



## **Good-Looking Grass or Deep Roots?**

**This message explores Luke 11:14–54 and shows that the real issue that people had with Jesus was not a lack of evidence, but where their allegiance lay. Through four stories, Jesus exposes how people explain Him away, demand more proof, refuse to see, or hide behind religious devotion. Luke’s challenge is clear: neutrality toward Jesus is impossible ... the kingdom has arrived, and the King calls for wholehearted allegiance.**

Today I want to start with a question: what has captured your heart? And is it something that matters for eternity?

### **Introduction: Confession**

And I want to start with a confession. A couple of years ago I proudly showed you my new lawn at home. I showed you pictures, I used it as an example of great love and diligence, and people admired the lush freshly germinated blades of grass that were going to turn into an ongoing lush carpet that we could all roll around on.

But I confess, I failed. We had a great summer last year, and I couldn’t afford the constant watering it needed; the soil underneath just wasn’t good enough to sustain good roots, and then ... the weeds, the endless weeds, and then the cost of quality sprays. The reality was that being a lawn addict required more commitment than I could sustain. I feel like I’ve let

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you all down, and there'll be no more mention of my lawns, they're dead to me. Mostly they are.

The problem wasn't just the lawn. The problem was what had captured my attention. I'd become strangely devoted to something that, in the big scheme of life, doesn't matter that much.

And if we're honest, we all do this. We can become deeply devoted to any number of different things that slowly push Jesus to the margins of our lives.

And that's exactly the confrontation Jesus brings in Luke 11:14–54. In this passage Jesus tells four different stories, but they all ask the same question: **who really has our allegiance?**

### **Kind and Kingdom Come: Luke 11:14-54**

We're in a bigger 8-week section of our series called **King and Kingdom Come**. Caleb began this section on the last Sunday in February by reading Luke 9:51, ***“As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem.”***

This section runs through to Luke 19:45. Jesus is on the move toward Jerusalem, teaching crowds and disciples along the way, and the pressure is building. People are seeing what He's doing and hearing what He's saying, and the question becomes unavoidable: do they recognise who He is, and will they give Him their allegiance?

We'll have a quick look at each of the four stories, picking out the significant point that leads us to asking ourselves about the role that Jesus plays in our lives. It's a big section so I'm not going to read all four stories as you can do that yourselves later; I'm going to give you a summary of each story and the major point Jesus is making.

Luke isn't just recording four random moments from Jesus' ministry here. He's showing us something deeper. As Jesus begins the journey toward Jerusalem, people are forced to respond to Him, and their responses progressively harden.

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- Some explain Him away.
- Some demand more evidence.
- Some simply refuse to see.
- And some actively oppose Him.

And Luke is quietly asking us the same question: **Where do we stand?**

### **Story 1: The Kingdom Confronts Allegiance (11:14–26)**

Luke 11:14-26, *“Jesus was driving out a demon that was mute. When the demon left, the man who had been mute spoke, and the crowd was amazed. <sup>15</sup>But some of them said, “By Beelzebul, the prince of demons, he is driving out demons.” <sup>16</sup>Others tested him by asking for a sign from heaven. <sup>17</sup>Jesus knew their thoughts and said to them: “Any kingdom divided against itself will be ruined, and a house divided against itself will fall. <sup>18</sup>If Satan is divided against himself, how can his kingdom stand? I say this because you claim that I drive out demons by Beelzebul. <sup>19</sup>Now if I drive out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your followers drive them out? So then, they will be your judges. <sup>20</sup>But if I drive out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. <sup>21</sup>“When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own house, his possessions are safe. <sup>22</sup>But when someone stronger attacks and overpowers him, he takes away the armour in which the man trusted and divides up his plunder. <sup>23</sup>“Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters. <sup>24</sup>“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.’ <sup>25</sup>When it arrives, it finds the house swept clean and put in order. <sup>26</sup>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 the first story, Luke 11:14-26, we come across Jesus driving a mute demon out of a mute man – it’s all on! The demon is driven out, the mute man speaks, and the crowds are amazed, but quickly there were also scepticism as Jesus is accused of working for Beelzebub, which effectively is a synonym for the prince of demons, effectively Satan.

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Others want more signs that what Jesus was doing was of God. His reply to his accusers in Verse 20 makes it clear that what He's showing is that the kingdom of heaven is no longer just an abstract idea. It has arrived and it has power. Jesus says in response to their scepticism, ***"If I drive out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come to you."*** Jesus is saying that the kingdom has arrived. He **is** the fulfilment of prophecy, and the kingdom **is** advancing. And to add to that, well, Jesus is as clear as He can be in Verse 23, ***"Those who are not with me are against me."***

The crowd are asked about their response to that reality - what priority are they putting on following the promised and prophesied Messiah; the application to that question is that they, and we, can't stay neutral about Jesus, because neutrality isn't an option when allegiance is demanded.

The last three Verses of this section (11:24–26) are the conclusion of this challenge as Jesus warns that merely removing evil without true transformation leaves a person worse off than before; his overall point is that a half-hearted response to God leads to deeper bondage.

So, here's Jesus saying, ***"Who are you going to follow? I've given you the sign, everything lines up, who is going to have your heart?"***

Verses 27-28 crystallise what Jesus has been saying and what he is going to continue saying throughout the rest of the Gospel. Let me read these two verses, ***"<sup>27</sup>As he was speaking, a woman in the crowd called out, "God bless your mother - the womb from which you came, and the breasts that nursed you!" <sup>28</sup>Jesus replied, "But even more blessed are all who hear the word of God and put it into practice.""***

I mean, what's more direct than that? By shifting away from the focus on Jesus' physical, familial ties (Mary) to the necessity of spiritual, obedient discipleship for all believers, Jesus redefines *"blessedness"* from a matter of proximity to Jesus to a matter of hearing and obeying the Word of God. Jesus highlights that Mary's ultimate blessing was not just being His mother, but being the obedient servant of the Word, and this is the example to follow.

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## **Story 2: The Sign That's Already Been Given (11:29–32)**

***<sup>29</sup>As the crowds increased, Jesus said, “This is a wicked generation. It asks for a sign, but none will be given it except the sign of Jonah. <sup>30</sup>For as Jonah was a sign to the Ninevites, so also will the Son of Man be to this generation. <sup>31</sup>The Queen of the South will rise at the judgment with the people of this generation and condemn them, for she came from the ends of the earth to listen to Solomon’s wisdom; and now something greater than Solomon is here. <sup>32</sup>The men of Nineveh will stand up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and now something greater than Jonah is here.***

As Jesus defines what allegiance to the Word of God looks like, the next story that starts at Verse 29 says that the crowds are increasing in size. More people are listening, thinking, wondering about His words. Seizing the opportunity, like a good public speaker does, Jesus confronts the crowd who are demanding more signs of who Jesus is, seemingly not being the people who hear the Word and who are definitely not putting it into practice.

Jesus says that the sign has already been given. It's well known. **The sign is Jonah.** He's using a prophetic metaphor to show that just as Jonah was in the belly of a great fish for three days and nights before being released, Jesus predicted he would spend three days and nights in the heart of the earth before rising. **The sign of Jonah** is emphasising that Ninevah repented with less revelation than what Jesus' generation is currently receiving. They shouldn't need any more signs and the emphasis in this story is that **evidence is not the problem — devotion and allegiance is.**

## **Story 3: The Lamp of the Body (11:33–36)**

Luke 11:33-36 ***<sup>33</sup>No one lights a lamp and puts it in a place where it will be hidden, or under a bowl. Instead, they put it on its stand, so that those who come in may see the light. <sup>34</sup>Your eye is the lamp of your body. When your eyes are healthy, your whole body also is full of light. But when they are unhealthy, your body also is full of darkness. <sup>35</sup>See to it, then, that the light within you is not darkness. <sup>36</sup>Therefore, if***

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***your whole body is full of light, and no part of it dark, it will be just as full of light as when a lamp shines its light on you.”***

The next story in Verses 33-36 is titled in my Bible, *The Lamp of the Body*. It's most likely a familiar story to many of you where Jesus uses the image of a lamp to explain how spiritual perception works. Just as a lamp is placed where its light can be seen, the light of God's truth is meant to illuminate a person's life. The key issue is the **condition of the “eye,”** which represents our openness to God. If our eye is healthy, we're receptive and responsive to God, the result being that our lives will be filled with light. But if our eye is unhealthy, meaning its resistant, then our lives will be filled with darkness.

Jesus warns people to examine themselves carefully, because what they think is light could actually be darkness. The goal is a life fully illuminated by God, where nothing is hidden in the shadows and God's truth shines through the whole person, and so this story is again highlighting that people are seeing the light of the kingdom, but their eyes are rejecting it.

And if we're honest, most of us don't reject the light dramatically. We just start to slowly look somewhere else.

**Story 4: Woes on the Pharisees and the Experts in the Law (11:37-54)** ***“<sup>37</sup>When Jesus had finished speaking, a Pharisee invited him to eat with him; so he went in and reclined at the table. <sup>38</sup>But the Pharisee was surprised when he noticed that Jesus did not first wash before the meal. <sup>39</sup>Then the Lord said to him, “Now then, you Pharisees clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside you are full of greed and wickedness. <sup>40</sup>You foolish people! Did not the one who made the outside make the inside also? <sup>41</sup>But now as for what is inside you - be generous to the poor, and everything will be clean for you. <sup>42</sup>“Woe to you Pharisees, because you give God a tenth of your mint, rue and all other kinds of garden herbs, but you neglect justice and the love of God. You should have practiced the latter without leaving the former undone. <sup>43</sup>“Woe to you Pharisees, because you love the most important seats in the synagogues and respectful greetings in the marketplaces. <sup>44</sup>“Woe to you, because you are like unmarked graves, which people walk over without knowing it.” <sup>45</sup>One of***

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*the experts in the law answered him, “Teacher, when you say these things, you insult us also.”<sup>46</sup> Jesus replied, “And you experts in the law, woe to you, because you load people down with burdens they can hardly carry, and you yourselves will not lift one finger to help them.<sup>47</sup> “Woe to you, because you build tombs for the prophets, and it was your ancestors who killed them.<sup>48</sup> So you testify that you approve of what your ancestors did; they killed the prophets, and you build their tombs.<sup>49</sup> Because of this, God in his wisdom said, ‘I will send them prophets and apostles, some of whom they will kill and others they will persecute.’<sup>50</sup> Therefore this generation will be held responsible for the blood of all the prophets that has been shed since the beginning of the world,<sup>51</sup> from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, who was killed between the altar and the sanctuary. Yes, I tell you, this generation will be held responsible for it all.<sup>52</sup> “Woe to you experts in the law, because you have taken away the key to knowledge. You yourselves have not entered, and you have hindered those who were entering.”<sup>53</sup> When Jesus went outside, the Pharisees and the teachers of the law began to oppose him fiercely and to besiege him with questions,<sup>54</sup> waiting to catch him in something he might say.”*

The longest story in this section takes us from Verse 37 all the way to the end of the chapter in Verse 54. Jesus pronounces six **"woes"** against those who should, in theory, know better — the Pharisees and the teachers of the law. This section is confronting because these woes aren't against obvious outsiders, these woes are against the most religiously committed people in the room, which means the danger in this passage isn't that we're like the crowds, it's that we're like the Pharisees. People who know Scripture. People who attend church. People who look faithful. Jesus says it's entirely possible to be very religious and still resist the King.

So, let's walk through the six woes and feel the weight of what he's saying:

- **In woe one** the Pharisees were meticulous about external purity ... the right rituals, the right appearance, but Jesus says the inside of the cup is full of greed and wickedness. The outside looks immaculate, but the inside tells a different story.

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- **The second woe describes** genuinely impressive religious discipline, including tithing (as it was then) but they had completely neglected justice and the love of God. They were brilliant at the minor keys and deaf to the major ones.

If we combined woes one and two, it would like something like this: Think about someone (theoretically) who is known as being deeply committed to their church. They give generously, they serve on rosters, they know their theology, but in the workplace they're ruthless. They cut corners, undercut colleagues, and treat staff as tools for their own advancement. And somehow, those two worlds never meet. Sunday self and Monday self are entirely different people. Jesus looks at that and says: *woe to them*, because they've learned to clean the outside of the cup so well that they've stopped noticing what's inside it.

- **Woes three and four** talk about religious status and a lack of humility and service that is ultimately described as being like religious corruption, while
- **Woes five and six** are aimed at their religious control over people, and the continued rejection of the living Word who is standing right in front of them.

To illustrate, here's a second example, and this one is harder to hear because it's closer to home. Think about a church community, where the preaching is excellent, the theology is sound, the programmes are well run. But when someone raises a concern about how power is being used, or questions a decision from leadership, or names something that doesn't feel right, the system closes ranks. The message gets managed, the person gets quietly sidelined, and everyone carries on as if nothing happened because the institution must be protected. That is woe five and six running together. Burdens are placed on the vulnerable while those with power don't lift a finger; messengers of truth are honoured in theory but silenced in practice. Every church must guard against becoming this, and Jesus says woe to those who do that.

Jesus isn't describing people who are indifferent to God. He's describing people who are *devoted* to a version of God that conveniently reinforces their own position. And that is the most dangerous place to be ... not outside the kingdom, but inside it and still resisting the

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King. **Their problem is exactly what Jesus has been building toward through all four stories: they hear the Word of God but do nothing with it.**

## **Conclusion**

Luke has shown us all four responses to Jesus that we identified earlier:

- Some explained Him away.
- Some demanded more evidence.
- Some simply refused to see.
- And some actively opposed Him.

Jesus isn't looking for opposition, analysis, or even admiration. **He's looking for allegiance.**

The kingdom of God isn't asking for our curiosity. It's asking for our life. The kingdom of God isn't asking for a casual interest. It's asking for **our whole life**. Remember that the strongest opposition in this passage doesn't come from obvious sinners — it comes from religious leaders. People who tithed carefully. People who knew Scripture. People who looked faithful. Yet when the kingdom stood in front of them, they defended their system instead of surrendering to their King.

This is the sobering truth: **proximity** to Jesus is not the same as **allegiance** to Jesus. We can hear sermons. We can attend church. We can host Him at our table — like the Pharisee did — but we can still resist His authority in our lives. Neutrality feels safe, but neutrality is an illusion, because when the King arrives, **not choosing is still a choice**.

So, the question for us isn't whether we believe in the kingdom in theory. The question is: **Are we aligned with the King in reality? What priority does He have in our hearts? My lawn died because it looked good on the surface, but the roots were never deep enough to sustain it.**

**And Jesus is asking us the same question: is our devotion just good-looking grass... or does it have roots?**

As Jesus turns toward Jerusalem, He is heading toward a cross. Toward rejection. Toward sacrifice. Toward victory. And on that road, He invites allegiance. Not applause. Not analysis. Not scholarship. **Allegiance.** And the reason we can give Him our allegiance is because He first gave Himself for us, moving toward the cross for our sake.

We give remarkable allegiance to political tribes, to economic ideologies, to opinions we'd die on a hill for. Jesus is asking for that same whole-hearted commitment, directed at the King whose kingdom actually lasts.

If someone looked at our calendars, our spending, and what takes our attention this week, what would they conclude has our devotion? What does allegiance to Jesus look like at 4pm on Thursday? Let's take some time to reflect in what allegiance to Jesus looks like in our lives and what rhythms and practices we might put in place that will help us more fully deepen the richness of faith that gives us life, and life eternal.

Amen.

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**Reflecting on Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> March 2026:**

Last week Pastor Aidan spoke about what Jesus said about prayer in Luke 11:1-13.

In the past week, how has your prayer life developed, and what have you boldly asked your heavenly Father for in prayer?

These questions help you think more about this message. We hope they might be a conduit for conversation and reflection, encouraging us to wrestle with how this message might practically work itself out in our lives.

1. What is currently capturing your heart more than Jesus, and what would realignment practically look like for you this week?
2. Where might you be hearing Jesus' words but not yet putting them into practice? What is one step of obedience you can take this week?
3. If someone looked at your calendar, spending, and attention this week, what would they say has your allegiance? What needs to change?
4. Pick one specific day and time later in the week (perhaps Thursday at 4pm). What does following Jesus look like for you at that time, and every week thereafter?

If you'd like to chat with someone about your spiritual journey or anything else going on in your life, please contact us at [care@windsorpark.org.nz](mailto:care@windsorpark.org.nz); **we're better together and no perfect people are allowed.**



Below are some further resources that may take the message further and deeper and enable you to explore other viewpoints on the same theme. We also encourage you to engage with the preacher if there are further questions you have or if you'd like clarification on anything. Email [info@windsorpark.org.nz](mailto:info@windsorpark.org.nz) and we'll direct your query to the appropriate person.

1. In Luke 11:29-32 Jesus mentions the '**sign of Jonah.**' This is not the only time that Jesus mentions that sign, so there is significance attached to that reference. Click on the hyperlink below to read a more detailed explanation of that phrase:  
[https://www.christianstudylibrary.org/article/sign-jonah?utm\\_source=chatgpt.com](https://www.christianstudylibrary.org/article/sign-jonah?utm_source=chatgpt.com)
2. Sometimes our allegiance to Jesus is affected by our inability to focus on Jesus, or to focus on ... anything. In his book **Stolen Focus: Why You Can't Pay Attention**, internationally bestselling author Johann Hari shows twelve deep factors harming our focus. Once we understand them, together, we can take back our minds. Click here for a link to that book: <https://www.unitybooks.co.nz/products/stolen-focus-the-surprising-reason-you-cant-pay-attention>
3. Trying to stay in control can often prevent us from being fully aligned to God's purposes for our lives. In the below Bible study called **The Cost of Control**, Sharon Hodde Miller discusses the way control can cost us a lot more than we could ever imagine, and how we can walk in faith knowing God is in complete control:  
<https://app.rightnowmedia.org/en/content/details/762742>