

The Vilification of Jesus, Part 1

Scripture: Luke 11:14-23

Code: 42-159

We come to the Word of God and to a very important portion of Scripture, this morning, in our ongoing study of the gospel of Luke. I am but a servant, as you know, my responsibility is to dispense to you the Word of the living God and I desire to be faithful to that end week in and week out. And the best way to do that is to go through the Scriptures, leaving nothing out. And we are so profoundly enriched in every text but this one is particularly definitive and important. Luke 11 verses 14 through 23...Luke 11 verses 14 through 23, this incident is carried actually down through verse 28, but I want to look at 14 through 23.

And as you would assume, a passage of this length is more than we can cover in one lesson. And so, God willing, we will divide it into two. But let me read the text for you, Luke 11:14.

"And He was casting out a demon and it was dumb and it came about that when the demon had gone out, the dumb man spoke and the multitudes marveled. But some of them said, He cast out demons by Beelzebul, the ruler of the demons. And others to test Him were demanding of Him a sign from heaven. But He knew their thoughts and said to them, Any kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and a house divided against itself falls. And if Satan also is divided against himself, how shall his kingdom stand? For you say that I cast out demons by Beelzebul and if I by Beelzebul cast out demons, by whom do your sons cast them out? Consequently they shall be your judges. But if I cast out demons by the finger of God, then the Kingdom of God has come upon you. When a strong man fully armed guards his own homestead, his possessions are undisturbed. But when someone stronger than he attacks him and overpowers him, he takes away from him all his armor on which he has relied and distributes his plunder. He who is not with Me is against Me. And he who does not gather with Me scatters."

My friend, Larry King, once commented, "The whole world is gray." And I suppose that's how it appears to most people...complex, diverse, ten-thousand shades of gray. In fact, there are so many religions and so many philosophies and so many world views and so many theories and so many ideas that we have come to the conclusion that there really is no such thing as absolute truth anyway and as we move up the revolutionary chain and we have finally reached the pinnacle where we tolerate anything and everything, we've come to that elevated understanding that nothing is really true in and of itself. And so we are applauding this gray world in which we live and affirming everyone's

right to believe whatever he or she wants to believe. We have abandoned the once precious controlling and motivating conviction that there actually is such a thing as truth. And I suppose the mantra of the post-modern world is the whole world is gray. There's no black and white. Everyone is entitled to his opinion, or her opinion. Your truth is your truth, my truth is my truth. And there's something wonderful about everybody having the right to believe whatever they want to believe. This is how it should be, tolerant should prevail. We are more than ever, I think, comfortable with the notion that this spectrum of concepts is legitimate and beneficial and right...whatever right is. And so we celebrate this diversity as if it was some virtue.

Nothing could be further from the truth. Nothing could be more wrong than that perspective. Let me cut through all the fog very rapidly and reduce the whole race of human beings to a very simple and very precise division. Whatever you may believe, whatever you may think, whatever you may imagine to be your options, everyone in the world falls into one of two categories, and there are only two and there are not three or more. Only two options. Jesus said it in verse 23, "He who is not with Me is against Me," and that is it. That template is laid over the human race. You are either with Christ or against Him.

He further said, "And he who does not gather with Me scatters." You either are with Him and contributing to His Kingdom, or you are against Him and fighting His Kingdom. Everyone in the world lives and dies in one of those two categories. And your eternal destiny is determined by which of the two. In that sense there are only two religions in the world...there are those who are with Christ and those who are against Him. There are those who are God's and those who are Satan's. There are those who are in the Kingdom of Light, and those who are in the kingdom of darkness. There are those who are unrighteous and those who are righteous. As my grandfather used to say, there are the saints and the aints and that's all...that's all. This is unmistakable, this is clear, this is precise, this is definitive, this is determinative and it leaves out no one...absolutely no one.

It isn't the first time that Jesus hinted at this axiomatic reality. Back in chapter 9 and verse 50 He said to His disciples, "He who is not against you is for you," and there was that same principle. There are only two options in the world, you are either supportive of the Messiah and supportive of His work and His Kingdom, or you are against it and there is no middle ground. There is no third option. There is no other category. There is no neutrality. God is not stuck with trying to figure out what to do with the people who are neither for Christ or against Him. God is not sort of in the dilemma of all that middle group who on the one hand didn't know about Jesus or on the other hand knew about Him but didn't know what to do so did nothing. They are not in some middle group that have to be brought under some kind of trinitarian consultation so as to determine their destiny. You are either with Him or you are against Him. And if you make no decision, you are against Him as much as the most rabid Satanist. You are not different than a Satan worshiper if you are not with Christ.

There is no possibility of neutrality. There is no third option. In the war between God and Satan, between good and evil, between light and darkness, between truth and lies there is no middle ground. There is only heaven and hell which crystalizes into permanency the decision of the choice made here. The person who does not believe in Jesus Christ, does not receive Him, does not follow Christ with all his heart, does not join in building Christ's Kingdom is in partnership with Satan as much as if he were a Satan worshiper. It is not necessary to oppose Jesus Christ to be against Him. It is not necessary to attack His deity. It is not necessary to attack His Word. It is not necessary to attack His character. It is not necessary to attack His gospel. It is not necessary to discredit His church. It is not necessary to persecute Christians. It is not necessary to interfere in His work, to slander His name, or to hate His Kingdom. All you have to do is nothing about Jesus Christ and you're in the same category with Satan worshipers, in fact you are one. You've made your choice. If you are not involved in the work of gathering souls into the Kingdom of God, you're guilty of participating with those who scatter them. No decision concerning Jesus Christ is a decision. No participation with Christ is to be against Him, against His work, against His Word and against His Kingdom. Just know that. Don't comfort yourself that you're sitting in some neutral spot with warm and fuzzy feelings about Jesus. Those will damn you just as fast as if you bowed down to a Satanic shrine and engaged in human sacrifice. All people are either Christ's or Satan's. They're either children of God or children of the devil. They either belong in the Kingdom of light or the kingdom of darkness, or either headed for heaven or headed for hell. And there are no exceptions. This is crystalized in the words of Jesus in verse 23, and this marks a definitive moment in the ministry of our Lord in Judea. It is only months before the cross.

As we learned in chapter 9 verse 51, the days were approaching for His ascension that He resolutely set His face to go to Jerusalem. Not His ascension to heaven, but His ascension to Jerusalem for the Passover, the last Passover where He would die and where He would be the final and only sacrifice for sin. He is headed toward His death, only months away now. The Galilean ministry is in the past. In these final months, He along with His Twelve and the seventy and the rest of His disciples are hitting every town and village in Judea, going everywhere proclaiming His Messiahship, affirming the reality of that and His deity by signs and wonders and miracles, healings, casting out of demons. All through Judea, from town to town and village to village they go, day after day after day. And the days are filled with miracles and teaching and calling for repentance and faith in Him as the Messiah. He puts His divine power on display and He even delegated it through the seventy so that they went out and even had power over demons which had been delegated to them for this period of time. And through His presence and through His preaching and His healings and His power over demons, He is bringing the force of the Kingdom of God into the little towns and villages throughout Judea. And they're being confronted with the reality of who He is. And they're therefore being confronted with the decision of all decisions...what are you going to do with Jesus Christ? And you only have two options, you are either with Him or you are...what?...against Him and there is no middle ground.

Up to this point Luke has been presenting the record of the revelation of the Son of God. It starts out early in Luke, as you well know, when an angelic announcement comes to Zacharias and then, of course, Elizabeth finds out they're going to have a child, the child will be the forerunner of the Messiah. Then another angelic announcement comes to Mary and she's going to have the Messiah. And we went through all of that, the virgin birth and we know that this is the Messiah because of the forerunner, because of the angelic involvement, because of the virgin birth and then there's a genealogy and we know the genealogy places Him in the Messianic line and everything comes together. And John the Baptist who is the forerunner says, "This is the one," and we begin to see His ministry unfold and He goes everywhere and expresses this great power over the kingdom of darkness and this great power over disease and this great power over death. And He preaches the Kingdom of God and He forgives sin and He calls for repentance and He affirms that He's the Messiah, the Son of God. And this has been going on for several years now. And everything He ever said was proven and verified and attested by these signs and wonders and they were multiplied through the Twelve who went out two-by-two and they were multiplied through the seventy who went out two-by-two. It is unmistakable evidence.

And so, we reach a point where it's decision time. Nothing more can be said. Nothing more needs to be done. The facts are there. The evidence is there. What's your conclusion? What's your response? You've seen it all, you've heard it all. The message, the miracles, the call for repentance, the offer of forgiveness, the promise of the Kingdom, what is left? Only a decision. And after this, as you move through chapter 11, the Lord gets more confrontational than ever. Verse 29 He says, "This generation is a wicked generation." In verse 39 He indicts the Pharisees who are clean on the outside and full of robbery and wickedness on the inside. He raises His response to a more confrontive and condemning level. In fact, in verses 53 and 54 of this chapter, their response is that the scribes and Pharisees began to be very hostile. They're plotting, trying to catch Him in something He might say. The crowds get larger. Verse 29, the crowds are increasing. Chapter 12 verse 1, thousands are making up the multitudes that are gathering around Him. He's talking to more people than ever. The crowd is getting bigger and bigger. And yet He is getting more confrontive and more condemning. The warnings are stronger, more lethal. What's this about?

Well it's time to make a decision and basically the decision has been made. And the decision in general is to reject Him. And that decision is fixed and it's settled with only a very brief and hypocritical respite at Palm Sunday in which they gave Him the accolades as if He were the son of David and spun around on their heels a few days later and called for His blood.

So the attitude toward Jesus is fixed. And the tragic reality is they concluded exactly the opposite of the truth. What did they conclude? Verse 15, "He casts out demons by Beelzebul, the ruler of the

demons." He is from hell, not heaven. He represents Satan, not God. He is a liar, not the truth. He's the source of death, not life. He's from the darkness, not the light. They concluded the exact opposite of the truth. Opposition then to Christ had really reached the fixed point. And you know what? It really was the leaders of Israel, the Pharisees and the scribes, who launched this and propagandized the nation against Jesus and the people because it suited their self-righteousness, bought the lie of the Pharisees and the scribes. And that's why the nation rejected Him. They didn't just sort of stumble into this, they were led into it by their false leaders. And it wasn't just the scribes and the Pharisees that wanted Him dead, eventually the whole crowd screamed, "Crucify Him," didn't they? They had been sufficiently brainwashed over months and months and months, even over a couple of years to buy the party line against Jesus.

Now with that as a background, let's look at verse 14. And what happens here is Jesus does a miracle of casting out a demon which involves also a healing. And this allows for us to see this final response surface. Verse 14, "And He was casting out a demon," something He did all the time, and it was dumb or mute, the word *kophos*, probably indicates someone who is deaf and therefore could not speak. And the demon came out, "It came about when the demon had gone out the dumb man spoke." There's nothing unusual about this. It happened all the time. It happened weekly. It may well have happened daily sometimes...very, very common circumstance in the life of our Lord. If you go back to chapter 7 verses 20 to 22, remember John the Baptist sent some of his disciples to ask the question, "Is this really the Messiah?" And Jesus said, "I am the Messiah, and here's the evidence," you remember that? The people who can't walk, walk. The people who can't see, see. The people who can't hear, hear. The dead are raised.

So this was routine but it surfaces the reaction and the response that has become the general attitude. Verse 14 says, "Initially the multitudes marveled...the multitudes marveled." Sure, of course, because this is a healing, it is like all the healings of Jesus, mark it, instant, complete, no rehabilitation. Very different than so-called healings today by perpetrators of false healings.

Now I do need to make a comment at this point. This particular incident in the flow of Luke's gospel happens in Judea, the southern part of Israel. What follows they accuse Him of doing by Satan, He responds with the words that I told you, if Satan is divided against himself, he'd be pulling down his own house, and so forth. The response of the people to this miracle and the response of Jesus to their response and what He says are very, very similar, almost identical to an incident that is recorded in the twelfth chapter of Matthew and also the third chapter of Mark. Now I just want to speak to that issue for a moment because I think it's very important. There are many Bible commentators who feel that what Luke is giving us here is just another edition of the Matthew 12, Mark 3 incident, that Luke is just giving his version, as the synoptic gospels do very often where you have the same incident in the three gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke. After all, it was a healing by the casting out of a demon.

They said He did it by Satan power. Jesus responded the same way. And yet there are some differences. The material before and after is different. There's no discussion of the blaspheming of the Holy Spirit which is the main thing in Matthew 12, it's not here it comes later in Luke. Jesus says that at a later time.

So how are we to know this is the same event or a different event? Jesus even says in the Matthew 12 account, "Whoever is not with Me is against Me." Does this necessarily make it a parallel? Let me help you to think that through for a minute.

I'm convinced that this is a different account and I'll tell you why. One, it's in Galilee where the first one took place. And Luke is giving us the chronology and we know Jesus is in Judea. Why would Luke import something out of His Galilean experience to try to show us the developing attitude in Judea? All He's doing is saying the same thing that happened in Galilee, the same final rejection that brought Jesus' ministry in Galilee to an end is the very same thing that's happening in Judea. Here is a parallel. And you may say to yourself, "But, I mean, isn't it kind of odd that they would have the very same reaction as the people in Galilee? The people in Galilee said He did what He did by the power of Beelzebul. Now the people in Judea are saying the same thing. Isn't it somewhat of a strange coincidence that at two different times months and months apart in two different locations they would come up with the same thing?"

Not really. First of all, this man was only deaf and mute. The man in Matthew was blind, as well. So that could indicate a different situation. But more importantly, this is very interesting evidence that the systematic campaign to discredit Jesus as a demon-possessed agent of Satan had been effective everywhere. People didn't just blurt out as in verse 15, "He cast out demon by Beelzebul, the ruler of the demons," because that was the obvious thing. That was not obvious, that was idiotic, that was absurd. And Jesus points out the absurdity of it by axiomatic statements, "A house divided against itself will fall." It's an absurd statement. No rational person would assume that statement to be true. You would have to parrot something that had been propagandized. What you find out here is the party line coming down from Jerusalem, the party line of the Pharisees and the scribes was...we have to discredit Jesus. We have got to get rid of Jesus because Jesus was dismantling their hypocritical religious system, their self-righteousness. And they hated Him for it. And what is the worst thing that you could ever see? What would be the severest way to ever discredit someone in a religious community? To say he's a representative of...whom?...Satan. That was the party line. This wasn't invented this day in Judea in some coincidental fashion as it had been stated in Galilee. Not at all. In fact, this has been a growing perspective that the leaders have been doing everything they could to establish everywhere they went dogging the steps of Jesus.

For example, in a completely different setting, John chapter 7, verse 20, the multitude said, "You have a demon." Well where did they get that?

John 7:20 and John 8:48, "The Jews answered and said to Him, 'Do we not say rightly that You're a Samaritan and do you have a demon?'" They're just furious. And they're parroting this idea that He's demonic.

Chapter 10 of John, verse 20, "Many of them were saying, 'He has a demon and He's insane.' And some others were saying, 'These are not the sayings of a demon-possessed man.'" Where is this idea that He's demon-possessed coming from? Why are people coming up with this? These are not the teachings of an insane man. These are not the teachings of a demoniac. These are not the insanities of a man running out a tomb slicing himself up. Where is it coming from? There has to be a source for this.

Matthew 12:24 says, "It came from the Pharisees." And Mark 3...Mark 3 gives the parallel account to the Matthew occasion, the Matthew incident. Matthew chapter 12 verses 20 to 40, Mark chapter 3 verses 20 to 30, the same incident. And in Mark it says, "And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem said He does this by the power of Beelzebul." First they started sowing the idea that He's demonic...He's demonic. And then they just raised it to the peak and said He is doing what He's doing not just by any demon but by Beelzebul, the prince of demons. This was the...this was the party line. This was the CW, this was the conventional wisdom that Jerusalem was sending down and disseminating through the crowd. And the witless people bought it all and parroted back. And here we are in Judea and it doesn't say anything about scribes being there, it doesn't say anything about Pharisees, it just says, verse 15, "Some of them said..." In the middle of their marveling, it's an amazing thing, in the middle of their astonishment and their wonder because they had never seen anything like that, never. In fact, on another occasion when Jesus cast out demons they said that, "Never has anything like this happened in Israel ever." They had their phony Jewish exorcists. They had their people who purported to be able to cast out demons, who could, of course, not do that in the power of God. They knew the difference. They had never seen anything like it and yet as soon as the crowd begins to marvel, the propagandists blurt out, "He casts out demons by Beelzebul, the ruler of the demons." And I don't know that Jesus even heard because it says in verse 17, "He knew their thoughts." But He knows what people think and He knows what they say when His ears can't hear it. There they are sowing that same lie. They sowed it in Galilee and it was successful. And now they're dogging His steps with it in Judea.

Back in Galilee when He had healed the man who was blind and deaf and mute and cast the demon out, the amazed crowd began to say, "Can He be the son of David? Is this the Messiah?" And they quickly jumped in and said, "No...this is done by the power of Beelzebul."

You know, what would have been nice would have been if verse 15 said this, "But the people gathered around and rejoiced with the man who could hear and talk." Wouldn't that have been nice? Just kind of come around the guy and rejoice with him? How would you feel if you had just been healed and they said, "Well, it was by satanic power?" They didn't care about Him. It would have been even more wonderful if they had said, "Thank You, God, for this display of power over the kingdom of darkness. Thank You, God, for this glorious reality that You can conquer Satan." Because there can't be a Kingdom of God unless the Messiah can conquer Satan, right? There can't be. You have to be able to crush the serpent's head to establish the Kingdom of God. There are so many right responses, but they just said, "He cast out demons by Beelzebul, the ruler of the demons."

And then verse 16 adds this interesting comment. "And others to test were demanding of Him a sign from heaven." Ah, I suppose you might say, "Well, you know, you know these people just need more information." No. That isn't what they were doing at all. It wasn't about getting information, it was to test. Better, to taunt. "Yeah, Jesus, do some wonders and prove to us You're not doing it by the power of Satan." It's the same thing they said at the foot of the cross. "Bring Yourself down off the cross." Slanderous, mocking, taunting. That's why Jesus said in verse 29, "This is a wicked generation." This isn't legitimate need to see more evidence. They were wicked. And they demanded a sign. And in verse 29 Jesus said, "This generation is a wicked generation, it seeks for a sign." That was how they expressed their wickedness. Never enough, is it? Never, ever, ever, ever enough, as if they hadn't seen signs. He Himself was the sign. And all they could do was taunt Him, "Do another miracle and prove You're not in partnership with Satan."

So they aren't really to be distinguished from the people who said in verse 15, "He cast out demons by Beelzebul the ruler of the demons, they just chimed in from a different perspective.

Look at that statement for a moment in verse 15. "He cast out demons by Beelzebul, the ruler of the demons." You know, this is so gripping to me. I mean, there is a pathos in this. There is a foreboding in this. There is an ominous reality in this that is absolutely devastating. You understand how many years the Jews sat in wait for the Covenant promise to be fulfilled in the arrival of the Messiah? You understand that because we've gone through it in the gospel of Luke how every mother longed to the Messiah's mother, how every father longed to have his children know the messianic kingdom. How they waited for the fulfillment of all that had been promised to Abraham and all that had been promised to David, and all of the New Covenant realities to be brought in and how Zacharias had...had given glory to God in his benedictus in which he celebrated the glories of the Abrahamic Covenant and of the Davidic Covenant and most ly of the New Covenant and how all of history culminated in the coming of Jesus Christ? And here we come to this culminating reality that Christ has given a full manifestation of Himself, nothing more to say, nothing more to do. And the conclusion is, He's from hell. This is absolutely staggering. Is there any wonder that Jerusalem was

destroyed? Is there any wonder that Jesus pronounced judgment on them? There could be no more revelation, there was nothing more to say. All the prophecies had been fulfilled. All the evidence had been manifest. And this is where they end up. You can talk till you're blue in the face about who killed Jesus, but I'll tell you who hated Him. The Jews did and they screamed for His blood. They didn't take His life without the complicity of the Romans, but they hated Him. That was their conclusion.

And to show you the vilification, all you have to do is look, "He cast out demons by Beelzebul, the ruler of the demons." They didn't even use the word Satan, they used the word Beelzebul. That goes way back into the Old Testament. And it's a frightening thought, lord of the flies. Why that? Because it also meant lord of the dung...lord of the manure, a very popular term for the prince of demons, Satan. In fact, it was so well known and so well established that it doesn't need to be interpreted, and it isn't, it's just used. Both in Galilee it was used, and here again in Judea it was used by the crowd and it was the party line that had come down from the top, Jesus is an agent of the dung-god. You talk about blasphemy, that's some serious blasphemy. You say, "I'd never say that." Well good, I'm glad you wouldn't say that, but if you're not with Him, you're...what?...you're against Him, you're with those who said it. You might say, "Well I would never crucify Him." Yeah, you're with those who did. You only have those two options. The title became a common term for Satan like Belial and it needed no explanation.

Get this, here was their response. They called the highest and holiest one the lowest and most evil. They called the one who was pure good, pure evil. They called God the devil. They called perfect holiness wickedness. They called incarnate truth a liar. This is the extreme opposite and if you're there, you can't be redeemed because when you've had all the revelation and you've concluded the opposite of the truth, you're irredeemable and that's Hebrews 6:4 to 6. You can't be renewed again to repentance because you've rejected the full truth after all of Christ's manifest glory in the world. You might understand if they said, "Well, we're not really sure yet," but this? And then this mocking, sneering, slanderous taunting that went all the way to the cross where they taunted Him as He was hanging there. And they were religious and their hatred and their hostility shows the reality of their apostasy. The ugliness of spiritual pride, is there anything more ugly than spiritual pride? Is there anything more cruel than religion, the wrong religion, satanic religion? They had nothing but self-righteousness and ceremonial virtue, outside white, inside full of stinking dead men's bones. The holy Lord of heaven receives from their lips the vilest possible slander and blasphemy and they use the worst name they can think of to identify Satan, the lord of the dung.

You say, "I would never do that. I...I think Jesus is a good person and, you know, I would never say that about Him." Well if you're not with Him, you're...what?...you're against Him. You see, you don't have any options. There's no harmonizing, patronizing middle ground here, folks. Don't come to

Jesus with any of your patronizing nonsense about the fact that He's a good man, a good teacher, meant well. You don't have that option. Listen to me, Jesus is either God or He's the greatest blasphemer who ever lived. He either speaks for God or He speaks for Satan. That's it. He is either the Son of God, or He's not. And if He's not, then He's the biggest liar that ever lived and the biggest blasphemer who ever lived who pulled off the biggest deception in history. He is...they were right. If He is not God, they knew there was only one other conclusion. They had it right. If He is not who He says He is, He is an insane, demon-possessed deceiver. Those are your options. And if you do not embrace Him as Lord, then you stand with those who call Him a satanic blasphemer and you have no other alternative. And if you do call Him a satanic blasphemer and stand with those who do and He is God, then you are guilty of the worst blasphemy and eternal hell will be your punishment.

You know, this is a heart-breaking moment in this gospel, isn't it? Couldn't we have wished the story had unfolded differently with the loving, gracious, magnificent Christ revealing Himself day after day after day after day? How does it get to this? It's not as if He offered them some painful experience, He offered them a Kingdom and forgiveness and joy and love and hope and heaven. And it came to this? This is pretty convincing about human depravity, isn't it, and the satanic character of false religion, even apostate Judaism? I'm surprised, in some ways, that Jesus didn't speak them out of existence on the spot, that He didn't just blow fire on them as the sons of thunder had earlier called Him to do on that village that wouldn't accept them. It would have been a just judgment if verse 17 said, "He knew their thoughts and He extinguished them." That would have been fair. He could have killed them, but He didn't. And here you see one of the greatest glimpses of the mercy of God. Verse 17, "He knew their thoughts," probably means they weren't necessarily saying this so they could hear it, though they were saying it. The crowd might have been pretty large. They weren't saying it so He could hear it. That didn't matter, He knew their thoughts and He said to them...and then He goes in to this statement that goes all the way down to verse 26, and you know what this is? This is an invitation. He's saying to them, "Wait a minute, wait a minute, wait a minute. Your blasphemy is irrational. Your blasphemy is inconsistent. Your blasphemy lacks wisdom and common sense. You've got to rethink this. Don't you get it? Satan can't cast out Satan and survive, that's an absurdity. And you can't say of My casting out Satan it's by Satan but your Jewish exorcists do it by God when it's so obvious the difference between what they attempt to do and what I've done. And surely you understand the principle in verses 21 and 22 that the only one who can attack a strong man and overthrow him and plunder him is somebody who's stronger." So He's pleading with them, and we'll go into that in detail and people are still doing those same things, blaspheming Jesus Christ, follow this, lacks rationality, it lacks integrity and it lacks wisdom. And I'll show you next week how and how that goes on even now. But this is mercy.

And then He ends with an invitation in verse 23, that first section, "He who is not with Me is against Me." I'm warning you, if you are not gathering with Me, you are scattering, you are opposing Me.

This is mercy. This is just another indication that the doors of grace had not been slammed shut, that salvation was still available to those who would turn and repent. He could have killed them but He reasoned with them. If you conclude that Jesus is not God, not Messiah, not Savior, not Lord, you have only one other option...He represents Satan. He is a liar from hell, deceiving all he can and, boy, has he been successful. And we're all duped. In fact, he is Satan's most potent agent. If you're not with Him, that's where you stand. There is no middle ground.

Before you go away thinking there's no hope, Jesus asks you to rethink that. You can't look at His life and reasonably conclude that Satan was working through him. And He calls you one more time, "Be with Me, embrace Me as your Lord and Savior." Prepare your heart, dear friend, prepare your heart to receive salvation. We talk about receiving salvation, it's a gift, it's a gift. Let me tell you something, you can't receive that gift unless your heart is prepared. You go to some meeting, some guy gets up and preaches a sermon and says if you want to receive the gift, reach out. And people come down and their hearts not ready to receive. They pray some little prayer and they live under the illusion that they were saved.

You say, "What do you mean prepare your heart?" You have to prepare your heart a number of ways. Number one, you have to prepare your heart through fear. "What do you mean fear?" Fear of eternal judgment, that's necessary heart preparation. What do you need a Savior for if there's no hell? And if there is a hell, then you need a Savior. The cultivation of a prepared heart cultivates fear, fear of judgment. Secondly, you have to cultivate humility, brokenness, contrition, a sense of wretchedness. Thirdly, you have to cultivate repentance. Then believe in the facts of the gospel because you have a heart prepared to receive. Anything other than that is weedy soil, rocky soil and it's going to spring up a little while and...what?...die. Hear preparation is what is called for. And all that Jesus did and called for, telling them of judgment to produce fear, telling them that they had to humble themselves and reject their self-righteousness, calling them to repent, prepared the heart to then believe the truth and be saved.

You can't be saved by praying a little prayer, there's no guarantee God will have to answer your prayer. He is sovereign, after all. But when the truth is embraced in prepared hearts, salvation takes place. Jesus here and again and again until He gets to the cross is in this really sad, sad time, recognizing that the rejection of the people is fixed and yet extending mercy all the way to the very end and at the last rescues one thief and mercifully takes him to paradise. And He is the same Lord today. While rejection is being hardened all around toward Christ, mercy is still being extended. Join me in prayer.

Father, the world sometimes is so confusing and that's certainly the strategy of the enemy. But the truth is so simple and straightforward. Either we are with You or against You...and that's it. And, O Lord, how I pray today that those of us who are with You would rejoice in such grace knowing that our

hearts were prepared through the Word and the Spirit to receive the gift. For those who have not yet embraced Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, O God, would You again through the Word and the Spirit prepare the heart with fear, humility and repentance so that they might receive the gift by faith in the gospel? These things we ask that the Son may be glorified and we pray in His name. Amen.

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