**THE GOSPEL OF LUKE**

**GET OFF THE FENCE ABOUT JESUS**

**Luke 11:14-28**

**INTRODUCTION**

The Bible has the amazing ability to speak to all different kinds of people who are going through different seasons of life. It has poetry, laments, worship songs, logical arguments, and stories. It speaks to those who are suffering, and to those who are rejoicing. It humbles the proud and lifts up the humble. It makes the wise simple and the simple wise. The Bible has had a lasting impact across the world and across time, because it is the very Word of God. God has chosen to work through the Holy Scriptures to accomplish his eternal purposes in this world as he reveals himself to fallen humanity.

Today, God, through his Word, wants to address three categories of people: the skeptical person, the uncommitted person, and the blessed person.

It has been said that we live in an age of skepticism, but skepticism is not unique to our generation. It has always been present. Indeed, in ancient Greek society, there was an entire group of philosophers who were known as the skeptics. Skepticism is a general attitude of doubt towards truth claims. People can be skeptical about different things. They can be skeptical about claims about morality, claims about God, claims about meaning in general, or all the above. Think about the person who, when you try to share something you believe is true with them, they tend to say, “Well, there’s just not enough evidence”, or “That’s just what you believe.”

While skepticism may have been around for a long time, lack of commitment is a more recent development. My parents’ generation was largely known as a generation of commitment. They worked the same jobs, lived in the same homes, and tended to get married and stay married. My generation, however, which is known as Generation X or the Millennial Generation, is widely known as an uncommitted generation. We switch jobs, move around, and jump around relationships more than any generation that came before us.

Millennials have unique skills. We’re computer savvy, we’re multi-taskers, and we’re massive consumers of information. These are skills that make us quite marketable, but the problem we have is that companies don’t know if they can count on us. In a recent Price Waterhouse survey, 50% of more than 1,200 CEOs from 60 countries expressed concern about the fact that Millennials don’t stay with companies long enough, and therefore they’re unable to harness their digital skills.

This lack of commitment creates a massive problem on so many levels. Companies can’t grow because they’re constantly losing their work force. Marriages, the pillars of society, don’t last and kids grow up in broken families. Friendships fade away as people are constantly moving from one place to another. And most disturbingly, fewer and fewer people are willing to make a commitment to surrender their lives and follow Jesus.

In our text today, Jesus has something to say to the skeptical person and to the uncommitted person. He wants to give you some warnings, not so that you would be condemned, but so that you would be saved. Jesus is ultimately interested in having you leave skepticism and lack of commitment behind so that you can live a truly blessed life with him.

**Read Luke 11:14-28**

The title of this message is **Get Off the Fence About Jesus**. My aim today is to show you that **The Committed are Blessed. The Uncommitted are Cursed. There is no Middle Ground when it Comes to Jesus.**

We will have three points today:

(1) The Skeptical Person

(2) The Uncommitted Person

(3) The Blessed Person

(1) **THE SKEPTICAL PERSON**

Our text today begins shortly after Luke has shifted his focus from Jesus' miracles to Jesus' teaching. Luke has told us what Jesus expects of his followers when it comes to evangelism, serving others, and prayer. Now Luke wants to show his followers how he went about recruiting others to follow him as well.

We see an example of the shift from miracles to teaching right in verse 14, where Luke tells us almost matter-of-factly that Jesus healed a man who was plagued by a mute demon. Nothing more is said other than that Jesus cast out the mute demon, and the mute man spoke. It's evident that Luke is only using the miracle as backdrop for Jesus' teaching that follows.

Verse 15 shows us that not all responded positively to the miracle. It says, "But some of them said, 'He casts out demons by Beelzebul, the prince of demons." It seems that there was a group of skeptical Jews who saw what Jesus did, and yet doubted that it was from God.

Who did they believe it was from instead? They believed it was from Satan, whom they call "Beelzebub". The name "Beelzebul" came from "Baal", who was the god that the Canaanites worshipped using idols. The Jews saw Baal as a false god, and started using Baal as a name for Satan. Satan was the chief of all demons, or "the prince of demons", as we see in verse 15.

In other words, this group of skeptical Jews saw Jesus wielding not divine power, but demonic power. The source of his authority wasn’t good but evil. The evil spirit had been cast out by an evil authority.

Jesus begins to reply to them in verse 17. Luke writes, "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."

What a simple, but powerful rebuttal. Jesus is saying that, if the Jews claim that Jesus is wielding demonic power, then the implication of that claim is that Satan is driving out his own demons. But if Satan is driving out his own demons, then Satan actually has no power. Power comes from unity, not division. If Satan is casting out his own demons, he has no real power, because he has no unity.

Jesus has another rebuttal in verse 19: "And if I cast out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they will be your judges." If Satan can cast out his own demons, then how can this group of skeptics be sure that their own Jewish exorcists aren't being controlled by Satan as well? They can't be sure. If they're going to be consistent in their claim that Satan casts out his own demons, then they must apply that claim to their own people. And of course, their own people will tell them how wrong they are. Of course they're not casting out demons by the power of Satan. They're casting them out by the power of God!

What Jesus is doing here is he's exposing their hypocrisy. He reveals the double standard they have when it comes to Jesus on the one hand, and their own people on the other. They would never say that their own sons who cast out demons do so by demonic power, and yet they don't hesitate to make the same claim about Jesus.

So if Satan isn't casting out his own demons, then that leads to only one possible explanation for Jesus' power: it comes from God. Jesus draws this conclusion in 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."

The Kingdom of God is here, because the King is here. God's reign on earth has begun through Jesus, the promised Messiah, the Chosen One of God. All of God's ancient promises to Israel are being fulfilled in Jesus. Jesus is the saviour who will rescue God's people from their sins. Jesus is the king who will reign on David's throne forever. And Jesus is the conqueror who will defeat all the enemies of God's people, whether they be human or demonic.

Do you see how Jesus chose to address skeptics? He used evidence, and he used reason. The evidence was the miracle, and the reason was the argument he used to refute their claim and draw them to the only correct conclusion: God’s kingdom is here, because the king of God’s kingdom is here.

There are two lessons for us here that address two different groups of people. The first lesson is for those who don’t struggle with skepticism. On the contrary, you have a rock-solid, unshakeable faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ. If that describes you, then Jesus is giving you an example to follow when it comes to addressing skeptics. When it comes to our skeptical friends, family, and acquaintances, our tendency is to stop talking about Jesus completely. We think it's a waste of time, because they're never going to change their minds. That didn’t stop Jesus from speaking to skeptics, and it shouldn't stop us either. There may come a time when we need to "shake the dust off our feet" and move our efforts elsewhere, but we must always be willing to give a defence for the hope that we have to everyone, including skeptics, and to use evidence and reason to do that.

The other thing we tend to do is we keep talking about Jesus to our skeptical friends, but we tell them that they just have to take him on faith. Now it's true that faith in Jesus isn't like a science experiment. We can't just gather enough evidence and come to absolute, 100% conclusions about Jesus. Certainty about Jesus ultimately comes from faith, not evidence. At the same time, evidence helps us to put our faith in Jesus. Evidence shows us that faith in Jesus isn’t just “a leap in the dark”. Instead, it gives us confidence in knowing that our faith is not misplaced. Therefore, let's not neglect to do the hard work of gathering and understanding the evidence ourselves, so that we're equipped to show our skeptical friends that faith in Jesus isn’t pie in the sky faith. It’s reasonable faith.

The second lesson is for the skeptics. This is for those who reject Jesus’ claims about himself, or see the Bible as a human fabrication. Have you explored your doubts? Do you know why you doubt? Have you taken your doubts to their logical conclusion? Have you examined the evidence carefully and taken the evidence to its logical conclusion?

You may be wondering what evidence I’m talking about. After all, we haven’t had the benefit of seeing Jesus with our own eyes and witnessing his miracles. We may not have that, but in some ways, we have something even more powerful. We have the Christian claim that Jesus rose from the dead, and we have the historical events that followed his resurrection.

In his influential book *The Reason for God*, Tim Keller puts it this way:

“It is not enough for the skeptic, then, to simply dismiss the Christian teaching about the resurrection of Jesus by saying, “It just couldn’t have happened.” He or she must face and answer all these historical questions: Why did Christianity emerge so rapidly, with such power? No other band of messianic followers in that era concluded their leader was raised from the dead—why did this group do so? No group of Jews ever worshipped a human being as God. What led them to do it? Jews did not believe in divine men or individual resurrections. What changed their worldview virtually overnight? How do you account for the hundreds of eyewitnesses to the resurrection who lived on for decades and publicly maintained their testimony, eventually giving their lives for their belief?”

- Tim Keller, *The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism*

If you’re willing to reason with Jesus, then Jesus will reason with you. And if you seek out the truth about him, looking honestly at the evidence and asking hard question, then I believe that you will find, like countless others have, including me, that Jesus is worthy of your belief.

(2) **THE UNCOMITTED PERSON**

Jesus addresses a second group of people in our text today, and we see this group in verse 16 where Luke writes, “[O]thers, to test him, kept seeking from him a sign from heaven.” This leads us to our second point: the uncommitted person.

This person is a little different than the skeptic. The skeptic makes conclusions about Jesus, whether it be that Jesus was an ethical teacher, Jesus was one prophet among others, Jesus was a historical fabrication, or Jesus was an instrument of Satan. They’re not true conclusions, but they’re still conclusions. The uncommitted person, on the other hand, doesn’t make conclusions about Jesus. Instead, he or she simply reserves judgment indefinitely. Uncommitted people don’t say “There’s not enough evidence”. They say, “I need more evidence.” They don’t say “Jesus isn’t the Son of God.” They say, “Maybe he is, maybe he isn’t. I’m not sure if I’ll ever know.

This is the kind of person who may go to church but never gets baptized and never becomes a church member. This is the kind of person who may like a spiritual conversation once in a while, but they never call themselves Christians.

Do you know someone like this? When we meet these people, we tend to be encouraged that at least they’re open, and we should be. I would rather someone come to church than not come to church at all, and to be open to spiritual conversations than to be closed. If that describes you, I want to thank you for being here, for asking questions and for seeking after God.

In many ways, the path to knowing God for you is similar to the path to knowing God for the skeptic. After all, Jesus uses his logical argument about Satan and the divided kingdom to address both the skeptics in verse 15 and the uncommitted in verse 16. If you’re unsure about Jesus, then follow the evidence. Think long and hard about your doubts, and ask others to help you to do that.

While I am encouraged that you’re here, God’s Word to you, at least today, is not one of encouragement. Instead, it’s one of warning.

This begins in verses 21-22 when he uses a parable of a strong man who is defeated by a stronger man. Satan and his demons are the strong men who are fully armed in verse 21, and the palaces they’re guarding are the people they’re possessing. Jesus is the stronger man in verse 22 who attacks them, overcomes them, and casts them out. Jesus uses the imagery of stripping his enemies of their armour and dividing their spoils to show his absolute, total, and humiliating defeat of demonic forces.

But then Jesus goes on in verses 24-26 to explain what happens next if the person, now freed from demonic influence, doesn’t turn and invite Jesus into their lives to take the demon’s place. He says, “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.’ 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.”

What’s happening here? Jesus is telling us something about human nature. He’s telling us that we are spiritual beings, and as spiritual beings, other spiritual beings are meant to dwell in and with us. It can either be Jesus, dwelling in us through his Spirit, or demons. If Jesus is in us, then demons can’t dwell within us. But if Jesus isn’t in us, then demons are free to take up residence in us, even if they were cast out at some earlier point in time.

This is what’s happening in the parable. Jesus frees the man from one demon, but because the man didn’t invite Jesus into his life, the demon returned. The strong man in the parable is meant to be replaced by the stronger man. If he doesn’t, then the original strong man returns with a vengeance.

Verse 26 says that he returns with “seven other spirits more evil than itself, and they enter and dwell there.” The demon returns to reclaim his palace, and this time he’s going to fortify his position with the help of other demons. We saw people possessed by multiple demons earlier in Luke 8 with the man who was possessed by an entire demonic legion, and we also saw people possessed by demons who were stronger than average with the possessed boy whom the disciples couldn’t heal in Luke 9.

This shows us that not every demon possession is the same. A person can be possessed by multiple demons, and a person can be possessed by stronger or weaker demons. Both the number and the strength of the demons present in a person affect how much they afflict the person they’re living in, and how hard they are to get out.

What does this mean for us? As one commentator put it, the parable warns us “of the devastating consequences of experiencing God’s work only to fail to follow it up”(Darrell Bock). It’s a warning to the uncommitted, to those who may see God working in their lives, but they’re not yet ready to commit themselves to Jesus.

This could refer to demonic activity, where Jesus literally casts out demonic influence from your life only for increased demonic influence to enter your life because you never committed to Jesus. These days, speaking about demonic possession and demonic influence is almost taboo. We think it’s impossible that something like that could happen in Western culture. When we’re tempted to think like this, we need to recognize that there are some parts of the world where demonic influence and activity is a daily reality, and the people there think it’s strange that we think that demons don’t exist! Let’s not be blinded by our own cultural moment and realize that reality is much more than what we have experienced.

I believe, however, that our text doesn’t only apply to literal demonic activity. It also applies more generally as well. For example, say you’re feeling depressed. You go to church and receive some comfort, but you don’t commit yourself to Jesus. What happens? The comfort is only temporary, because you haven’t invited Jesus into your life. It’s only a matter of time before the depression returns, and with greater force than it once had. Or take another example. You have a deep struggle with anger. You realize you need help, and you start praying for awhile, and you feel your heart softening. But if Jesus doesn’t live in you, if you haven’t fully committed to following him, then the anger will return, and it will return with a vengeance.

Why does this happen? Why does commitment to Jesus matter so much? It matters because of what Jesus says in verse 23: “Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters.”

If you’re not committed to Jesus, then Jesus isn’t committed to you. If you’re not *with* him, then he considers you to be *against* him. Some people think that there’s a third option, that it’s possible to not be *with* Jesus without being *against* Jesus, but according to verse 23, that’s just not an option. You are either with him or against him. You’re either fully in or fully out. There’s no middle ground when it comes to Jesus. You can’t take the benefits of his help without taking on the full responsibilities of following him. You either gather with him as one of the sheep of his flock, or you scatter away from him like enemies. It’s one or the other. There’s no middle ground.

So if you’re uncommitted today, unsure about where you stand with Jesus, and unwilling to gather with him and call him your Lord and Saviour, then consider these warnings seriously. There are devastating consequences from experiencing God’s work only to fail to follow up. You may receive some help, and some comfort from Jesus for a time, but eventually that help will pass, and you will be left on your own once again to face the darkness of your sin and of the world by yourself.

(3) **THE BLESSED PERSON**

But if you do commit to Jesus, then Jesus does much more than commit to you in return. He comes to you and lives in you through his Spirit. And when he lives in you, then nothing can truly harm you, because Jesus is the stronger man who overwhelms all other men. He rids them from your life, he makes his home with you, and he guards you as his own personal palace. This is what the blessed life looks like, which leads to our third point: the blessed person.

Our text today ends in verses 27-28: “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!’” This woman in the crowd was so moved by Jesus’ teaching that she spontaneously blurts out praise. She praises Jesus’ mother as a way of praising Jesus, essentially saying that his mother was blessed because Jesus is such a special man.

While there’s certainly a time and place for praising Jesus, that’s not what he wants the crowds to focus on at this time. Jesus isn’t interested in compliments from people who aren’t committed to him about how great and how wise he is. He’s interested in obedience.

This is why Jesus responds in verse 28 with, “Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it!” Jesus doesn’t want us to just hear the word and say, “Oh, how insightful! How profound! How wise!” He wants us to hear the word and say, “I need to change my life. I need to do something about what I’ve just heard. I need to obey.”

Obey what? Obey what Jesus just spoke about it. If you are to hear the word of God and keep it, then you must make a commitment to Jesus. You must give your life over to him and invite him into your life.

Obedience begins with saying that you truly believe that, through Jesus, the kingdom of God has come upon us. Jesus is the king who brings God’s kingdom. From his birth to his death, Jesus is the King of Kings who came to deliver us from all evil by taking the evil of our sins upon himself. He died on the cross for our sins, so that we could be forgiven. And now, through the obedience of our faith in Christ, we can finally live the truly blessed life.

The blessed life doesn’t mean the pain-free life, but it does mean that the pain we experience and feel will never overwhelm us, because the stronger man, Jesus himself, lives in us and guards us from being crushed by it. As the Apostle Paul said in 2 Corinthians 4:8-9,

“We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed…”

As a younger man who has lived a privileged life, I have only tasted a little of true suffering. I am but a novice in the school of suffering. Many of you are much more advanced in tasting the deepest of pains, and of knowing God’s sustaining grace.

I have a friend from law school who recently lost his mom to brain cancer. When she died, my friend wrote a powerful eulogy which he posted online, and in it, he narrates what his mom, who was a strong believer, thought about in the months leading up to her death. This is what he wrote:

Back in April, while on palliative care, our surgeon put in an order for an MRI for Mom, considering she had beaten the estimated prognosis by a few months. (She had) an aggressive stage 4 brain cancer, and without treatment, the tumor doubles in size every two weeks. Strangely enough, although larger in size, the tumor in Mom’s brain had grown slowly, and so our surgeon was willing to operate on Mom. “Let’s reset the clock”, he said. But Mom had no desire to rewind time. In fact, even when she was initially diagnosed about a year prior, she had no interest in going through with treatment. I asked Mom if she would reconsider foregoing surgery: “Don’t you want to see my children, your grandchildren?” Mom looked at me with a glimmer in her eyes, and I’m paraphrasing here, but she said something to the effect of: “Frankly, Jonathan, I don’t give a darn.” You see, Mom believed the words of C.S. Lewis: “There are far, far, better things ahead than anything we leave behind.”

This is what the blessed life looks like, and it comes from having the immeasurable blessing of having Jesus living inside you.

**CONCLUSION**

So if you’re on the fence about Jesus but want to get off, where do you start? What does commitment to Jesus look like? The Bible teaches us that the primary symbol for expressing your allegiance to Jesus is baptism. We don’t believe that the Bible teaches that baptism is for babies. Baptism is for people who believe the gospel: that Jesus lived a perfect life, died a sacrificial death for their sins, and rose to give new life to all who put their trust in him, and because of the gospel, they want to spend the rest of their lives living for Jesus and worshipping him. So if you want to express your commitment to Jesus, then you must get baptized.

Baptism was also the ceremony that led early Christians to join local churches. Today, we call this “church membership”. If you want to commit yourself to Jesus, then you must commit yourself to his people. It is in the church where his word is taught and proclaimed. It is in the church where his flock gathers to be his hands and feet in the world. And it is in the church where Jesus is worshipped and adored as our savior and king.

It’s ok to be on the fence about Jesus, but it’s not ok to stay there. You either receive him into your life, or you reject him. Whoever is not with him is against him, and whoever does not gather with him scatters. Turn to Jesus today. Invite him into your life. Believe and be baptized, that you may live the blessed life.