

Sunday, January 28, 2024 | The Road to Redemption

Week 10 | Luke 11:29-36 | "Greater Than Miracles"

Last week, we talked about *exorcisms*. Satan has *never* once triumphed over the Lord. Thus, contrary to what might be portrayed in Hollywood, exorcisms are *undeniable proof* that the powers of darkness have been *decimated*. But if that is so, why are so many still *enslaved* to the dark? Because humanity loves darkness rather than light (Jn. 3:19). Though the door of salvation is open to all, sadly, many choose *subjugation* over *liberation*. In fact, many return to their captivity rather than remain free. How do we avoid such an unenviable state? **By obeying God's word, we become a home for blessings. Otherwise, if we disobey God's word, we'll become a haven for devils.**

Today, we'll be talking about *focusing on the right thing*. Too often in life, we miss, as it were, the forest for the trees. We get hung up on something which distracts us from something far *greater*. Admittedly, what we're fixated on may be important in its own right; however, if you were to take a step back, you'd realize it is not *the* most important thing. In hyper-fixating on one detail, we miss the bigger picture.

Now, while this happens frequently in our ordinary lives, it can also occur in our spiritual lives. Who among us has not shifted their gaze from what's truly important? Who hasn't gotten distracted and lost sight of Jesus? This misalignment breeds an unhealthy appetite for the wrong things if left uncorrected. We may even ask God for those bad things, not realizing our request is offensive to him.

The old adage, "It never hurts to ask," is a lie. When we lose sight of God's will—i.e., when we forget the main thing—we make requests that hurt God. How do we avoid this? By evaluating our priorities. Is what we're after genuinely worth having? Or should we start looking for something more substantial? Should we seek out something *greater*?

Jesus teaches us two principles about seeking:

- i. **Seek after signs, and you will find condemnation.**

READ: Luke 11:29-32 (ESV)

²⁹ "When the crowds were increasing, he began to say, "This generation is an evil generation. It seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of

Jonah. ³⁰ For as Jonah became a sign to the people of Nineveh, so will the Son of Man be to this generation.

³¹ The queen of the South will rise up at the judgment with the men of this generation and condemn them, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and behold, something greater than Solomon is here. ³² The men of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold, something greater than Jonah is here.

Point of clarity: In the Bible, there is a difference between symbols and signs. Symbols represent something—e.g., communion, baptism, ichthus fish, wedding band, team mascots, etc. Signs direct you to something—e.g., water to wine, feeding of the 5K, road signs, the weather, etc. Symbols are designed to help us recall some great truth, whereas signs direct us to a deeper truth. Every time the Lord performed a miracle, it was to validate the message.

When the crowds spoke about wanting a sign, they asked for evidence that would prove the validity of Jesus' claims—e.g., "Prove to us you are who you say you are." The irony, of course, is that the Lord just cast out a demon, to say nothing of the countless other miracles and signs he had done up to that point. At this point, those who could be convinced by signs were already, and those who couldn't be convinced by signs weren't. A lack of signs was not the problem; it was a lack of faith. They liked Jesus' *miracles* but not his *message*. As readers, we can't help but wonder, "What further proof did they need?" And this is precisely why the Lord *condemned* his generation because, as he put it, "it seeks for a sign," which is to say, "it seeks for a [another] sign [while ignoring the truth of the signs]."

So, what is the Lord to do? Shall he pander to the masses and give them what they want? No. Jesus was no entertainer; he would not become a sellout to gain notoriety. So, rather than give them a new sign, he will point them to an old one. All that was left for this "evil generation" was the "sign of Jonah."

But what was the "sign of Jonah"? What miracle in Jonah's life was the Lord referring to? For those familiar with Mathew's account, you might be tempted to say that the "sign of Jonah" referred to how the prophet spent three days and three nights in the belly of a great fish. And, like Jonah, "so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth" (cf. Mat. 12:40). In other words, the "sign of John," at least as Matthew has recorded it, foreshadows Jesus' burial and resurrection.

The problem with this interpretation for us is that Luke does not mention Jonah's voyage in the belly of the whale nor even hint at Jesus' three-day stay in "the heart of the earth." Instead,

Luke only has the Lord say, “For as *Jonah* [emphasis added] became a sign to the people of Nineveh, so will the Son of Man be to this generation.” In other words, Luke highlights the man *himself* rather than his underwater cruise.¹

But, if that’s the case, in what way was Jonah, *the man*, a sign to the Ninevites? As far as we can tell, the Ninevites only heard Jonah’s preaching. Nowhere in the Book of Jonah do we find the prophet telling the Ninevites about his 3-day vacation in the belly of a great fish. The sum total of the sermon can fit into a single sentence: “Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown” (Jonah 3:4). Though we count 8 words in English, in actuality, it was only 5 in Hebrew. Thus, the true miracle of Jonah’s story is not how he survived being devoured by a sea monster, nor was it Jonah’s actual message, but how, after a Jewish prophet halfheartedly preached the shortest sermon ever to preached, an entire non-Jewish city repents. Unsurprisingly, God’s compassion for the nations is the main takeaway of the whole book; it is, quite literally, the last thing that is said.²

So, the salvation of the Gentiles is the *miracle*; it is what Jesus was referring to when he used the phrase “sign of Jonah.”³ Thus, unlike Matthew, who wanted to highlight the whale of Jonah and the resurrection of Jesus, Luke wanted to highlight how, just as the Ninevites responded to Jonah’s *message*, so will the nations respond to Jesus’ message.⁴

SIDEBAR: To be clear, Luke and Matthew are *not* contradicting one another. After all, is not Christ’s resurrection a significant portion of the gospel message? As he’s prone to do, Luke has merely taken a step back to ensure we do not miss the forest for the trees (e.g., the Lord’s Prayer). Furthermore, it is very Lukan to highlight Gentile receptivity towards God (cf. Lu. 4:24-28). What’s more, two similar yet distinct sayings may have been preserved. After all, in Luke’s version, Jesus’ comments come as a result of the increasing crowds, whereas, in Matthew’s version, they come as a response to the scribes and Pharisees requesting a sign (cf. Mat. 12:28).

¹ Nolland (1993), 2:652.

² This is best illustrated by how the last verse of the chapter says nothing of the great fish. Instead, the book ends with a commentary on God’s compassion on non-Jews: “And should not I pity Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also much cattle?” (Jonah 4:11).

³ Bock (1996), p. 1096, “In effect, Jonah’s message and the reaction to it are the sign, just as Jesus and his new community are the sign for this generation.”

⁴ Edwards (2015), p. 349-350; Garland (2011), p. 485; Nolland (1993), 2:653; contra. Morris (1988), p. 219, and Stein (1992), p. 335, who interpret Luke through the lens of Matthew; NT Wright (2004), p. 141, are content to present the two options without siding with either one.

That the salvation of the Gentiles is the “[sign of Jonah](#)” also explains why the Lord says, “[so will \[emphasis added\] the Son of Man be to this generation;](#)” the sign had yet to come. Jesus' generation wanted another sign, and they will get another sign in the not-too-distant future. After the resurrection, the Lord will say to the disciples, “You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (cf. Ac. 1:8).⁵ The “sign of Jonah” is the sign of “the Son of Man”: global expansion (cf. Dan. 7:14; Ps. 65:8; Isa. 49:6).

After condemning his generation, he reveals that he is not the only one who stands in condemnation of them. In fact, there is not one but **two other judges** who will condemn that generation.

The first witness is the “queen of the South.”

The phrase “queen of the South” refers to the “Queen of Sheba” who came and visited King Solomon (cf. 1 Ki. 10:1-13; 2 Chron. 9:1-12). Sheba was a land to the south of Israel in what is now Saudi Arabia, particularly the area we call Yemen.⁶ During Solomon’s day, the land of Sheba was a powerhouse of trade, particularly for spice, perfumes, and incense.⁷

The Bible says that when the Queen of Sheba heard of Solomon’s fame, she “came to test him with hard questions” (1 Ki. 10:1). In other words, she wanted to see if the rumors she had heard about this man were true. And, as the story goes, by the end of her test, the Queen was convinced of Solomon's power, wealth, and wisdom. Interestingly, though Solomon’s riches are mentioned, the Queen of Sheba praised Solomon, not simply for his **exceptional riches**, but for how God had blessed him with such **extraordinary wisdom** (cf. 1 Ki. 10:6-9).

Thus, Jesus' point is that if a foreigner traveled so far and only had one conversation with Solomon and was so impressed with Solomon's wisdom that she concluded the only way that a man could have that much wisdom was if it was given to him by God, then what's the crowd's excuse? Jesus' reputation was greater than Solomon's. They've

⁵ At one point, many Greeks living in Thessalonica converted to Christianity. The Jews became jealous, formed a mob, captured some Christians, and then hauled them before the city's authorities, saying, “These men who have turned the world upside down have come here also, and Jason has received them, and they are all acting against the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus” (Ac. 17:6).

⁶ Edwards (2015), p. 351.

⁷ “SHEBA,” Nelson’s Illustrated Bible Dictionary, New and Enhanced Edition, (Nashville, TN; Thomas Nelson, 2014), p. 1048.

seen him do many miracles and heard him teach countless times, yet they still don't see the wisdom in his words.

The second witness is the “men of Nineveh.”

The people of Nineveh will rise on the last day and condemn the people of Jerusalem because they repented when they heard Jonah's message. Yet, as great a work as that message accomplished, Jesus' message is the far superior message. In fact, Jonah is the most stubborn and ill-tempered of all the OT prophets. Jonah tried to avoid going to Nineveh while Jesus went wherever he was sent. Jonah begrudgingly preached a message of condemnation, while Jesus willingly preached a message of forgiveness. Jonah sat on a hill waiting for judgment to fall on his enemies, while Jesus went to the hill of Calvary, allowing the punishment that was supposed to be his enemies to fall on his shoulders.

Interestingly, as the land of Sheba was the southernmost tip of the known world during Solomon's day, the land of Nineveh was the northernmost tip of the known world during Jonah's day. Thus, Jesus' generation will be condemned from the ends of the earth. Those seemingly *far* from God still recognized God's hand, though the vessels God used —i.e., Solomon and Jonah—were far from perfect. Yet, here stands Jesus Christ, God himself, and wisdom incarnate, and the masses care more for *his miracles* than his *message*. What a joke. Why would you want anything more when you have Jesus?

ii. Seek after the Son, and you will find illumination.

READ: Luke 11:33-36 (ESV)

³³ No one after lighting a lamp puts it in a cellar or under a basket, but on a stand, so that those who enter may see the light. ³⁴ Your eye is the lamp of your body. When your eye is healthy, your whole body is full of light, but when it is bad, your body is full of darkness. ³⁵ Therefore be careful lest the light in you be darkness. ³⁶ If then your whole body is full of light, having no part dark, it will be wholly bright, as when a lamp with its rays gives you light.”

Jesus uses an ordinary example to illustrate an extraordinary truth.

Let's unpack the ordinary bit. When you light a lamp, you don't “put it in a cellar or under a basket;” instead, you put it “on a stand.” Why? So that all “those who enter may see the light.” When you light a lamp, you don't hide it away; you use it to light your house. That's simple enough to understand.

Now, let's unpack the extraordinary bit. Jesus explains that the "eye is the *lamp* of [the] *body*." Notice the eye is not the *light* but the "*lamp*." While technically, the Lord does not make the connection here, contextually, we can assume the "light" symbolizes Jesus's *teaching*.⁸ Biblically speaking, there is no such thing as an "inner light." Thus, when he says, "When your eye is healthy," he means that your "*lamp*" is working; and when he says your "lamp is working," he means you are thinking correctly, and you're thinking correctly because you follow Jesus' teachings. In other words, you're not the blind being led by the blind. You are the seeing being led by the light.

And because your lamp has the light—i.e., your eye is focused on Jesus—"your whole body is full of light." When you have the Son of God, spiritually speaking, you see the world as it truly is. And, because of that, your entire life—i.e., "your whole body"—will be filled with Christ's light. Jesus will reveal things about yourself that you never knew; where once there was darkness, now there is light. Spiritually, you will be whole.

On the flip side, "when it [your lamp/eye] is bad (when a person can't see because they do not have the light, i.e., they don't know Jesus Christ), your body is full of darkness." In other words, if your lamp--i.e., your eye/mind--doesn't work, you're spiritually *blind*. Such a person lives in a world of darkness, not light. If you do not focus on Jesus Christ, look to him as your guide; you will focus on the wrong things, such as miracles/signs.

Consequently, if people don't look to Jesus, their life will be "full of darkness." To borrow Jesus' metaphor, the unbeliever has a lamp—i.e., they have the capacity to see/think—but they do not have the light—i.e., they do not have the ability to see/think *correctly*. In 2 Cor. 4:4, Paul says, "In their case, the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God." In other words, their lamp is dark; it has no light. In a manner of speaking, the unbeliever is not very *bright*; they're quite blind, in fact (cf. Jn. 9:30).

This is why the Lord says, "Therefore be careful lest the light in you be darkness." Notice, he does not say check your eyes; he wants his audience to check *themselves*, their hearts, to see if there's "*light*" in them or "*darkness*." He wants his listeners to take stock of themselves. He was saying, "Are you sure you can see? Or are you as blind as a bat?" "One's spiritual perception is central to one's spiritual fate."⁹ What kind of light do you have, if you have any at all?

⁸ Bock (1996), 2:1100.

⁹ Bock (1996), 2:1103.

If you could see, then you would have “no part [of the] dark” and, as such, your entire life, aka your “whole body,” will be “full of light...[and] it will be wholly bright, as when a lamp [is bright when] its rays give you light.” When you look to Jesus and have his light, metaphorically, **your entire life shines**. You will be a beacon of truth, leading yourself and others into a deeper relationship with God. **And, someday, you will literally shine**. Matthew 13:43 says, “Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father.”¹⁰

So, what's the takeaway?

The message of Jesus is greater than the miracles of Jesus.

Too many think that if only God did something miraculous in their lives, they'd believe. They're like Liam Nelson's character in *The Grey*, who attempts to plead with God by saying, “Show me something real! I need it now....not later. Now! Show me, and then I'll believe in you until the day I die. I swear. I'm callin' on ya.” Or, as professed atheist Alex O'Conner once said, “All I'm asking for is something like the full experience. If I experience, even in the form of a flash of light...just once, just one time.... [something like] “Listen, here I am,” and [then God is] gone, I could live on that for the rest of my life....then I'll become the most prolific Christian apologist you've ever met.”¹¹

READ: Hebrews 1:1-3 (ESV)

¹ Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, ² but in these **last days**, he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. ³ He is the radiance of the glory of God and **the exact imprint of his nature**, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power.

There is no greater revelation than Jesus Christ. Who cares about Jonah or even Solomon when you've got Jesus! If you do not believe in the Son of God, then no one or thing will convince you. Stop seeking signs and wonders; instead, look to Jesus. **Open up the Scriptures, and you'll find something that can satisfy you better than a miracle; you'll find the Gospel message.** That, though we were sinners, Christ died for us. And though we deserve hell, Jesus wants to give us heaven. And though we were the enemy of God, through his Son, we can become the Children of God. No miracle can hold a candle to the flame of the good news.

¹⁰ Garland (2011), p. 488.

¹¹ These examples are taken from Ortlund, Gavin, “Divine Hiddenness: My Response to Alex O'Conner,” Nov. 5, 2023, *Truth Unites*, <https://youtu.be/d-6UhOS0FE?si=rmRNE3Hexfwknfwb>, [accessed January 27, 2024].

Video Description:

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SPEAKER: Ben Hyrne, Pastor

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