

Experiencing God's Power **Luke 11:14-36**

We are continuing to walk through the book of Luke and this morning we are in the middle of Luke chapter 11, looking at events that took place in Jesus' ministry in Judea about 6 months before his crucifixion. The scene we are going to look at and study this morning is one where we will learn a little bit more about God's power and when we should expect to see and experience it.

We all want to see God's power at work in our lives and feel the excitement of encountering the presence of the Living God. Many Christians long for powerful experiences in ministry or at church or in worship where "God shows up" in a powerful way and the Holy Spirit is really evident. I have a colleague in ministry who would often express the need and pray for more of the "manifest presence of Christ." And what he meant by that was he wanted to see miraculous stuff – healings, conversions, obvious answers to prayer, sudden freedom from addiction, signs and wonders... It seemed to be the thing he wanted most and felt like the church needed most. And most of us want to see that kind of thing. We want to see the supernatural. We want to see miracles, healings, power...

But for most of us that's a rare and elusive experience. If we look back over many years there are probably things we can point to where we saw the power of God at work, but I assume that most of us wish we would see more – a lot more. Most of us probably have some questions and confusion about why we don't see more evidence of God's power in our lives – stuff like we read about in the book of Acts.

But I also know of some Christians who seem to see and experience that kind of stuff quite regularly at times – usually at some kind of Pentecostal church that really pushes for those kinds of experiences. (Picture) I've visited some of those churches and heard stories from some of you about what you've seen and experienced. I've also watched videos on YouTube. There's some crazy stuff out there – people falling over because they've been "slain in the Spirit," people overflowing with uncontrollable laughter, people barking like dogs, speaking in tongues, gold dust falling from the sky, miraculous healings, prophetic words, and so on. These are all attributed to the power of the Holy Spirit and the willingness to seek and experience it.

So we have two very different kinds of experiences when it comes to the power of God and this morning I want us to think about what we should expect – should we expect it to be rare and elusive or normal and regular? The story we are going to look at will give us insight into these things that I think will bring greater clarity.

Jesus was ministering with his disciples in Judea and he was getting mixed reviews. Many in the crowds were amazed and excited about him, but many were also doubtful and opposed and trying to find a way to turn people against him. We see that in our story today.

Read Luke 11:14-16.

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.

This is the setting for this story. Jesus had cast out a demon that was making a man mute. He did this kind of thing all the time and the people were amazed. No one denied it, even Jesus’ opponents, but they were forced to deal with how it happened. Where does Jesus get his power? Matthew and Mark record a similar situation that happened earlier when Jesus was ministering up in Galilee. The fact that Jesus could cast out demons was a problem for his opponents and they had to have an answer for it. Here we see how they tried to do that.

Verse 15 shows us that some denied his power came from God, claiming it came from Beelzebul instead – the prince of demons. Verse 16 shows that others didn’t deny it was from God, but were testing him, like Satan did in the wilderness. They demanded that Jesus show them some kind of additional sign to prove his power was from heaven – scholars suggest they may have wanted to see something like a pillar of cloud or fire.

How would Jesus respond? He addressed the false accusation first, then the demand for a sign.

Read Luke 11:17-20.

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.

You can see that Jesus understood Beelzebul, the prince of demons, to be Satan. According to Leon Morris, “Beelzebul” was the Jewish name for a prominent demon that they likely derived from the name of the Canaanite god “Baalzebul.” So his opponents were accusing him of being a minister of Satan – that’s how he had power to cast out demons.

But Jesus points out the obvious problem with that – if a kingdom is divided against itself, it will fall. It’s a tactical strategy to cause division in the ranks of an enemy. And we all know the saying: “Divide and conquer.” The people were very familiar with how division destroyed a kingdom. They had seen it repeatedly in the kingdoms surrounding them and even recently in their own. Less than 100 years earlier, Israel had been an independent and sovereign nation under the Hasmonean dynasty. But because of division and infighting within the leadership, the kingdom was so weakened that the Romans literally walked right into Jerusalem and took over without a fight.

So Jesus points out the obvious reality – if he’s casting out demons by the power of the prince of demons, Satan’s kingdom is divided and it would fall, and Satan would never do that.

Furthermore, Jesus pointed out that if Satan was the one who gave him power to cast out demons, what did that say about their own followers who were trying to do the same thing? They wouldn’t take too kindly to the insinuation that they too were wielding Satan’s power and their response would show how foolish the accusation was. That only left room for one explanation in verse 20 – it was by the finger of God that he was casting out demons. And that was a sign that in him and his ministry, the Kingdom of God was coming upon them. When the kingdom of God is spreading, the power of God is working and the kingdom of darkness is pushed back.

He supports this idea with an illustration to show what was happening through his ministry.

Read Luke 11:21-23.

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.

This illustration describes what's happening in the spiritual realms through Christ's ministry. The strong man is Satan and his palace is the world, including the people of Israel. Prior to Christ's ministry, Satan had a good thing going. His palace was well guarded and his goods were safe. He was carrying out his schemes through the corruption of the government and religious establishment of Israel and he had a strangle-hold over many people's lives through demonic influence and possession.

But when Jesus came and began his ministry, it was a direct attack on Satan and his kingdom. In 1 John 3:8, John writes: *"Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil."* Jesus came to destroy the works of the devil and he did this not only by providing salvation and redemption through the cross (Col. 2:15), but also through his ministry – by casting out demons, exposing the worthless religion of the Pharisees, preaching repentance, and so on. Jesus was conquering Satan's territory. And if the scribes and Pharisees didn't join him in what he was doing, they would be against him – and partnering with Satan. If they didn't gather subjects of the kingdom with him, they would be scattered. Jesus and demons don't go together – when he is present, demons flee.

He finishes this part of the conversation with a warning for those who had been delivered from demons.

Read Luke 11:24-26.

"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."

I think what Jesus is saying is that when it comes to demonic influence and possession, it's not enough to just cast them out. There also has to be a possession of another kind. Demons like to come back to familiar territory and if the person they left isn't possessed by the Spirit of Christ, the door is wide open for them to return and bring others along. So the only safeguard against ongoing or worsening demonic activity is union and fellowship with Christ. We must be one with him through faith and we must abide in him as our source of life, or we leave to door open to unclean spirits.

So, in Jesus' response to his accusers, he teaches us that in his ministry he is pushing back the darkness. He is destroying the work of the Devil. He is taking back territory from Satan. And God was giving him the power to do that. That power was a sign that the kingdom of God was upon them. And what I think that means for us is that we can expect to see God's power when we are doing the same thing. When we are actively engaged in pushing back the darkness and bringing light into the darkness, we can expect to see God's power at work in us and through us. We can expect to see people set free from demonic attack and influence. We can expect to see bondage, corruption, and habitual wickedness broken. As we minister in Jesus' name, carrying out his mission as he intended, we will see the power of God.

But there are also times when we can expect to not see it, and that's where this story goes from here. Luke first mentions a woman in the crowd who excitedly cried out about how blessed Jesus' mother was because of bearing and nursing him, but Jesus re-directed the attention to how blessed they would be if they heard the word of God and kept it. He then went on to address those who demanded a sign from heaven to prove his power was from God.

Read Luke 11:29-32.

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.

So Jesus exposed the wicked intentions of those who were demanding a sign. They had already seen and heard overwhelming evidence that his power came from heaven through his teaching, healings, and casting out demons. Another sign wouldn't change anything. Therefore, none would be given except the sign of Jonah, which is a reference to his resurrection. As Jonah was in the belly of the fish for three days, the Son of Man would rise from the grave on the third day.

His opponents were spiritually blind and if they didn't believe after all the signs that had already been given, they never would. They would be condemned in their sin and the Queen of the South and the people of Nineveh, both who had believed based on preaching and wisdom, would stand as condemnation against them on the day of judgment.

Those who want to see God's power for the sake of their own curiosity, amusement or proof to believe what's already been revealed, should not expect to see it. Evidence of God's power is already all around us and seeing something more powerful won't make any difference. And that seems to be what Jesus points out with his closing illustration.

Read Luke 11:33-36.

"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."

The Reformation Study Bible notes that by saying this, Jesus was pointing out that: *"the people seeking a sign did not need more light, but better receptiveness to the light they already had. What God was doing in Jesus was plain enough."*

The implication/application for us here is that if we're seeking to see God's power for merely our own amusement, curiosity, and experience, and not really to bring about his kingdom on earth, we should not expect to see it. God is not a genie-in-

a-bottle to be toyed with. This is why I'm leery of churches that get caught up in signs and wonders and manifestations of the Spirit. I'm not denying that those things can happen, but if you're coming together for the purpose and with the expectation of seeing God's power for your own thrill and experience, I think you're veering off course and I would question where that power is coming from and if it may also include manipulation.

So if we want to see more of God's power at work in our lives, what should we do? This story points us to engage in ministry that pushes back the darkness. Seek to minister to people like Jesus did – showing compassion for those who are hurting and helpless, sharing the truths of the Gospel, and ministering to those who may be in bondage to demonic influence. And I think we need to be careful to not become like those who just wanted to see another sign for the sake of their own proof, curiosity or experience. Jesus refused to do any miracles for himself, but only those he was directed to do from the Father in order to carry out his will.