



## **Luke 11:23–26**

23 ‘Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters. 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.” 25 When it arrives, it finds the house swept clean and put in order. 26 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.’

## **Reflection**

I’m not sure if you recall the last time you were openly insulted. Usually insults happen in a cowardly way, through gossip or on social media, as often as not behind peoples backs or in an anonymous, trolling sort of way. It’s rare these days that a person is insulted to their face. More often than not there is insinuation or a tone or air to a person that is suggestive of a slight even if it is hard to pin down. You leave the encounter reasonably certain that you should have taken offense, probably working and re-working in your mind the perfect reply that you wished you had the presence of mind to formulate in the

moment – but also with some small doubt that perhaps you'd misheard or mistaken the person's comments. Could they really be that bad at communicating? Surely they couldn't be implying what you think they said, could they? And so, you let it pass, giving them the benefit of the doubt; the whole episode casting a shadow over the relationship and certainly resulting in far closer scrutiny next time round.

Not so with Jesus and the Jewish religious leaders. It is hard to fathom a deeper insult than the one they levelled to Jesus' face in yesterday's passage. Point blank they accused Jesus of being in league with Satan. They even suggested that Jesus' power was Satanic; his ministry being empowered not by the Holy Spirit but the by devil himself. The Jewish religious lead-

ers have openly insulted the Lord of Life; claiming that the Son of God and Saviour of the Jewish people is in fact doing the bidding of God and humankind's greatest enemy. And yet, that an insult is ludicrous in nature, does not necessary take away from its force. And in a society driven by the values of honour and shame, an insult of this magnitude cannot be ignored. The Jewish religious leaders have nailed their colours to the mast – openly opposing Jesus and setting them up for his extended response that will fill the remainder of this chapter. But before Jesus excoriates them, he speaks to the remainder of the crowd, those more guarded in their comments about him. Some of those asked for yet another sign from heaven, others had remained silent, happy to sit on the fence and see how things played out. Je-

Jesus addresses them all with the words of today's passage, including even the formerly demon possessed man whom he'd just healed. His chilling words, no doubt, pleased not one of them. Luke 11:23–26,

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The crowd might as well be a random sample of people today. Some avowed atheists will shake their fists at God and insult him to his face. Many more agnostics and skeptics will demand more and more proof with there never quite being enough for them to be wholly convinced. But the great majority when it comes to the Christian faith will happily and distractedly sit on the fence. Yes Jesus was an interesting character, yes he may well have been the most influential man of all time, yes I think there probably is a god of some sort – but when it comes to making any commitment to him, well no, I'm happy just to see how this thing called life plays out. To the first century crowd and to us Jesus would reply,

23 'Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters.

This means that if you are not actively working for Jesus, working with him to advance his kingdom here on earth; then you are actively working against him. There is no middle road, no middle ground, no sitting distractedly on the fence. You are either for him as demonstrated by your obedience to him; or against him as demonstrated by living your life in any other fashion.

Then perhaps pointing at the demon possessed man Jesus has just healed by way of illustration (but his meaning encompassing them all) Jesus continues in chilling fashion.

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There is no hope for this man in front of me, apart from receiving me into his heart as his Lord and Saviour. I have driven the demon out, but unless he accepts me in then seven other spirits more wicked than the first will come and take its place. It is the same with you religious leaders and you crowds. Moral effort and outward show will



not save you. Neither will apathy or disinterest or sitting on the fence. Things are far more black and white than you know. Humankind is empty without God and the void must be filled. It is either filled by sin that leads to death; or by faith in Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life. And just as this man now speaking so joyfully in front of you will either receive me as his Lord and Saviour or end up with seven demons in place of the one. So too will be the fate of every single one of you who does not receive me. I assure you, your final condition will be worse than your first.

## **Think & Pray**

These are not cheerful words. They are words of strong warning. Perhaps your life is good order. Swept clean, neat and

tidy, in relatively great shape. If you have not accepted Jesus into your life as your Lord and Saviour, be warned. Your final condition will be far worse than your first. Perhaps you're content to live on the periphery of Christianity. Occasional church attendance, good will towards Christians and the teachings of Jesus but no more, that's far enough for me. Be warned. Or perhaps you need evidence upon evidence, your burden of proof higher towards the claims of Christianity than any other cultural narrative you've so easily adopted. Have you really weighed the evidence in an objective fashion? The historical evidence, the living evidence, the personal testimonies of Christians you know? Or finally, perhaps you most identify with the demon possessed man – enslaved, trapped, mute, out of control, un-

able to break out of a cycle of addiction or abuse. Or newly free, making a fresh start, but oh so fearful of relapse. If this is you Jesus can fill the void and help you break this cycle forever. Invite him in. Receive his forgiveness and peace. And watch him begin to renew and recreate you from the inside out.

Spend some time letting this passage speak personally to you today and then close in prayer however you are led by the Holy Spirit.