

Whose side are you on?

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[0 : 00] Let's ask God to help us. Father, I just pray that you would speak powerfully to us through your scriptures today, through the Gospel of Luke.

And I pray that as we hear your word, it will be encouragement to the disheartened, it will be a help to the weak, it will be an admonishment to the apathetic, and that, Lord, by your word, you would let Christ dwell in our hearts by faith.

So all this we ask in the name of your Son. Amen. Now, over the last 15 years, Malaysian politics has gotten familiar with one animal.

You know what that is? The frog or katak. Now, what is a katak? It's a term used of politicians who like jumping from one party to another based on who they think has the best chance of winning.

These politicians keep their cards close to their chests, try to read the prevailing mood, and then, at the last minute, hop onto the team they believe will benefit them the most.

[1 : 13] They swap sides, not so much based on principle, but for their personal interests. And today's passage is here in part to say, don't be a katak.

Not with reference to Malaysian politics, but with reference to Team Jesus. You see, what is being on Team Jesus like? Now, looking back in Luke's Gospel so far, we've seen that it involves taking up our cross daily, saying goodbye to material security, loving across boundaries.

And if we look forward to the coming chapters, we'll see it involves facing opposition and dealing with the worries of life. So, it won't be easy.

And sometimes, that can cause us to wonder, am I really on the right team? Maybe it's time to start looking around. Maybe it's time to jump from Team Jesus.

I'm not sure where to yet, but to somewhere that looks better. But today, Jesus will encourage us.

[2 : 28] He will show us that there is no better side to be on than Team Jesus. And the way we'll see that is by looking at this little episode in Jesus' ministry.

But from this passage, Jesus will also challenge us. And he will show us why, even though Team Jesus is the best team, it will also be serious business.

And that might make us a little bit uncomfortable in the process. But that is good, because he will actually compel us to face up to reality and help us to make good decisions.

So, let's dive straight into this episode. And to help us to get to grips with it, I'll take us through this story under three headings. So, let's begin with Satan's defeat.

Straight away, we're dropped into a day in the life of Jesus' ministry. Verse 14. Jesus was driving out a demon that was mute.

[3 : 40] That is, a demon who causes a person not to be able to speak. Now, if you've been reading Luke's Gospel from the very beginning, you know Team Jesus is not the only game in town.

Team Satan is here too. There are very much real forces of darkness at work in this world. Again and again in Luke's Gospel, Jesus has to cure many from unclean spirits.

And of course, he himself is tested by the devil. And this is still our world, is it not? As Christians, we believe in the supernatural.

Though it is mostly unseen, we understand there is such a thing as a spiritual realm. And we believe that Satan exists, and not only that, he is active.

He prowls about like a roaring lion in 1 Peter. He is pictured as a destructive dragon in Revelation 12.

[4 : 51] And his fingerprints are all over this mute man. Now, brain injuries, strokes, psychiatric illnesses, damage to vocal cords, and so on, can all cause a person to be mute.

It is important to say that not everyone who is mute has a demon. Just like how not everyone who has cancer or is struggling with anger has a demon.

We should be careful not to blame everything on the devil. When we do so, we minimize our personal agency and responsibility in this world to an extent which the Bible never does, and we make the devil bigger than he actually is.

But in this instance, we know he is the cause because, verse 14, The Bible does occasionally describe cases like this one where Satan and his demons are said to be somehow inhabiting a person.

As they do so, they attack people's minds and bodies to such an extent that it can cause human defect or abnormality.

[6 : 33] We see that in Luke 8 where they psychologically tormented a man. We see that in Luke 9 where they bring about convulsions to a boy.

We know later on in Luke 13 they are responsible for a physical defect in a woman. So, occasionally, such things have demonic sources.

And what they all have in common is destructiveness. Satan is the destroyer. One popular evangelistic tract starts by saying God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life.

When it comes to Satan, we can reverse that. Satan hates you and has a destructive plan for your life.

He wants to keep you and I away from God. It's kind of interesting that Luke tells this episode straight after giving us Jesus' teaching on the Lord's Prayer.

[7 : 46] In other words, after telling us how to speak to God, Luke gives us a picture where a demon prevents a man from speaking.

It is a picture of opposition to God's agenda. And so, given that I've just spent the last two minutes or so showing Satan to be a pretty intimidating figure, we think that it must take something dramatic to fight him.

If we follow the movies and even some books sold in the Christian bookstore, we might think that some elaborate rituals, chants, incantations, maybe even some sacrifices and memorization of demonic names will be necessary.

But come to verse 14 and what do we find? It's so down to earth. Jesus drives out a demon as if he is just having his daily cup of kopiore.

There's no elaborate rituals, no chanting, no incantations, none of the things that the pagan sorceress of his day tended to use.

[9 : 08] Satan is defeated almost casually. The roaring lion is reduced to a whimpering cat. There is no tension.

This isn't a fair fight. There is ever only going to be one winner. And so, verse 14, the crowd is amazed.

Of course they were. But here is an important thing to remember. Just because someone marvels doesn't mean they believe.

And that becomes clear when part of the crowd starts murmuring, which takes us now to our second heading, the slanderous accusation.

Verse 15, But some of them said, By Beelzebub, the prince of demons, he is driving out demons. Now, who is Beelzebub?

[10 : 17] It appears to be the Greek translation of two Hebrew words joined together, one being the Canaanite god Baal, and the other word meaning something like dwelling place or habitation.

And by this time, it seems to have been used as another way to refer to Satan. As you can see in verse 18, it's used interchangeably.

So these opponents charge him with being on team Satan. This Jedi, they say, is really a Sith.

Notice, they never deny Jesus' authority. Neither do they accuse him of being a fake. But they attempt to discredit Jesus by attributing the source of his power to Satan.

So, by implication, if you take his side, you're on the side of evil. Strong words indeed.

[11 : 35] And then, there were others, verse 16, who tested him by asking for a sign from heaven. They wanted proof.

Now, wanting proof in itself is not necessarily a bad thing. In the Old Testament, the Lord himself sometimes gave signs as a way of verifying his work and to point people back to him.

But the thing is, what Jesus has just done is a pretty big sign. Back in Isaiah 35, verse 6, what is one of the clear signs that God himself is present and he is bringing in his kingdom?

the lame will leap like a deer and the mute tongue shout for joy. So actually, the proof is already there.

These folks should have more than enough proof the mute man can speak. Yet they keep saying, we want more.

[12:47] You see, sometimes it is not really the lack of evidence that holds people back from getting on board with team Jesus.

Is it? It's something else. And Jesus will respond to them more specifically in two weeks time. But for now, how does Jesus respond to these slanderous accusations? He does so in three ways. First of all, he shows their absurdity.

Verse 17. Jesus knew their thoughts and said to them, any kingdom divided against itself will be ruined and a house divided against itself will fall.

If Satan is divided against himself, how can his kingdom stand? Look, Jesus says, team Satan has a kingdom too.

[13:55] It's where he wants to keep you, to enslave you, and destroy you. But my job, Jesus says, is to set the captives free.

I want to restore people. In fact, I've even empowered 72 of my followers to do that. so our agendas are completely opposite to one another.

How then does it make any sense for Satan to give me orders to sabotage himself? Does Russia send planes to bomb their own air bases?

Does Ukraine send drones to attack their own tanks? Why would Satan get his demonic soldier to inhabit a person and then enable Jesus to cast out that same soldier?

It is totally illogical. Yes, Satan loves to divide. He's always looking to divide your family. He's looking to divide your church.

[15:06] But why would he seek to divide himself? Satan may be evil, but he is not stupid.

When a civil war breaks out in a country, it only weakens it, not strengthens it. So the absurdity of the argument is exposed.

And second of all, he shows their inconsistency. Jesus now poses a question, verse 19. Now, if I drive out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your followers drive them out?

Jesus says, let's consider other Jewish rabbis. We know that from time to time, they too are called to perform an exorcism here and there.

And for the sake of argument, let's assume they had some success. when they do, you're more than happy to take it as a sign that God is working through them.

[16:16] You never say otherwise. So, why the double standard? You can't have your cake and eat it too. In fact, if those exorcists are here and they exercise sound judgment, they would conclude the same as I do.

And so Jesus exposes their inconsistency. And then third of all, Jesus asserts his supremacy.

Jesus now follows through on his logic. If I am not in league with the devil, then where does my power come from? Well, there is only one real logical alternative, isn't there?

verse 20. But if I drive out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.

If Jesus can so easily defeat demons, that must mean his power is the same power as the infinite God. God in the book of Exodus, God caught down plagues in judgment on Egypt.

[17:38] And at first, the Egyptian magicians tried to go toe-to-toe with God. Turn river into blood? Okay, we'll do the same. Call out frogs?

Okay, we'll do the same, never mind that it actually made things worse. But by the time of the third plague, they couldn't challenge God anymore.

And Exodus chapter 8 verse 19, the magicians said to the Pharaoh, this is the finger of God.

This is the finger that has the power to create and destroy. This is the finger that has the authority to write the two stone tablets of the covenant.

And Jesus says, this is the finger at work in my ministry. And if that is true, that must mean God's kingdom is here.

[18:45] And that must mean the king himself is here. And who is this king? he is the stronger man.

That's our third heading for today. Jesus now tells a mini parable to press home his big point. Verse 21. When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own house, his possessions are safe.

But when someone stronger attacks and overpowers him, he takes away the armor in which the man trusted and divides up his plunder.

Jesus starts by comparing Satan to a strong man. This strong man is fully armed. Maybe Jesus wants us to imagine the ancient equivalent of Rambo or John Wick or the Kill Bill Bride.

And the home in which the strong man dwells represents a person. Now, this is going to be someone who doesn't trust Christ.

[20 : 05] Because Satan cannot take up residence where the Holy Spirit has already made his home in. Although, of course, Satan can still cause plenty of mischief in the life of a believer.

But Satan does not inhabit believers. Don't let anybody tell you otherwise on this front. So, here is one who is powerful, strong, fully armed.

But it doesn't matter because the king who is here is the stronger man. He is a good Samaritan but he is also a divine warrior.

He is the prince of peace but he is no pushover. he can defeat the strong man. And Satan and his kingdom can never be a match for Jesus and his kingdom.

Indeed, Jesus seems to be drawing from the language of Isaiah 49 verse 24 to 25 here where God through his servant promises to take back plunder from fierce warriors.

[21 : 35] And that's what Jesus does. He disarms the strong man. He takes the plunder. He's been taking people like this formerly mute man and releasing them from captivity so that they might belong to him.

And this victory is but a foretaste of the bigger victory this servant is going to accomplish. You see, we might not be demonised the same way that this man was.

We've not been struck mute. But that doesn't mean we were no less captives. For don't we use our tongues also not to bless and comfort but to curse and tear down?

Don't we sometimes use our tongues to praise ourselves rather than God? And so the Bible says we have spiritually imprisoned ourselves.

We stood legally condemned by the long record of sin that stood against us. Colossians 1 tells us that we were in the kingdom of darkness.

[22 : 59] We were in Satan's kingdom as it were. But on the cross Jesus the stronger man disarms the devil and that is what Colossians 2 verse 13 to 15 on the screen tells us.

Now I'm not going to read all those verses in full but in a nutshell what did God do? As John Piper puts it God took that long list that record of sins and put it in the hand of Christ and drove a spike through it and threw his hand so that he became a substitute for us bearing the punishment for the record of our debts in his own death he nailed it and so he disarmed the devil of his chief weapon the power of Satan to hold sinners to the debt of their sins and trespasses he cancelled the debt he set it aside he made us alive and he made a spectacle of

Satan he made a fool of him Satan thought that he won the victory at the cross only to discover that it is the scene of his ultimate defeat Satan's boast becomes his foolishness Jesus has taken back the plunder and he continues to do so every time someone puts their trust in Christ and this is how Colossians chapter 1 verse 13 puts it he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the son he loves and so there is no longer any lead to live in fear when we are on team Jesus we are on the side of the one stronger than the strong man or as 1 John 4 verse 4 puts it the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world you see sometimes people think oh

God and Satan are on almost equal footing oh whenever there's bad stuff in the world that must be when Satan is getting the upper hand but when God is on top oh that's when there is peace and harmony and all that but that kind of thinking which is called dualism is completely foreign to the Bible's worldview God and Satan are not equal or even near equal no Jesus is way stronger and so that is how Jesus wants to encourage us he says do you know you're on the strongest side yes sometimes team Jesus looks weak but don't forget the cross look incredibly weak so don't be swayed by

Satan or anyone else trying to offer arguments for you to switch sides yes life on Jesus side can be tough sometimes it will even feel like you are losing your life sometimes but whoever loses his life for Jesus will save it but how will you respond having encouraged us Jesus now challenges us he says you know I'm the stronger man but whose side are you on that's the big question for us today whose side are you on think carefully about this because here is implication number one

[27 : 40] Jesus says either you are for me or against me verse 23 whoever is not with me is against me and whoever does not gather with me scatters in other words Jesus says they are actually only two sides they are those like the disciples they follow Jesus they are on team Jesus and then they are those like the demons and these opponents they are against Jesus they are on team anti Jesus but wait a minute we say surely there's one more group right what about the neutrals I mean surely there are those who say oh I'm neither for or against Jesus I'm on the fence today they might say well it's not that

I hate Jesus or anything I'm just not that interested nothing personal or they might say actually I do find Jesus very interesting that's why I sometimes go to church or Christian stuff if I had to fill in a form that asks what religion I am I might even be happy to take Christian but I'm not committed to him not not really and it is quite possible that that describes some of us listening today but if that is you notice what Jesus says to you either you are for me or against me there is no neutrality if you are sitting on the fence that means you are not on team Jesus and if you are not on team Jesus that means you are not for team Jesus you might be here in church but until you actually personally trust him you're on the other side now you might protest actually I'm not on team anybody I'm just team myself but Jesus says if that's you you might not realize it but you are still inside Satan's kingdom because team myself is just a state in Satan's country and so why not take Jesus' side because it is no fun being on Satan's side he only ever looks to destroy and devour but Jesus can be your restorer and liberator and that is so important because you and

I also need to realize another implication so here's implication number two Jesus also says either you go all the way with me or not at all either you go all the way with me or not at all you see Jesus says there are some of you who do think you are on team Jesus you've been helped by him in some way perhaps he did for you what he did for this man he delivered you from some demonic oppression or perhaps he healed you miraculously perhaps he healed your loved one or perhaps you asked him for something when you were desperate and he gave it to you and that is great but Jesus says you can't stop there you need to go all the way with me or not at all and he shows how this works with regards to this formerly mute man look at verse 24 when an impure spirit comes out of a person it goes through arid places seeking rest and does not find it then it says

I will return to the house I left when it arrives it finds the house swept clean and put in order then it goes and takes seven other spirits more wicked than itself and they go in and live there and the final condition of that person is worse than the first in other words Jesus says this yes you may be delivered from demonic oppression or you've been healed or whatever well praise God when that happens but you haven't really been totally delivered yet because you are still outside of Christ and that means it is very possible for the devil to attack you again in fact he might come with reinforcements so what such a person needs is what every single person needs they need the gospel they need

[33 : 31] Christ you may be healed physically but if you haven't trusted Jesus yet you are still in the kingdom of darkness you are not yet on team Jesus so really you are not yet out of trouble and maybe that's why Paul the apostle Paul prays what he prays for the Ephesians in Ephesians chapter 3 verse 14 to 19 now many of the Ephesians they live in Ephesus and Ephesus was a place where there's a lot of black magic and sorcery and stuff like that so they had probably been exposed to elements of the occult and Paul prays that God the Father by his spirit would grant them power so that

Christ may dwell in their hearts by faith why that prayer because as the Holy Spirit works to regenerate a person's heart and he accepts Christ and lets Jesus dwell in their hearts by faith then the person is truly secure in God you see there might be supernatural powers other than Christ who can also give you help sometimes they can heal you somehow give you financial success whatever but they won't have Jesus' agenda they are not looking ultimately to save you only Jesus truly does only Jesus gives you the most important victory over sin and death so trust him commit yourself to his team either you go all the way with him or not at all but how do you know if you are completely on board with

Jesus well that brings us to our final implication for today implication number three the way you show you are on team Jesus is by hearing and obeying you in verse 27 a woman suddenly cries out blessed is the mother who gave you birth and nursed you now she surely means well she is probably giving Jesus a compliment the way we might say to someone oh wow Melvin how lucky your mom is to have someone like you so quite so successful so so charming but how does Jesus

reply verse 28 blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it Jesus turns this into a teaching opportunity he says is Mary my mother blessed yes but you know who else is blessed even more those who hear

God's word and keeps it that's what it's all about if you've been following Luke both last year and this year you know that's what Jesus keeps saying don't you because that's how you know the strong man has been evicted when you want to hear and obey Jesus you know you have a new heart and a new life you're on team Jesus you're on the winning side of this wall sometimes people think of spiritual warfare as having to learn special words of declaration to bind the strong man and whatnot but did you notice Jesus or Paul for that matter never recommends doing any of that he simply says day by day keep hearing God's word day by day keep striving to obey it and day by day as you do so

Satan is kept at bay that's the real spiritual warfare because what can Satan do he can try to accuse did you notice that's what he did to Jesus himself in this episode through the opponents and he can try to deceive did you notice that's what he tried to do too by trying to convince people that Jesus belongs to the side of darkness and not light but did you also notice how in Jesus' reply the word of God is never far from his mind as I've tried to show you already he alludes to both Exodus and Isaiah 49 so Satan will come as an accuser to lead you to despair or he'll come disguised as an angel of light to lead you to temptation or presumption but if you are a team

[39 : 17] Jesus member you will let God's word supernaturally search your heart to convict you when you are wrong and to assure you when you are doubting and you have nothing to fear because that same word will always point you back to Jesus so today Jesus encourages us he is the stronger man who drives out demons and inaugurates the reign of God and he challenges us whose side are you on are you with him all the way do you seek to listen to his word and to obey it if so you are on the right side and the kingdom of God has come upon you let's pray heavenly father we thank you again for the encouragement of the passage thank you that the lord Jesus is indeed the stronger man the one above all powers all authorities above every kingdom every dominion thank you that he is seated on the throne and we can trust him so father will you help us indeed to do that to be on his side to be on his side and be with him all the way to listen to his word to obey it knowing that we have a place in his kingdom to look forward to all this we pray in the name of Jesus Christ Amen