

“The Kingdom of God Has Come upon You”

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Brian Watson

As you can see, I now wear glasses. At the end of last year, it became clear to me how I wasn't seeing things clearly. I had a hard time reading any text that was about ten or fifteen feet away. Kathy and I were away one weekend, and we visited a church that projects the lyrics of songs on screens, and I had a hard time reading the words. At first, I thought, “Why did they choose such a small font?” But then Kathy said she had no problem reading the words. Then I noticed while I was in a classroom that I had a hard time reading the names of my fellow students, which were printed in fairly large print, on cards where they were seated. So, I finally got an eye exam and I got glasses.

What I didn't realize was that I was missing out on a lot of other details in the distance, like the branches of trees. I could see the trees, of course, but I couldn't make out all the branches within the trees. The trees were a bit blurry. The past few weeks I've driven in and out of Boston, and I now can see all the definition of all the buildings in the city.

I used to have better eyesight, but over time, particularly the last couple of years, it has become worse. So, I was slowly able to recognize how my vision had become worse. But some people start out with bad eyesight. When I told a friend I had glasses, he said he is nearsighted, and he refused to get glasses for years. He thought that everyone had a hard time seeing things in the distance. If you start out with bad eyesight, you wouldn't know what you're missing until you get glasses or contacts. Then, you can see things as they really are.

In a similar way, we don't start out life seeing reality clearly. I'm not talking about literal vision. I'm talking about perception. We don't perceive all that there is to life. We certainly don't understand life very well. What we need is a set of glasses, metaphorically speaking, that will enable us to see reality. And the Bible is that set of glasses. The Bible is God's written word, which tells us what he is like, what the world is, who we are, what's gone wrong with the world and us, and how things can be fixed. If we don't see the world through the lens of the Bible, we won't reality clearly. Of course, we'll see important things; we're not completely blind. But there are things that are real, and things that are really important, that we won't see at all unless we view the world through a biblical worldview.

So, today, I want us to slip on a pair of biblical glasses to see four realities. We're continuing in the Gospel of Luke, which we have been studying for some time now. And we're going to read Luke 11:14–36 today. As we do that, we're going to see four things. One, supernatural good and evil are real. There really is a God and there really is a devil and his demons. Two, we'll see that Jesus is real and we'll see something about his identity. Three, there is no spiritual neutrality. Four, there is no neutral response to Jesus, and we'll see what it looks like to respond to him positively.

So, keep those four things in mind as I read today's passage. The passage may seem like it's drawing together some disjointed sayings. That's probably because our Bible translations have the passage broken up into smaller sections. You can ignore those subheadings that the Bible editors put there. Those subheadings aren't part of the original text, and while sometimes they can help, sometimes they just get in the way.

Let's now read Luke 11:14–36:

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."

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!"

²⁹ 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. ³⁰ For as Jonah became a sign to the people of Nineveh, so will the Son of Man be to this generation. ³¹ 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.³² 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.

³³“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.³⁴ 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.³⁵ Therefore be careful lest the light in you be darkness.³⁶ 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.”¹

The first reality we see through the lens of the Bible is that there is a supernatural good, God, and there is supernatural (or preternatural) evil, Satan, who is called Beelzebul here. That name, Beelzebul, refers back to Baal-Zebub, who is mentioned in 2 Kings 1. He is called “the god of Ekron,” one of the Philistine cities (2 Kgs. 1:2–3, 6, 16). The name means “Lord of the flies.” You may not understand any of that if you’re not familiar with the Bible, but if you’re familiar with “Bohemian Rhapsody,” you might recognize “Beelzebub.”² Beelzebul might mean “Lord of the dwelling place (or temple).” But what matters is it’s a reference to Satan, the devil.

And in this passage, we read about demons, or unclean spirits. Jesus casts a demon out of a man. The demon had caused the man to be mute, unable to speak. Jesus also tells a cautionary tale about unclean spirits. All of this might seem quite strange, because we don’t see demons, just as we don’t see God or the devil. But that doesn’t mean they aren’t real. We certainly see the effects of God and Satan.

This discussion about good and evil leads us to the issue of Jesus’ identity, which is the second reality the Bible allows us to see. The question of Jesus’ identity keeps coming up in Luke’s Gospel. The four Gospels of the Bible—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—are biographies of Jesus. But they’re not really like modern biographies, which generally tell about every age of a person’s life. These biographies focus mostly on two or three years of Jesus’ life, and they spend an inordinate amount of time talking about one particular week of Jesus’ life, the week that ended with his death. Luke clearly wants his readers to know who Jesus is and what Jesus came to do during that period of time.

So, the question of Jesus’ identity is brought up once again. We see that Jesus is able to heal the man who was demon-oppressed. But some people, probably Jewish religious leaders,

¹ All Scripture quotations are taken from the English Standard Version (ESV).

² That’s a reference to the song by the band Queen. The line from the song, “Beelzebub has a devil set aside for me,” doesn’t quite back sense, unless we think of “devil” as a demon.

accused Jesus of doing the work of Satan. Jesus points out that this accusation makes no sense. Why would Satan drive out his own demons? Jesus says that every kingdom divided against itself falls—that's true whether the kingdom is the kingdom of God, the kingdom of Israel, or the kingdom of the devil. Jesus points out how illogical they are being.

Then, Jesus asks, "If I cast out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your sons cast them out?" He's referring to other Jewish exorcists. He's probably referring to his own disciples, who were given the authority to cast out demons (Luke 9:1; 10:17). They will judge Israel (Matt. 19:28). His point is that if all the other Jewish exorcists are casting out demons by the power of God, then so is he. Or, to put it the other way around, if Jesus is driving out demons by the power of Satan, then so are the other Jewish exorcists. You can't have it both ways.

But Jesus says that he isn't casting out demons by the power of Satan. Instead, what he's doing is proof that the kingdom of God has come. He is driving out demons "by the finger of God." That's an interesting phrase. In Matthew's Gospel, in a parallel passage, Jesus says he casts out demons "by the Spirit of God" (Matt. 12:28). So, the "finger of God" is an anthropomorphic way of referring to the Holy Spirit. But Luke uses the "finger of God" to refer back to something in Israel's history. In the days of Moses, God delivered the Israelites out of slavery through miracles. Moses would perform some action with his staff, and miracles would happen. What's interesting is that the king of Egypt, the Pharaoh, had magicians who could also do miraculous works. They weren't doing these things by the power of the Holy Spirit, but by some demonic force. (That, by the way, shows that everything that appears miraculous is not from God. That's why we have to be careful about paying too much attention to miracles.) But there were times when Pharaoh's magicians couldn't do what Moses did. And at one of those points, the magicians say, "This is the finger of God" (Exod. 8:19). We're also told that the Ten Commandments were written by the finger of God (Exod. 31:18; Deut. 9:10).

What that means is that Jesus is doing the work of God. He is empowered by the Holy Spirit to perform miracles, signs that show that he is from God. And, just as the Holy Spirit wrote the Ten Commandments, the Holy Spirit is revealing who Jesus is. He's a man, but he's not just a man. Luke's Gospel makes it clear that he is the Son of God. He is divine, eternal. As God, he has always existed. Over two thousand years ago, he added a human nature to himself, becoming a baby in a virgin's womb. That miracle, too, was brought about by the Holy Spirit.

Jesus is the “strong man” who can bind Satan, attacking him, overpowering him, stripping him of his armor, and dividing his spoils. Jesus came to drive back the devil, to wrest the world away from Satan’s hold, to put an end to evil. John, an apostle, said, “The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil” (1 John 3:8).

I’ll say more about how Jesus does that, and a little more about who Jesus is and what he came to do, a bit later. But first I want to point out something interesting. It’s no surprise that the Bible says that Jesus could work wonders. We would expect that. Most of what we know about Jesus is found in the Bible, and the Bible presents Jesus as the God-man, the Savior, the Lord, and a miracle worker. But we do have some other information about Jesus outside of the Bible. The Roman sources about Jesus affirmed that he lived and was crucified by Pontius Pilate.³ There are a couple of references to Jesus in the *Babylonian Talmud*, a collection of writings by Jewish rabbis. The Talmud was put together a few hundred years after Jesus. It’s not the Bible, so we can’t view it as completely true and authoritative. But it does refer to Jesus as a worker of wonders. These statements were written by people who didn’t believe that he is the Messiah, the anointed king of the Jews. So, one claims that, “Jesus the Nazarene practiced magic and led Israel astray” (Sanhedrin 107b). Another says, “He has practiced sorcery and enticed Israel to apostasy” (Sanhedrin 43a).⁴ Those rabbis were wrong to say that Jesus led Israel astray. But what’s interesting is that everyone seems to acknowledge that Jesus worked miracles and that he was an exorcist. The only dispute is whether he came from God or Satan. The claim that he came from Satan simply doesn’t make sense. The way that Jesus lived and the things he taught could never come from the prince of demons.

Before we move on to the third reality we’ll see this morning, we should note two more things about Jesus’ identity. First, he claims to be greater than Jonah, one of Israel’s prophets. If you don’t know anything about Jonah other than a whale (or, as the Bible puts it, a great fish), then join us next Sunday at 9:15. We’re currently studying the book of Jonah. And Jesus claims to be greater than Solomon, one of Israel’s more famous kings, and a man known for his great wisdom. Second, Jesus implies that he is related to being enlightened. Elsewhere, Jesus calls

³ For more information on sources about Jesus, see <https://wbcommunity.org/how-can-we-know-jesus>.

⁴ Quoted in Edwin M. Yamauchi, “Jesus Outside the New Testament: What Is the Evidence?” in *Jesus Under Fire: Modern Scholarship Reinvents the Historical Jesus*, ed. Michael J. Wilkins and J. P. Moreland (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 214.

himself “the light of the world” (John 8:12), the one who came to reveal our true condition, to lead us out of darkness, and into life. I’ll say more about these things in a moment.

The third reality we see is that there is no spiritual neutrality. That’s his point in the little parable found in verses 24–26. Jesus describes a situation in which an unclean spirit is cast out of a person. If that person doesn’t have the Holy Spirit filling the vacuum, the demon will return with seven more. I don’t think he’s saying that this is exactly how all exorcisms work. The point is that it’s not enough to simply cast out evil. One must be filled with the good. It’s not enough to avoid doing “bad things,” whatever you think those bad things are. If you aren’t turning to Jesus and receiving the Holy Spirit, you open yourself up to spiritual attacks from the enemy. And you will be guided by one spirit or another. Some people say they’re spiritual but not religious. I have no doubt about that. Everyone is spiritual; the only question is whether that spirit is the Holy Spirit or an evil spirit. We will either be with God or against him. We will be on one side of the dividing line or another.

In a similar way, Jesus says that we will either be filled with darkness or light. We have to look to a light that is outside of us. And that implies that all of us start out filled with darkness. If we look to the light, our whole body will be full of light. But we can only do this if we have healthy eyes, eyes that can see the truth clearly. If we don’t have eyes to see, we will be full of darkness. Jesus urges us to come to the light, to look to it and trust it. What Jesus doesn’t say here is that he himself is the light. But he implies that he is the one that we have to look at, the one we must respond to.

And that brings me to the fourth reality we see here. Just as there is no neutral position spiritually speaking, there is no neutral response to him. He explicitly says, “Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters.” You are either with Jesus or against him. If you’re with him, you’re doing the work of gathering people into God’s kingdom. God’s kingdom is “God’s people in God’s place under God’s rule and blessing.”⁵ Jesus came to call people into that kingdom, and to show that he himself is King. And Jesus uses his followers to gather people, the way a farmer gathers a harvest (Luke 10:2). If you’re not working to know Jesus and to make him known, you’re working against him. You’re allowing people to be scattered, apart from God, and therefore apart from true life and hope. The key point is that you

⁵ Vaughan Roberts uses this definition, based on one created by Graeme Goldsworthy, repeatedly in his book, *God’s Big Picture: Tracing the Storyline of the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002).

are either under the King's rule, doing his work, or you're not. There's simply no fence-sitting when it comes to Jesus.

To be against Jesus, you don't have to be hostile to Christianity. You don't have to be an atheist. If you're apathetic, not really interested in following Jesus, you're against him. So many people are simply apathetic to Jesus. I see this every Easter. On Easter, which is four weeks away, we'll probably have twice as many people here. And that's good. I encourage you to invite people to come here, to join us in celebrating the resurrection of Jesus. It's an opportunity for more people to hear about Jesus. But so many who come will be apathetic. They may enjoy the service to some extent, but they won't pursue a relationship with Jesus. They won't read the Bible, pray, and worship with other Christians. They likely won't obey other commandments of Jesus, ones that are demanding. It's heartbreaking, really.

What does a right response to Jesus look like? Jesus gives us a couple of examples. First, he refers to Jonah. There were people who wanted to see a sign from Jesus, as though Jesus hadn't performed enough miracles already. Jesus knew their hearts. He knew that some people will never have enough proof to believe. They will demand proof after proof after proof and never put their trust in him. They want to be in control. So, Jesus says that no other sign will be given to them other than the sign of Jonah. In this case, he probably is referring to Jonah's preaching. Jonah was sent to one of Israel's enemies, Assyria, specifically to the city of Nineveh, in order to tell them God's judgment would come upon them for their evil deeds. When Jonah relayed that message to the people of Nineveh, they repented. They responded positively to Jonah's message. In a similar way, the Queen of the south, or the Queen of Sheba, came from a great distance to see Solomon. She heard his wisdom and was amazed. She had a positive response to Solomon. Jesus says these people will rise up on the day of judgment, and they will judge the unbelieving Jewish people standing in front of Jesus.

This would have been an amazing thing for these Jewish religious leaders to hear. These Gentiles had faith, and they would judge Jewish people, the supposed "chosen people of God." God did choose the Israelites as his people. They were rescued by God, delivered out of slavery. They received his law and many of his blessings. But that doesn't mean that all of them believed and had a right relationship with God. No one is born with a right relationship with God. We must respond to him positively. And we do that by responding positively to Jesus.

What do people who respond positively to Jesus do? Look at verses 27 and 28. In the middle of Jesus' teaching, a woman interrupts Jesus by yelling, "Blessed is the womb that bore you, and the breasts at which you nursed!" In other words, "Jesus, your mother is blessed to have you as a child." She's acknowledging that Jesus is great. But Jesus doesn't say, "You're right, Mary is blessed." And if ever there were a time when Jesus would say something about Mary being sinless, which is what Catholics believe, he would have said it here. But he doesn't say that. What he says is, "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it." What does it look like to trust Jesus? You believe that he speaks the words of God, and you do what he tells you to do.

Now, this does not mean that we earn a right standing with God. The Bible's message is that we cannot do that, because our obedience is always imperfect, mixed not only with moments of disobedience, but also bad motives. We can only receive a right relationship with God by trusting in Jesus, trusting that he alone has fulfilled all of God's righteous demands and that he died on the cross by bearing the penalty for our sin. But if we truly trust Jesus in that way, we'll obey him. Those who receive God's blessings also come under his rule. You can't be a Christian and ignore what Jesus says. In that case, you're not looking to the light. Instead, you're remaining in darkness.

Jesus came to save his people, and to destroy the works of the devil. But he hasn't fully destroyed those works yet. Satan is still active, and we obviously experience evil all around us and even within us. Jesus will come again, sometime in the future, and he will completely defeat Satan. The strong man will not only bind the devil, but he will destroy him. But Jesus came the first time to remove Satan's grip on us. And he did that not by acting as a strong man. Instead, he let himself be bound. Though he was perfectly righteous, completely sinless, people didn't believe him. They hated him. They didn't like what he said, and they were threatened by what he was doing. So, they bound him and killed him under false charges. But this was ultimately God's plan. Jesus allowed this to happen, because he knew that that he had to suffer the punishment that we deserve. Jesus died on the cross, and when he did that, he endured not just physical pain and death, but spiritual pain and death. He endured God's wrath. The light of the world was submerged into the greatest darkness in order to bring us into the light. And Jesus then rose from the grave to show that he satisfied God's demands, that he has power of sin and death, and that all who come to him will be raised from the dead when he comes again in glory.

So, what do we do with this information? We've slipped on our biblical glasses and seen some things that we couldn't otherwise see. So what?

We should consider these four realities. God is real. And so is Satan. Furthermore, so is Jesus. And there is no neutral spiritual ground. We will either be with Jesus or against him. So, which side are we on?

I realize that many people find the idea of no neutrality off-putting, to say the least. Some people think that whole "we're either with Jesus or against him" business to be very narrow-minded. They would probably say, "That's far too black and white. The real world is full of grays." I do believe that reality is often quite complex, and there are many situations where things are not so black and white. But just because there's a lot of gray doesn't mean there is no black and white. Many truths are precise and even narrow. Two plus two is four, not three or five or any number. All species of living things are either human beings or not. There are times when we can very neatly say that people are in this group or that. For example, you're either an American citizen, or you're not.

As I was thinking about this, I thought of the following image. We all know about the Titanic. I'm sure a lot of us saw the movie of the same name that came out in the late '90s. If you haven't seen the movie, here's a spoiler: A large ship hits an iceberg, the ship is destroyed, and a lot of people die. There were some lifeboats, and people who got on those lifeboats lived. But those who didn't die. Even those who had lifejackets didn't survive, because they were in the frigid waters of the northern Atlantic. So, you were either on a boat or you were dead. There was no neutral ground, no third place.

And that is a good way of imagining what the Bible tells us. God made a good world, which we might liken to a luxury liner. Things were fine on board. But then a disaster happened. The ship struck the iceberg of sin. Like an iceberg, sin might not seem so dangerous on the surface. But sin is deep and dangerous. It is a failure to love, trust, worship, and obey God the way that we should. And when the first human beings sinned, the luxury liner that God created was ruined. It's been sinking ever since. And everyone who has ever lived is either plunging to their death or they're getting on the lifeboat. That lifeboat is God himself, and now that Jesus has been revealed, it is Jesus. He is the only place to find refuge.

If someone rescued you from frigid waters, in which you would surely die, and put you on their boat, you would listen to them. If a captain of a ship found you drowning and he pulled

you on to his ship, you probably would be grateful and while you're on his ship, you would abide by his rules. The same is true of Jesus. If we have truly come to know him, if we've been pulled onto his ship, not by our own efforts, but by his, then we will be thankful, and we will listen to our captain and do what he says.

But there are many others who aren't on that lifeboat yet. They're on the ship that's sinking and think everything is fine. They think, "Oh, the ship has some trouble, but we'll find a way to patch it up someday." Some people are in the water, thinking that they can save themselves because they're strong swimmers. Those who think there's nothing to be saved from will be lost. Those who think they can save themselves will be lost. But those who fix their eyes on the light, who trust that Jesus is their only hope, find salvation, and their lives are changed forever.

If you haven't looked to the light, if you haven't gotten on board the only lifeboat there is, then I urge you to do so now. If you're already on board, listen to your captain. Abide by his rules. Don't just be hearers of the word, but also be doers. And if you're on board, look around. There are many people who are drowning. They are scattered in dangerous waters. Will you gather them? Will you try to rescue them? Do you realize they are truly lost? A nice person who doesn't know Jesus is a drowning person who cannot save herself. Not one of us can save ourselves through our own efforts. The only hope is Jesus.

To use a different metaphor, God's kingdom has come, and Jesus is the gate, the door, to that kingdom. He's the only way in. Let us make sure we are in that kingdom and that we obey the King. And let us bring others along with us, urging them to find shelter in a kingdom of love, light, and life.