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THE COMMITMENT REQUIRED TO FOLLOW JESUS

Luke 11:14-54

(7 of 11 in a series through Luke 7-15)

The first five centuries of the church were an extremely interesting and helpful time for the development of how we think about who Jesus Christ is. For basically 500 years the church reflected on the testimony of Scripture, discussed, debated, and came to a consensus on how to understand who and what the Bible says Jesus is. There has probably never been a time like that in the history of the church where there was a sustained focus on one doctrine for such a period of time. And we in this room are blessed because of their labors. We get to stand on their shoulders and testify together that the divine Son of God took on a fully human nature so that he at once had two natures—one fully divine and one fully human. Language that feels so commonplace to us was carefully worked out by those dear saints who came before us. But what's interesting is that so much of this complex process of figuring out how to articulate what the Bible says about Christ came about because false teaching began to make its way around the churches.

And though that may sound odd to think that the church was spurred on to articulate the fine details of the doctrine of Christ because of falsehoods, this is actually the way that things often work. It's not that people don't understand truth until some falsehood is stated. It's, rather, that we don't always know what truths *need* to be stated until some falsehood begins to be heralded and believed. This is why it would probably have been impossible to find a church's statement of faith articulating that marriage is between one man and one woman 100 years ago, but now it would be hard to find a faithful church whose confession of faith *doesn't* say that. Once falsehood is stated, it forces us to look at and articulate what is true.

I think Luke 11:14-54 can work that same way. This section of Luke's gospel is all about confrontation between Jesus and those opposed to him. Luke puts together moments in Jesus' ministry when people claim that he's working by the power of Satan, challenge him on not observing certain rituals, and demand signs of him with moments where Jesus issues some of the harshest words of judgment against them. And, yet, I think it can be helpful for us in understanding what our commitment as a follower of Christ must look like. The reason why is because where we see Jesus' answers and rebukes to his opponents' teaching, challenges, and hypocrisy, we can gather—by contrast with this dark picture—what it must look like to follow Christ as our Lord. And that's precisely what I want to try to show us this morning as we look at this text. First, then, we can gather that we must commit ourselves to Christ's purpose and mission.

We must commit ourselves to Christ's purpose and mission

Again, we're going to see this against the backdrop of those opposing Jesus. Our text begins with Jesus casting out a demon of a man who'd been unable to speak, and once the demon had

been cast out, the man was freed to speak. However, amidst many marveling, some said about Jesus that he “casts out demons by Beelzebul” (v. 15), which is another name for the devil, while others sought more signs from him.

Now, at this point, we shouldn't be surprised since we've seen this so much, but Jesus knew their thoughts. Therefore, though they may only be discussing their charges against him among themselves, he still knows them and addresses them. And he addresses them in a few ways. First, he notes that a divided kingdom or household will fail. In other words, if he's casting out these wicked spirits by the power of the devil, then Satan would be empowering some to afflict humans while empowering Jesus to deliver humans, and that wouldn't make sense. Those working in Satan's kingdom would be going in different directions. Moreover, in this occasion, Satan would be working toward his own defeat, which is foolish. And, finally, they're witnessing noting unusual with Jesus casting out demons when compared to others who do the same, and if that's the case, then if they think Jesus is casting out demons by Satan's power, then what does that say about their own people who also cast out demons? In short, Jesus notes just how irrational their charges against him are, which is something we often see in those who reject Jesus. They begin thinking irrationally and are given over to foolishness.

However, then Jesus goes on the offensive. If instead of casting out demons by the power of Satan, he casts them out by the finger of God (see Exodus 8:19), then that means that God's kingdom is in their midst. In other words, Jesus is announcing to them that he's God's promised king, demonstrating God's reign over the evil one. That's precisely what he's doing to the devil, as Jesus notes that the devil is like a strong man, fully armed, guarding his place, while Jesus comes in as a stronger man, overcoming the devil, stripping off his armor, and taking his goods. And since these in the crowds aren't with Jesus in this effort, then they're on the side of the evil one, scattering people instead of gathering them unto God.

Thus, what starts as this group challenging Jesus ends with Jesus saying that he's God's king, stronger than any evil power they've known, and they're his opponents. That's not where you want to be. And then Jesus adds one more note on how demonic spirits work. He tells the crowd that when a demon leaves someone, it “passes through waterless places seeking rest” (v. 24)—which is a reference to the demon looking for a place where humans dwell—but if it can't find any people, it will return to the person whom it left with seven others spirit who are more evil, thus making the person's life worse than it was.

Jesus' point is that even if someone cleans up his or her life and looks better to everyone but doesn't repent and believe in Jesus—being indwelt by the Holy Spirit—then that person may well only end up worse. Christianity isn't about doing better. It's about placing one's faith in Christ and following him as Lord.

Now, if we keep in mind that we can learn what Jesus demands of his followers by seeing his rebuke of those not following him, then it seems that we can say from this first encounter that Jesus wants his followers to see that we must align ourselves with him, his purpose, and his mission. If people oppose him, they're opposing God's king and God's kingdom. And if they try

to do good apart from bowing the knee to him, they only set themselves up to be greater ponds of the devil. Therefore, bow the knee to Jesus in faith, and instead of opposing him, make sure your life is all about seeking to obey Christ in his purpose and mission.

And I'll say practically, this is one of the biggest reasons why we encourage people to join a local church. Jesus' mission involves baptizing disciples so that they're part of a church and then are taught to obey all that he commands. So don't try to be wiser than God but link arms in covenant with believers in a local church and make sure you're pursuing the purpose and mission of Jesus. Next, Jesus shows us that we must commit to obeying his word.

We must commit ourselves to obeying Christ's word

This next section actually begins positively, or at least with only a minimum rebuke. As Jesus is being opposed by many, a woman in the crowd yells out in adoration of Jesus, "Blessed is the womb that bore you, and the breasts at which you nursed" (v. 27). Now, as I noted, this is obviously an expression of adoration for Jesus as she notes the blessing that is known by the one who gave him birth. And yet, Jesus, issues the mildest of rebukes—or at least a correction—answering, "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it" (v. 28).

It seems that Jesus didn't want anyone to think that only those with a familial connection to him can be blessed of God, nor that those with a familial connection were *automatically* blessed of God. What matters is not our family connections but whether we obey the word of God. And the encouraging reality for us here is that though none of us can choose our parents or what family we were born into, we all can choose to obey God's word, and if we do, we are blessed of God. Thus, Jesus sets up this section showing that his followers must be those who commit themselves to obeying Christ's word.

We see this emphasized by once more, as we see a group who doesn't obey Christ's word. In verses 29-32 Jesus begins to speak judgment against this generation of people who hear his word but simply demand greater or more signs before they believe. He calls them "an evil generation," noting that the only sign that will be given to them is the sign of Jonah.

Some have speculated that the sign of Jonah may simply be that Jonah preached a message of repentance or judgment, and so Jesus doing the same is the sign they get. But it's hard for me to think that anyone would hear a reference with Jonah without thinking that he preached this message of judgment and repentance only after being rescued from certain death as the fish first swallowed and then vomited him up out at sea. Consequently, it seems that the sign of Jonah that Jesus refers to is that he—like Jonah—will be delivered but not just from certain death but from actual death.

But the problem is that many who hear his word after he has been raised won't believe—even many in the crowd hearing him that day. And Jesus points out the terrible nature of their disobedience since those who heard Jonah repented at his preaching and the queen of the South

came to hear Solomon to obey his wisdom, and one greater than Solomon and Jonah is here and yet they are not listening to and obeying Jesus' word.

Then, Jesus gives a parable to warn them about not receiving his word. He says, "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. 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. Therefore be careful lest the light in you be darkness. If then your whole body is full of light, having no dark part, it will be wholly bright, as when a lamp with its rays gives you light" (vv. 33-36).

Now, my guess is that this is confusing, but I think I can help us understand just with one observation. When Jesus speaks of the eye being the lamp of the body, he's not picturing our eyes lighting up things by shining light out from them and lighting up the room around us. Rather, he's picturing our eyes as lamps to our bodies as they let light in. In other words, when your eye is healthy and working properly, it lets light in and lights up the body. However, if the eye is unhealthy and does not let light in, then the body remains dark. That's the illustration. And Jesus' point is that if we let the light of his word in, our lives can be transformed. However, if we keep his light out—rejecting his word—then it will have an effect of allowing darkness to remain and corrupt the whole of our lives. This is a warning against those who do not listen to and receive Christ's word.

This is why we can say that followers of Jesus Christ must be those who commit themselves to obeying Christ's word. There is really nothing more central to following Christ than obeying his word. Jesus teaches us to make disciples of the nations by teaching them to obey all that he's commanded, and where are his commands found? Of course, they're in his word. This is what following Christ means—learning what God's word says and obeying it. It's what we're about as a church. It's why we structure our corporate worship as we do—constantly hearing God's word and responding to it. And one reason we structure the service this way is not only to help us in the present but to be a reminder to future generations who might gather in this place that the word must remain central if this church is to honor the Lord. We believe that what you emphasize in worship and in life matters. It's why we commit much time to preaching through God's word—book by book—and take time to examine it, understand it, and apply it Sunday after Sunday. It doesn't take much—simply slipping away from focusing on God's word—to walk in utter ruin. And this is why Jesus reminds us that those who follow him must be committed to obeying his word.

So, look at your life and make sure you're someone whose aim is to hear and read God's word, know God's word, and obey God's word. Anything less suggests that you're not following Jesus. Finally, Jesus shows us that we must commit our entire being to following him.

We must commit to our entire being to follow Jesus

I have to admit that I tried a few different ways to say this point because I don't love how abstract this point feels to me, but I think as we walk through the text, you'll see what I mean. In

verses 37-54 Jesus goes on a scathing rebuke against the Pharisees and legal scholars of the day. If one were only to have a category of Jesus being kind and peaceful, he would have serious problems with what we see here.

The first encounter happens as a Pharisee asked Jesus to dine with him, and Jesus agreed. However, Jesus didn't wash before eating, which astonished the Pharisee. But why? Was this a case of Jesus using bad hygiene? No, it's something else altogether. Under the law, only priests had been commanded to wash hands (and feet) before handling the offerings at the altar (Exodus 30:17-21), but the Pharisees had expanded this as a law for all people before handling any food. So the Pharisee was astonished at Jesus *not* washing. He'd violated this law—which was really no law at all.

Now, again, Jesus could have just gone into the Pharisee's home and washed, knowing this was the expectation, much like we might show the courtesy of taking off our shoes in some place, though there's obviously no biblical command that one must do so. But Jesus, it seems, was doing this precisely because he wanted to address this issue. Jesus had an agenda.

Therefore, as soon as the Pharisee shows his astonishment at Jesus' lack of washing, Jesus responds, "Now you Pharisees cleanse the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside you are full of greed and wickedness. You fools! Did not he who made the outside make the inside also? But give as alms those things that are within, and behold, everything is clean for you" (vv. 39-41).

In other words, Jesus knows that the Pharisees were concerned to look good on the outside only. Within, they were greedy and wicked. They simply wanted gain. Therefore, Jesus tells them they need to focus on internal holiness. They need to address their greed, and one way to do that is go give as alms which they have taken hold of in their greed. Jesus is saying that our outside appearance of holiness must reflect our internal holiness as well.

Then, in verses 42-44, Jesus builds on this rebuke. He says, "But woe to you Pharisees! For you tithe mint and rue and every herb, and neglect justice and the love of God. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others. Woe to you Pharisees! For you love the best seat in the synagogues and greetings in the marketplaces. Woe to you! For you are like unmarked graves, and people walk over them without knowing it."

Taking these one at a time, first Jesus notes that the Pharisees may be sticklers on giving their ten percent of even the tiniest things like herbs that grow in their garden, and so—again—they look externally holy. However, Jesus tells them, that they neglect love and justice, which are basic to everything we do in obedience to God. In fact, Paul will say in 1 Corinthians 13 that if we even do something seemingly as sacrificial as giving our body to be burned but don't do it in love, it amounts to nothing.

Then, he notes that at their hearts is a desire for prestige. They go into the synagogues and seek the best seat. They're driven not by love for God and a desire to exalt him but a love for themselves and desire to exalt themselves. Thus, Jesus compares them to unmarked graves.

Now, this comparison doesn't make sense to us in our setting, but the idea was that coming into contact with a grave made one unclean. Consequently, it was very important for graves to be marked so that others could see it and make sure not to step on it and become unclean. Thus, Jesus is saying that the Pharisees are like unmarked graves in that they spread their corruption to others without others even realizing it. Some may follow their instructions and teachings, thinking this is what is right and good, while they're still corrupt internally. We might compare it to the pastor who tells his congregation that certain sexual sins are acceptable because he wants to be embraced by the wider culture, and in doing so, he is leading those under his teaching to greater and greater corruption.

Then, after hearing the Pharisees rebuked by Jesus, the lawyers realize that because they do the same things, they too are being rebuked by Jesus. Therefore, one of them declares, "Teacher, in saying these things you insult us also" (v. 45). And if he was expecting Jesus to say, "Oh, I'm so sorry," he sure was in for a shock because Jesus then brought in the lawyers as well to his harsh rebuke. He noted that they build tombs—perhaps as memorials—to the prophets of the Old Testament who had been killed by their ancestors. Their intention, most likely, was to send the message that had they been alive at that time, they would have listened to and honored the prophets, unlike those before them. But obviously that's not true because here is the Son of God standing in front of him, and they oppose him. Thus, Jesus says that it is fitting that they build the tombs because they're basically completing the acts of their father, "For they killed them, and you build their tombs" (v. 48).

Then, Jesus notes that the blood of all the prophets—from Abel to Zechariah (which is a reference to the first righteous one killed in the Scripture to the last prophet killed in the Scripture (since Chronicles was the last book listed in the Hebrew Old Testament))—would be required of them because by rejecting the Son, they were showing they had the same rebellious hearts as those before them. And with such evil hearts toward the Lord, they were hindering others from seeing truth and obeying the Lord.

I think you can see, then, why I said that we have to commit our entire being to following Jesus. The Pharisees and lawyers were pictures of individuals who looked good on the outside to many but inside were corrupt and devious. What many didn't see was their greed, desire for prestige, and hatred for real holiness. And we should take this moment to examine ourselves as well. It may well be that those around us this morning would say, "Yeah, he is following Jesus" or "She is obeying the Lord," but you know your heart. You know what you're pursuing in secret. Are you a picture of someone who wants others to think of you as a follower of Christ while you want to hold onto secret sin? If that's the case—as in this scene—the Lord will be gracious enough to expose you so that you can repent. So, why not just repent now and walk away from your sin. If you know Jesus, you have the Spirit and don't have to be enslaved to that sin. Jesus demands nothing less of his followers. He demands that we commit the entirety of our lives to him in obedience.

Luke 11:14-54 is filled with Jesus confronting his enemies, but if we allow his rebuke to shine a light on what he demands of his followers, we'll see that we need to orient our lives to being committed to his purpose and mission, to hearing and obeying Christ's word in every detail, and to committing our entire being in obedience to him. He demands no less, and how could we not obey in light of the fact that he lived, died, and was raised for us? So, let's declare our commitment to him this morning as we come to the table. Amen.