basket, but letting it shine for all men to see. But that's not what this message is: it's about our eyes letting in light so that our whole bodies will be illuminated. I don't know how much sense that makes biologically, but I think Jesus' point is: He is the light and He had ministered, taught, and healed out in the open where everyone could see Him. The question is: do you have the eyes to see Him, or do you want to avoid looking? If you avoid Him, your life will be full of darkness; if you seek Him, you will be filled with His light. Most of Israel in Jesus' day refused to let His light in, it's why He said they would be judged. His light was there for all to see, believe, and be transformed by it.

During the French Revolution, there were Christians who were locked up in a dark dungeon. Once a day for a few moments, the sun would peek through at a particular angle, the only light they would be receiving. One of the prisoners would climb onto another's shoulders and hold his Bible up to read as much as he could until the light went away. When he was lowered, the other prisoners would say, "Now tell us what you read when you were in the light."<sup>3</sup> Oh, that we would yearn to let

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<sup>3</sup> R. Kent Hughes, *Luke: That You May Know The Truth* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2015).

the light of the Scriptures penetrate our eyes and our lives. Use your eyes to seek out the truth and everything in your life will conform to it. Paul said it a different way in Philippians 4:8: *“Whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.”* We can spend a lot of time dwelling on darkness and lies, rationalizing as Christians that it won’t affect us, but it does: we begin to think and act in ways that we’ve seen and thought about. And conversely, when we dwell on heavenly, Scriptural things; when we reflect on godliness and truth, our lives will pursue those things. Jesus said, *“I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life”* (John 8:12). The more we look at Jesus, the true light of the world, the more our lives will be filled with the light of God.

The Christian singer, Keith Green, had a song whose lyrics imagined God speaking to the believer: *“My word sits there upon your desk, but you love your books and magazines the best. You prefer the light of your TV, you love the world and you’re avoiding Me.”*<sup>4</sup> Ouch, I resemble that remark. How about you? What are your eyes dwelling on – the darkness of the world or the light of Christ? Verse 35 says, *“Be careful lest the light in you be darkness.”* How much greater to have His light brighten up our whole lives.

Here’s what this all comes down to: Satan is an evil, destructive force who loves to tear down and destroy. Jesus is the healer, the Redeemer, the One who brings life, peace, and salvation. You can choose one of them. It’s like a game of kickball or tag when we were kids when you were allowed to pick your team. And don’t think that’s there’s a third option: to stay on the sidelines and not choose either side. If you do that, the Bible says that you have chosen Satan’s side. These two sides are doing battle in one sense, but they are not equal combatants. Jesus has been, and always will be, stronger. He is Satan’s creator, as He is the Creator of everything. He has allowed Satan to roam free for a time, but He can snap that leash and bring Satan to heel at any time He chooses. And He has already revealed His plans, that in the end, Satan and His angels will be cast into the lake of fire. Jesus and all of His followers will be reigning in the New Heavens and the New Earth for all of eternity.

Colossians 1:12-14 says, *“the Father... has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in Whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.”* Let us never forget or doubt that Jesus died in our place, paying the penalty for our sins, then rising from the dead to defeat death and seal Satan’s defeat. As we place our faith in Him, as we choose our allegiance to Him, we are delivered from all darkness and live in the light of Christ forever. Amen.

### Benediction

Ephesians 3:14-19 – *“For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.”*

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<sup>4</sup> “You Love the World (And You’re Avoiding Me)” lyrics by Keith Green, on the album *So You Wanna Go Back to Egypt...*