

The Priority of a Real and Living Relationship with God in Christ

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[0 : 00] So we're going to turn now to our Bible reading this morning. It's in Luke's Gospel, chapter 10, in our ongoing studies in Luke. If you have one of our church visitors' Bibles, it should be page 869 or thereabouts.

And we're going to read together from Luke, chapter 10, at verse 38. And notice the first line there.

As they went on their way. This is one of Luke's little marker posts for the whole of this second half of the Gospel, where they're on a journey with Jesus.

Not just a journey to Jerusalem, but a journey through Jerusalem, the road to the cross, which leads to glory. And to the Lord Jesus at the very end of the Gospel, being taken up into his glory.

But these little marker posts tell us the organization of Luke's teaching. And it goes on for the next few chapters here until the next marker post. But now as they went on their way, Jesus entered a village.

[1 : 05] And a woman named Martha welcomed him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching. But Martha was distracted with much serving.

And she went up to her and said, Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me. But the Lord answered her, Martha, Martha, you're anxious and troubled about many things.

But one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her. Now Jesus was praying in a certain place.

And when he finished, one of his disciples said to him, Lord, teach us how to pray as John taught his disciples. And he said to them, When you pray, say, Father, hallowed be your name.

Your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread. And forgive us our sins. As we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us.

[2 : 12] And lead us not into temptation. And he said to them, Which of you who has a friend will go to him at midnight and say to him, Friend, lend me three loaves, for a friend of mine has arrived on a journey, and I have nothing to set before him.

And he'll answer him from within, Do not bother me, for the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed. I cannot get up and give you anything. I tell you, though he will not get up and give him anything because he's his friend, yet because of his impudence, because of his shamelessness, persistence, he will rise and give him whatever he needs.

And I tell you, ask, and it will be given to you. Seek, and you will find. Knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receive. And the one who seeks, finds.

And to the one who knocks, it will be opened. What father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion?

If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him? Now he was casting out a demon that was mute.

[3 : 22] When the demon had gone out, the mute man spoke, and the people marveled. But some of them said, he casts out demons by Beelzebul, the prince of demons. While others, the testament kept seeking from him a sign from heaven.

But he, knowing their thoughts, said to them, every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and a divided household falls. And if Satan also is divided against himself, how will his kingdom stand?

For you say that I cast out demons by Beelzebul. If I cast out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your sons cast them out? Therefore they will be your judges.

But if it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own palace, his goods are safe.

But when one's stronger than he, attacks him and overcomes him, and he takes away his armor in which he trusted and divides his spoil. Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters.

[4 : 30] When the unclean spirit has gone out of a person, it passes through waterless places seeking rest. And finding none, it says, I'll return to my house from which I came.

And when it comes, it finds the house swept and put in order. Then it goes and brings seven other spirits more evil than itself, and they enter and dwell there. And the last state of the person is worse than the first.

As he said these things, a woman in the crowd raised her voice and said to him, Blessed is the womb that bore you and the breasts at which you were nursed. But he said, Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and do it.

Amen. May God bless to us this, his word. Well, let's turn, shall we, to Luke's gospel chapter 10 and to the passage that we read there at verse 38.

I wonder what your number one priorities are as you live your life here on this earth. That's a pretty big question.

[5 : 39] And it's a question that Jesus poses really very acutely to everyone considering walking with him on the road, which, of course, he claims is the only road to the glory of his eternal kingdom.

We've been walking that road with him since Luke 9, verse 51. And over the last couple of studies, we've been beginning to see his perspective on the path to glory, the path that every follower must tread if they're going to follow Jesus.

And he's told us already that it is a path of rejection and pain because it's the road that leads to the cross. But it's also, as we saw last time, a path of rejoicing and great privilege because we're called also to be heralds of his mercy in this world, to show his compassion even as we proclaim his mercy in this world.

And that's one of great joy. And here at verse 38, we begin another section, as I said, of Luke's teaching as they went on their way. It's one of the marker posts.

You'll find the next one at chapter 13, verse 22, where we read again, Jesus went on his way. These chapters here, these two or three chapters, there's no particular place names.

[6 : 58] It's not a geographical journey. But Luke has brought together teaching of Jesus that is on a similar theme. And he's showing Jesus, teaching far and wide, in different places, that in his coming, in his gospel, the eternal kingdom of God has drawn very near to people.

Those were his words in chapter 10, verses 9 and 11. It's even stronger here if you look at chapter 11, verse 20. The kingdom of God has come upon you, he says to those he's speaking to.

And what he's saying is that that brings a great moment of destiny. And a response must be made, and made very urgently. And indeed, the pulse of destiny and of urgency runs through this whole section.

Destiny, because something truly momentous has happened. As we'll see in chapter 11, verse 29, someone greater than Jonah is here with a message that must be heeded.

In chapter 12, verse 8, Jesus says that to confess him now will lead to eternal life. To deny him now will lead to condemnation on the great day of God's judgment.

[8 : 15] So there's urgency as well. And that's emphasized by Jesus' parables and teaching. Now is the time that we must all respond.

Because who knows when death might intervene in an individual's life, like the rich fool we'll see in chapter 12. Or when a public disaster might happen, like the collapse of the Tower of Siloam that killed so many people, chapter 13.

Or indeed in chapter 11, as we'll read, when God's judgment might be unleashed upon one generation because it is so particularly evil and perverse.

So there's a theme of destiny and urgency in Jesus' words that demand response. And his message, we'll see, provokes responses of different kinds.

We see both joyful astonishment but also jealous anger. By and large, that generation did misjudge Jesus because they judged by their own perceptions, by their own expectations, by their own criteria.

[9 : 22] And very wrong, these proved to be. And Jesus brands them evil and perverse and full of hypocrisy. And yet as the climax of this section comes, chapter 13, verse 17, despite this, we see that his enemies were put to shame and many did rejoice in the glorious things that he is doing because they responded to Jesus as he taught them a very different way to assess what is really important in this world and what his priorities are and what indeed God's priorities are for all of our perceptions, for all of our ambitions, all of our relationships in this world.

And it seems, I think, that this long section divides into four movements and each of them emphasizes the real and true priorities of God's kingdom for all who'd seek it and the reactions that are brought when Jesus proclaims them, both in the opposition but also in the triumph of Jesus' ministry as people come and follow him.

And so this first section that we read goes through to verse 28 of chapter 11. And I think it shows very clearly that the first priority above everything else in this life, according to Jesus anyway, is the priority of having a real and living relationship with God through Jesus Christ himself.

That's what this is all about. And what it looks like in practice is laid out in these three paragraphs that are headed for us in our Bible. So let's start with the first one, verses 38 to 42 of chapter 10, which are all about the priority of relishing Christ's presence.

the priority of listening to Jesus for him to tell us what really matters and is important in life. So verse 38 introduces us to Mary and Martha, of course, a family that were beloved to Jesus along with their brother Lazarus.

[11 : 29] We read about that in John chapter 11. We don't get very much detail here though, not at all. What we have is a very brief paragraph that is clear and to the point. Verse 39, Jesus says that Mary sat at Jesus' feet and listened to him and verse 42 gives the verdict.

Mary has chosen the good portion. That is the top priority according to Jesus over every other concern and busyness of life.

Now don't be mistaken, Martha is no baddie. Not at all. She loves Jesus. We're told here she welcomes him into her house. She serves Jesus. But here's the thing.

Sometimes our love for Jesus can even get in the way of the priorities that Jesus really wants for our lives. And that's so here.

Martha, verse 40, is harassed with much serving. Well, that's hardly uncommon. There's plenty of that in the building this week. I can tell you that for sure.

[12 : 35] But you see, she expostulates to Jesus, doesn't she? And she expects Jesus to back her up. My sister isn't giving me the help that I need in the kitchen. It's not fair. Actually, I've heard that said a few times in my life as well.

I must say, I'm sure some of you have too. But Martha expects Jesus to agree with her, doesn't she? But instead, he rebukes her. Now, of course, he's not rebuking her activity.

He's rebuking her attitude in verse 41. She's anxious and troubled by it all. Of course, Jesus is not saying that service to him is unimportant. Of course not. We get to chapter 12.

We'll see he commands it. He demands it of his disciples always. But the priority for Jesus' true people must always be his presence and his person.

Jesus' time was short. He's journeying to the cross. And Martha is depriving herself of a vital opportunity to be with Jesus and spend time with him, engaging in fellowship with him and with his intimate friends.

[13 : 41] And he's also wanting to spend that time with her and she is depriving Jesus of that time with her. She thought, you see, that she knew the priorities that Jesus had and she didn't need to listen to him to find out.

But do you remember what the voice from heaven had said on the Mount of Transfiguration? This is my son. Listen to him. And every follower of Jesus needs to listen to him, to let him set the priorities for our time and for our lives.

And when we do actually do that, sometimes it surprises us, doesn't it, what his priorities are. Now it's a vitally important principle for all of us to be very clear about because, of course, our time is also short.

We're on a journey with Jesus through life to glory, aren't we? And we can't do everything in our life. So we also have got to make priorities.

And if we don't listen to Jesus, we too will be in danger on missing out on what is the good portion according to him, what he really wants for us and from us.

[14 : 53] He said, we are made for fellowship with God. And we've been redeemed at great cost to recover that great purpose of fellowship with God and with God's true family through Jesus Christ.

And we can't be ourselves, therefore, truly by ourselves only by finding that fellowship that we get in relishing the presence of Jesus and sitting at his feet with his people, with our brothers and sisters and finding our true destiny, therefore, finding the good portion as Jesus calls it.

And that's his priority for us. You see, for many Christians, if our identity is sought so much in our role, in what we do, instead of simply who we are at Jesus' feet, then that is going to fill our lives also with much anxiety and trouble.

Indeed, it may cripple us, especially if we discover that one day that role is no longer possible for us. If you identify so much with your role as a parent, perhaps especially if you're a mother, that is where you find your identity.

Well, the day is going to come when your kids grow up and when they flee the nest. And you may feel utterly bereft, utterly lost. As if your whole purpose in life is gone, your life's just a shadow.

[16 : 26] Or if your whole identity and sense of self-esteem comes from your job or your career, then that's lost. Maybe through redundancy or eventually through retirement. And it can be similar.

It's very especially true, I think, often for those who are in Christian ministry because so much of your whole life is invested in all of that. And to lose that can seem to be so utterly devastating.

But you see, what Jesus is saying to us here, friends, is that it's not what you do for me that matters above all, but who you are. And above all, I want you just to relish my presence.

I want you to rejoice in just being with me and listening to me and letting me tell you what really matters for your life with me. The real priority for our journey through life is a living and real relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

And therefore, to have a real and a living relationship with all God's people, his family, who are those who matter most to God and should matter most to us. of our whole sense of identity and worth is taken up much more for what we do for God or even what we do for God's people, what our role is, much more than what our relationships are.

[17 : 55] And very likely that will cripple our relationships both with God and with other Christian people. We know, don't we, how exhausting, how dispiriting it can be to be around the kind of person who's always doing so much for you that it makes you feel guilty and inferior as if you're not doing enough.

You're always in their debt. You have to go and help them. Very difficult to be around a person like that. C.S. Lewis, with typical clarity, describes that sort of person in his description of Mrs.

Fidget in his book, *The Four Loves*. I'm sure some of you will have read it. It's the epitome of that person who needs to be needed and the effect that that has on other people.

Let me quote you. I'm thinking, he says, of Mrs. Fidget who died a few months ago. It really is astonishing how her family have brightened up. The drawn look has gone from her husband's face and he begins to be able to laugh.

The younger boy, whom I'd always thought a peevish and bittered little creature, turns out to be quite human. The elder, who was hardly ever at home except when he was in bed, is nearly always there now and has begun to reorganize the garden.

[19 : 02] The girl, who was always supposed to be delicate, now has riding lessons, dances all night and plays any amount of tennis. Even the dog, who was never allowed out except on a lead, is now a well-known member of the lamppost club in their road.

Mrs. Fidget very often said that she lived for her family and it was not untrue. Everyone in the neighborhood knew it. She lives for her family, they said. What a wife and mother. She did all the washing.

True, she did it badly and they could have afforded to send it out to a laundry and they frequently begged her not to do it, but she did. There was always a hot lunch for anyone who was at home and always a hot meal at night, even in midsummer.

They implored her not to provide this, it made no difference, she was living for her family. She always sat up to welcome you home if you were out late at night. Two or three in the morning, it made no odds, you'd always find the frail, pale, weary face awaiting you like a silent accusation, which meant of course that you couldn't with any decency go out very often at all.

Mrs. Fidget, as she has so often said, would work her fingers to the bone for her family. They couldn't stop her, nor could they, being decent people, quite sit still and watch her do it.

[20 : 21] They had to help. Indeed, they were always having to help. That is, they did things for her to help her do things for them which they didn't want done. The vicar says, Mrs.

Fidget is now at rest. Let's hope that is so. What's quite certain is that her family are. Very amusing, isn't it?

But, but, it's very telling. It's a very, very damaging thing to be so desperately need to be needed like that.

And if you're someone who's more concerned with doing things for people rather than being with people, then maybe you're having that effect on them too. And, on the Lord Jesus.

And he says, stop. Listen to me. My priority is just that you relish my presence more.

[21 : 25] that you just want to be with me and with my people, listening to me together. That's the good portion. And we need to search our hearts, don't we?

We need to examine our lives. Because if the priorities, which are the real priorities in our lives, are taking away from those things, having time at Jesus' feet, especially with our sisters and our brothers, with God's family, if that barely happens, that we just squeeze it in for a little fix whenever we can, once a week on a Sunday morning, before rushing off as quickly as possible to all our other priorities.

Well, friends, if that's so, according to Jesus, our priorities are wrong priorities. we're choosing the bad portion, not the good portion.

It's as simple as that. And if we do, Jesus knows that we'll drift further and further away from him and from his people, not closer and closer to him.

And the very real risk, of course, is if that's the case, we'll end up drifting away altogether. There is no role whether in family life or work life or a career or anything that can ever be as important as cherishing and nurturing a real and living relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ.

[23 : 00] And that means relishing his presence and listening to his voice and letting him tell us what is important and what isn't. But of course, a real relationship is always two-way.

Listening and also talking. And that's what verses 1 to 13 of chapter 11 are all about, the priority of responding to Jesus in prayer and asking him to help us and to provide what really does matter in our lives.

We call this the Lord's Prayer, but as somebody has put it, it should really be called the Disciples' Prayer because verse 1 says that the disciples ask him, teach us to pray. John's disciples have their particular way of praying.

Well, how do we, Lord, who know you as our Lord and Master, how do we pray? And so Jesus says, well, this is how you pray. Notice it's you plural. We can't tell that in our modern English Bibles.

We don't have thee and ye anymore. Although, of course, in Glaswegian, we do retain that distinction, don't we? We have you and yours. So this is how yours pray, all right?

[24 : 05] So Jesus says, when yours pray, yours pray like this. And by the way, every command in the New Testament to pray is to use, to you plural. Every single command in the New Testament.

That's, of course, not because we can't pray on our own, but it's because Jesus assumes that his family prays together. We have one father. That's why in Matthew's version of the prayer, it's explicit, our father, not my father, but our father.

And that's implicit here. We all together say, we say father. And it's a shared privilege that we have. And obviously, therefore, if we're never part of the use, if we're never praying together to our father with the church family, we're depriving ourselves, aren't we, as well as depriving others of one of the priorities that Jesus has for his people.

That seems to be something that's slower for men to grasp than women because generally speaking, it always seems to be the more women are interested in prayer in churches. I think that's perhaps why Paul very explicitly in 1 Timothy 2 commands men to pray.

I want all men everywhere to make prayer a priority, he says. I'm very thankful that when I look out in our prayer meeting, we do have many men. And of course, no man can ever become a leader in Christ's church unless he's committed to prayer, unless he's seen to be committed to prayer and giving a lead in prayer in the congregation's life.

[25 : 33] that's very basic for Jesus. But responding together to God in prayer is a basic priority for Jesus. And he teaches his followers here both a pattern for prayer and also the premise upon which our prayer is built, which is our great motivation to pray.

The pattern's there in verses 2 to 4. And above all, his point is just this, it can be very simple. Summed up in Luke 12, 31, where Jesus says, seek first his kingdom and all these other things will be added to you.

And so Jesus says the same here. First of all, submit to God and then seek from him. We submit, he says, to his person and to his plan. Father, hallowed be your name and your kingdom come.

We bow to God's person. There's real intimacy there. He's our father. But there's also real reverence. His name is hallowed. It's honored. It's esteemed. Not profaned or dishonored.

Because we don't protect our father's name by asserting blasphemy laws and by decapitating anyone who disrespects him. We hallow his name by ensuring that we reflect his name truly in this world and don't dishonor him by our behavior.

[26 : 52] That's how we dishonor God's name. But we bow to his name and we bow to his plan and his purpose. Your kingdom come. Prayer is not about us trying to align God with our selfish purposes.

It's about God aligning us with his sovereign purposes. It's the very opposite of what we often think. It's about saying, Thy will be done, which is explicit, of course, in Matthew's version.

Someone said to me recently they were talking about strife and problems in their congregation's life, in the church life, and they said it all comes down to one thing, people demanding my will be done, not thy will be done.

And of course, it nearly always is that, isn't it? But no, only if together we submit to him, can we rightly seek from him with a right perspective and right priorities in life.

And when we do seek the path of his true kingdom for ourselves, when we adopt the way of the cross, then of course that will affect the quality of our prayers. It will limit our prayers and it will channel our prayers, won't it, in the way of true kingdom priorities and what's really important for his kingdom.

[28 : 10] Well, what is important? Well, verse 3, daily provision, obviously our daily bread. We all need food, we all need basic material needs, but there's no extravagance there, is there?

There's great simplicity. As someone said, it's the iron rations of the Christian soldier. If there's a war on, people are glad, aren't they, to make sacrifices for the war effort. It's the overriding priority.

We have to do it, but we do it gladly. And so increasingly, Christ's followers will be content with simple physical needs.

Of course, we need our daily provision, but we're much more in need and conscious of our need, verse 4, for daily pardon and daily protection, pardon for sin, forgiveness, and of course the evidence of forgiveness in the forgiving spirit towards others who sin against us.

Forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us. And protection from evil, because we all know how weak we really are, how constantly and easily we're tempted.

- [29 : 18] And these will be the things, won't they, that are really filling our hearts, filling our prayers. If we're following Jesus' priority for our lives. We need to ask ourselves though, don't we, are these the things that are proportionately filling our prayers?

Brief and simple concerns for our physical needs, our worldly needs, for food and clothes and money and careers and partners and health and all these sorts of things.

But prayers that are underweight, they are and overweight in these deeply spiritual issues of pardon and pardoning others and protection. That's Jesus' pattern for our prayers.

Submission to him and then seeking from him what he tells us he wants for us and what things he says are most important of all. Keeping short accounts with God and giving short shrift to the devil, I suppose we could sum it up.

And the premise for our prayers are there in verses 5 to 13 where Jesus tells us that our prayer can and must be utterly shameless. That's the word in verse 8 that's translated impudence.

- [30 : 29] It means bold and shameless and therefore persistent. And his point is that our prayer is to be unashamedly forward like that because we need God's help and because of course we can rely on God's help.

That first illustration there in verses 5 to 10 just emphasized the urgency of our need. Middle Eastern hospitality demands that if somebody comes to stay you must put food before them and so this man had an acute problem so he had to go hammering on his neighbor's door but he wasn't embarrassed about it.

He did it because it was necessary. If your house was on fire and your family were stuck in an upstairs room and you needed a ladder to get them out and you knew your next door neighbor had a great big long ladder, you're not apologized for hammering on his door in the middle of the night.

You hammer in until he wakes up and gives you the ladder because you need it. And so we pray to God because we need the grace of his Holy Spirit for our lives daily.

And so we can be utterly shameless in asking. We don't have to apologize. It's an urgent need. That's the premise of our prayers. But more than that, it's not just our need.

- [31 : 41] Jesus tells us we've got a ready answer. who is willing to hear our prayers. Verse 9. Ask, seek, knock, it will be given. It will be found.

It will be opened. Now please notice, this is not, repeat not, an exhortation to endless all-night prayer meetings.

Endless long prayers and implorings as if God was a grumpy neighbor who didn't want to get up out of his bed. The whole point Jesus is making here is that God is in contrast to the grumpy neighbor.

He is ready and willing. Ask, he says, and I'll answer. Knock, I'm ready. So he says in verse 11 and 12 and so on, if earthly fathers, for all our sin and shortcomings, if we won't torment, if we won't disdain our little ones when they come to us with requests, verse 13, how much more will our heavenly father delight to give us?

Well, give us what? Verse 13. Give him his own very self to us, surely. That's what he's saying, isn't it? Our father gives himself to us in love and in care and in glad communion by his Holy Spirit.

- [33 : 07] We ask for things from God and God says, I'll give you myself and with me all the things that you could ever possibly need and more besides. And so we can be shameless, bold, confident because our father delights to give himself to us in Jesus Christ, his son.

And it's his priority that we should respond to him in prayer and especially in prayer together as children to their father so that he can respond to us and bless us.

Well, having focused on listening to Jesus and speaking to Jesus, it's rather striking, don't you think, in verse 14 that we come to a story about a dumb man who can't speak and very probably can't hear either because deafness and dumbness usually goes together.

It's hardly accidental, I think, in Luke's careful ordering. And so I assume that he's teaching us something here. And you'll notice that the miracle of healing that takes place just takes one verse there in verse 14.

And then we have about 15 verses following it, all about teaching and explanation. We could hardly have a clearer example, once again, of how Jesus' healing miracles are meant to be visual aids to show us vividly the message of the gospel of his kingdom.

[34 : 28] So here is such a clear picture, isn't it, of the power of God liberating a human being from silence, from inability to respond and relate to God, and being restored to hearing and to responding to the Savior, Jesus Christ.

A clear example of God's power at work. But do people recognize God's wonderful power at work through Jesus? That's the question and that's the third great priority that we're being asked to take very seriously, the priority of recognizing Jesus' power and of receiving and not resisting Jesus when he is doing what he thinks is most important in this world.

Jesus has told us that above all he came on a rescue mission to liberate those who are in captivity under the captivity of the devil. And here he explicitly draws out this visual aid in that direction in verses 21 and 22.

He talks straight, doesn't he, about a strong man being overpowered by an even stronger man and his house conquered and his spoil taken. And that's the consistent way that the New Testament speaks of the work of the Son of God.

Colossians 1 verse 13. He delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of the Son he loves. And the reaction was very clear, verse 14.

[36 : 00] The people marveled. Clearly something supernatural and wonderful was going on. Clearly this was a demonstration of the goodness of God's power. But look at verse 15.

Some refuse to recognize that this is God's power. Either they directly attribute it to Satan or they demand some further proof that it really was God's power and not some other.

You really wonder what they were demanding. If something like this wouldn't convince them. And they will not recognize and receive the power of God's kingdom. Rather, they oppose it and they reject it.

And you'll notice that what's clear from the rest of the chapter is that chief among these rejecters are the leaders of Israel's religious establishment, the Pharisees and the scribes, whose very purpose was to teach God's goodness and to make him known to the people.

And here we've got ordinary people beginning to see the truth. In Matthew's account, he quotes them very explicitly saying, is this the son of David? Their eyes are beginning to open that he is the Messiah, the Christ who they've longed for.

[37 : 17] But in the face of that developing faith, it is the religious establishment who lead the charge to demonize Jesus, quite literally, and to squash any such response of faith among these people.

It's very chilling, isn't it? Here's the established church of Israel calling the son of God himself a devil and doing everything it can to oppose his work and to oppose his saving mercy.

And if you look down to verse 52, you'll see Jesus' damning verdict on them. You've taken away the key of knowledge, he says. You did not enter yourselves and you hindered those who were entering.

What could be more revealing of something truly satanic than that? But alas, so often that has been so, all through history and right to the present day.

A friend of mine in the United States was converted as a young man at a Christian summer camp. When he went back to his home church, the bishop was visiting one day and he told the bishop, I became a Christian during the summer at camp.

[38 : 32] The bishop sneered at him and said, don't be ridiculous, you've always been a Christian. Don't listen to fanatics like that who talk about things like conversion. Well, Pharisees, scribes, bishops like that, moderators, clergy of all kind.

They need to read verses 42 to 52 of Luke chapter 11, don't they? They need to tremble at Jesus' words. And as Jesus said elsewhere, temptations like these that cause people to sin must come, but woe to him through whom it comes.

Better to have a millstone tied around your neck and be cast into the sea than cause one of my little ones to stumble. But many still today refuse, just like that, to recognize Christ's power as good and true and wonderful, as God's power being made known in the gospel.

And yet as we see here, that response is utterly perverse and absurd. Verse 17, Jesus says, it's absurd for one thing to think that Satan would go about destroying his own kingdom.

But isn't it true that so often opposition to the gospel is absurd and irrational? Like in Acts chapter 4, we see it all the way through the book of Acts, but remember in Acts chapter 4, Peter says, it's because of a good deed in healing this crippled man that we've been arraigned before the authorities today.

[40 : 00] Not from killing people or bombing somewhere. And all through history, the Christian church has shown the power and the love of God all through the world in rescuing orphans, in establishing hospitals, in reforming prisons, in pioneering adoption, in opening hospices, and on and on and on it goes.

And yet still today, many will pillory the Christian church as being dark and repressive and restrictive and evil and to be opposed. So Professor Dawkins, and in fact now even our own government, seems to be determined to remove any Christian teaching from our schools altogether, so dangerous it may be to our young people.

It's absolutely irrational. Jesus' followers are spreading nothing but good and people know it, but they deny it. Verse 19 here, Jesus says, some of their own sons are his disciples joining in doing these glorious things.

So are they devils too? Is that what marks out Christ's followers? Especially the radical ones, the really serious ones.

That's a very dangerous word today in people's minds, isn't it? Radical, radicalizing. as if there was no difference between those whose radical commitment to Christ as Lord leads them to utter devotion to works of goodness and restoration and healing and love and care and against evil.

[41 : 28] Not perpetuating evil and wickedness and death. But you see, spiritual blindness, friends, is a very perverse thing. And that's true today, just as it was in Jesus' day.

Of course, the real nub of the issue is right there in verse 20. Can you see? They can't admit the truth about Christ's power because if he is really wielding the finger of God, then the implications are very, very great, aren't they?

It means he is the Christ. He is God's unique revealer and savior. And they find themselves on the opposite side, opposed to him. So they can't admit it.

That's such a common human trait, isn't it? We can't admit to something because we do not want to have to deal with the implications. That's why you don't go to the doctor when you've got a lump, even though you suspect it might be cancer, because you don't want them to find out that it is cancer and tell you that it is.

Isn't that right? But they know what Jesus is saying in verse 22. It's almost quoting directly there from the prophet Isaiah.

[42 : 37] Isaiah 49 verse 24, he will rescue the prey of the tyrant, the Messiah will, and divide the spoil with the strong, Isaiah 53 verse 12, and on and on it goes like that.

They knew that, but they didn't want it to be true. They didn't want this Jesus to be the Christ. They didn't want to have him, someone like that. They would rather have demons than a savior like Jesus.

because that's not what their kind of religion likes at all. And Jesus gives a stark warning to the crowds, doesn't he? He's telling us that recognizing and responding to Christ's power and rejoicing in him as the real and true manifestation of God's goodness and his grace in this world, that it isn't optional.

It's mandatory. Look at verse 23. Neutrality is not an option. There is no Switzerland in this cosmic war, as someone's put it. Neutrality, says Jesus, is opposition.

Whoever is not with me is against me. So he asked that question to us. Whose side are you on, Christ's or Satan's? And his co-religionists in the religious establishment who are shown here to be utterly anti-Christ.

[43 : 59] It's a very stark question that Jesus is asking. And people did not like stark black and white questions then, nor do they like them today. We've discovered that for ourselves very often recently, haven't we?

Oh, you're being far too black and white, far too extreme. Is not Jesus being very black and white here? It doesn't matter, he says, what establishment credentials you've got.

It doesn't matter what historic privileges you possess. If you call good evil and evil good, if you want a different Christ from the real Jesus Christ, and if you refuse his clear words and you resist him and his precious revelation of the Father to the lost of this world, then you're not neutral, you're against him.

you're not gathering, just doing the same evangelical thing in your own different way. According to Jesus, look, you're scattering, you're destroying, you're opposing him.

And Jesus says, you've got to choose which side are you on. To whom will you devote your time and your money and your energies and your fellowship and partnership?

[45 : 17] Christ's mission or the mission of Beelzebul? Well, you recognize as a real priority that to have a real and living relationship with God through Jesus, you must recognize his true power at work and not resist it in his gospel.

You can resist it head on and openly, call it satanic, or you can also resist it more subtly and by default. That's Jesus' parting challenge in these last verses, 24 to 28.

Do you see? You can resist Jesus openly as the Pharisees did, but you can also resist him by a response that's merely superficial or merely sentimental. But all in all, it's the same thing in the end.

So verses 24 to 26, warn us against the superficial response. Just wanting a touch of Christianity for what it can do for you. Maybe removing some of your problems in life, cleaning up some of the past.

Maybe coming to church will help you get away from drugs or drink or a destructive sexual past. It will destroy, it will help you get away from other things. It will elevate your social standing or whatever. But Jesus says, no, it must possess you, heart and soul, completely.

[46 : 35] His spirit must inhabit you and go on inhabiting you, directing your way in the way of Jesus, directing you on the path of real discipleship. because there's no cheap grace with the Lord Jesus Christ.

It's hard, he's told us, to be on the road with him. But it's the only way because if it's not, verse 26, do you see, such a superficial response just opens the door to Satan to come and do worse than he ever did before.

That's the real danger, isn't it, of a superficial response to Jesus. That's why we don't issue cheap altar calls.

Because you need to count the cost, the real cost, of following Jesus Christ. There's danger in a superficial response. And, says Jesus, there's danger in the self-delusion of a merely sentimental response to Jesus.

That's verse 27. Effusive, extravagant compliments. Blessed be the womb that bore you and so on. It's easy to sing blessed, blessed, blessed. It's especially easy today to sing endless sentimental songs about Jesus over and over again, thinking that's what Jesus really wants.

[47 : 48] It clearly isn't what Jesus wants here. Enough of the compliments, he says to this woman. Less of the blessed be your name. It's commitment I want to see, he says.

It's hearing my word and actually doing it. Brings us right back to Mary, doesn't it, at the beginning. Listening to Jesus teaching what his priorities really are for our lives.

It's hearing my words and doing them. That's what Jesus is always saying back in chapter eight. Who are my true family, my mother and brothers? Not my natural kin, not the natural womb that bore me, but those who hear the word of God and do it with me and for me.

It's the obedience of faith that Jesus wants from us, not the oblations of superficial religion, not sentimental piety. Whether that's manifest in the veneration of Christ's mother or indeed in the veneration of Christian music.

It's not protestations of real love, but it's proof of real loyalty that Jesus asks. That's his priority. We exhibit a real and living relationship with the Father through the Son.

[49 : 14] And it's for that that he gives us his Holy Spirit. And so Jesus' priority is that we should relish his presence, listening to his words, submitting to his direction and responding in prayer, especially together, so as to depend on him for the help that we need.

And when we do that, he assures us, he will give us the help he needs. He will give himself to us. He'll grant us his presence and his power, and we will know his power at work among us together as we hear the word of God and do it.

So may God help us to recognize and not reject his kingdom and his call. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we ask that you would guide, direct, take a hold of our lives, that our priorities might be molded and shaped by nothing in this world other than you and your word to us.

Give us hearts to relish your presence, to love, to respond in prayer, and to be those who recognize your power, the power of your true gospel at work, that we might together as a fellowship, as we go forward from this day, align ourselves with your steps, and so walking with you, know that we walk the true road to your glorious kingdom.

And we ask it in your name. Amen.