

The Sign that Saves
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(READ Luke 11:29-36)

We see right away in our passage that this isn't easy-going, velty-glove Jesus. One popular misconception about Jesus in the broader culture is that Jesus was all about peace and love in a hippy, live-and-let-live kind of way. Jesus was certainly a tender man, but his tenderness was appropriately applied and balanced with strength. He was tender with children; when Jesus was working with men who were humble and sorry for their mistakes he was caring; when women who were broken hearted and regretful for the sins they had committed he was a soft place to land. Jesus was very warm, welcoming, and merciful in those kinds of situations, no doubt. But with proud and arrogant people, with crooked leaders, with stubborn crowds, unwilling to believe, Jesus was a pitbull. When it came to matters of truth, Jesus was uncompromising; he was resolute. Many would call a host of Jesus' responses intolerant. In fact, Jesus broke the cardinal PC sin of our day - Jesus offended people. On purpose, no less! And that's where Jesus is today in our passage. Jesus is looking at the people unwilling to turn to God and he's being a truth teller. He's rather bluntly telling them what's wrong so they can make the necessary corrections. Don't take his bluntness as being in a bad mood (we have to be careful not to think of Jesus as moody like we get moody). Also, don't take his bluntness as unkindness, either. While Jesus is being stern, I believe he spoke directly with great care in his voice. Jesus is tough in our passage today because prideful unbelief needs to be confronted directly.

The people want a sign. A couple of weeks ago Jesus delivered a demon-oppressed man and one of the things the crowds said was, "maybe I'll believe if he performs another one." Jesus confronts that desire head on; in vs. 29 he says, "This generation is an evil generation. It seeks for a sign." That's an important rebuke for us to consider. Jesus is saying seeking a sign is proof of a generation's wickedness. Have you ever wanted a sign from heaven? I have. So, I feel rebuked by Jesus' words. What's wrong with asking for a sign? The problem is that Jesus has already given them (and us) all we need to believe. He's already healed the demon-possessed man. One of Jesus' main ministries was healing the sick; he did that all the time. How many more do they need to see? Just one more. I'll believe when I see the next one.

I'm hoping you can see the problem that Jesus sees. The problem is not the lack of signs; the problem is with a heart that won't believe; it's with eyes (don't think these eyes... think "the eyes of your heart") that are looking for the wrong thing. We'll see that in a minute, but let's keep going in our story.

Jesus brings up two OT figures and uses them as a teaching device trying to lead the people towards repentance and life. The first is Jonah. Do you remember him? He was the prophet that God told to go to Nineveh, but out of hatred for the people who lived there, decided to get on a boat and go in the opposite direction. I'm guessing you know the story: God causes a storm to throw the ship in a panic, the crew tosses Jonah overboard after he tells them, "We're all about to die because I made my

God angry.” Jonah is swallowed by a fish, preserved, and spit back on shore so he can go to Nineveh and tell them about the God who judges the living and the dead.

Jesus says, “No sign will be given to this generation except the sign of Jonah. For as Jonah became a sign to the people of Nineveh, so will the Son of Man [that’s Jesus] be to this generation.” Here’s the question: what is this sign? Jesus is drawing a direct connection between Jonah’s sign and his sign. But he doesn’t say what this sign is. I think the sign is the call to repent. Jonah was sent to Nineveh with a message; that message was, “Repent because in three days your city will be destroyed.” Jesus has a similar message. His message is, “Repent and believe the Gospel.” Just the like the people of Nineveh, the destiny of this generation hinges on what we do with the message of Jesus. Now, you might think, “But that’s not a sign, Brian. That’s a message; that’s a word.” Yeah, I know. But isn’t that exactly what Jesus is rebuking? You want more signs you can see; I have a sign, but it’s the sign of Jonah, which is a message of repentance.

The second OT figure is the Queen of the South. The story comes to us from 1 Kings 10 where the Queen of Sheba comes to Jerusalem to meet Solomon. Tales of Solomon’s wisdom and wealth have spread around the world and the queen says to herself, “I’ve got to see this for myself; I’ve got to see if the stories are true.” So, she travels to Jerusalem to meet Solomon and she discovers they are; everything she’s heard about Solomon is true. He’s as wealthy and as wise as the legends have said.

Look what Jesus says in vs. 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.” Do you get it? People, I traveled for months, I risked life and limb, to see the greatness and wisdom of Solomon. And it was worth it. But, you have someone here far wiser, you have someone here right in front of you far greater. And you don’t love what you see. You don’t care about him.

Two times Jesus brings up the coming judgment; both times he says, “The queen of the South will stand and condemn you at the judgment seat. The people of Nineveh will rise and tell you you are guilty.” Here’s what Jesus is getting at: In both instances, the Queen of Sheba and the city of Nineveh did exactly what they were supposed to do. The Queen marveled and celebrated the wisdom of Solomon; the people of Nineveh turned away from their sin. But something and someone greater is here before you. Someone wiser than Solomon; a better messenger than Jonah with a better message, too. And you people do nothing. You hate what you hear. What’s your excuse? How come you won’t turn? How come you won’t submit to Jesus?

I wonder that for us a little. There are people all over this world in situations harder than ours, under direct threat of persecution, people not knowing where their daily bread is coming from. People who don’t have the word of God in their language, who don’t have the accessibility to teachers and books to help them understand the glories of Jesus from the scriptures like we do. And these people are believing. These people are turning to the Lord. When they receive the blessing of hearing God’s word, they’re receiving it! They are keeping it! They obey God even under threat of death. So, what’s our excuse? Why won’t we? Will many others from Iran, Afghanistan, Egypt, North Korea, Sudan rise

up against us on the judgment day and say, “What was the deal? You had how many Bibles in your house? You had your Bible on your phone? And you had teachers and friends who reminded you of what God’s word said, but you didn’t obey? You were given so much; how come you didn’t do more with what you were given?”

These words of Jesus are meant to increase our sensitivity to the reality of God’s judgment; he means for us to hear them and say, “What about me? Is God’s word and message of repentance having the effect on me that it’s supposed to? And if not, why not?”

Let’s move onto the next section and finish this off with some application. Let’s read vs. 33-36 (READ). What’s this *light in you* stuff Jesus is talking about? The ancients viewed or understood the power of sight differently than us. Physiologically we know that light passes through our cornea, then our lens and illuminates all those millions of rods and cones. When that happens, our neurons fire into our brain from the optic nerve and we see. The ancients didn’t know the complexities of such things. They obviously knew they needed light to see, but just as important as the light from the sun was for them to see, so was the light from within - true sight comes from within. So, when Jesus says in vs. 34, “Your eye is a lamp of your body” and “be careful lest the light in you be darkness,” everybody knew what he was talking about; he was saying you can only see if the light in you was bright.

And you know, the ancients were onto something deeper than the mere mechanics or science of eye sight that we need to understand and retrieve. To truly see there’s something more important than having a functioning retina, healthy lenses, and adequate lighting. To truly see clearly you need to have an inner light that illuminates the path towards truth and grace so you know where to walk.

Let me give you an example. Who sees more clearly: the man who forgives his wife for the mistakes she makes or the man who holds a grudge, keeping a record of wrong, and condemning their marriage to stagnation? Who sees more clearly: the young teenage girl who says “no” to peer pressure or the one who gives in to be accepted by girls in her class? Who sees more clearly: the neighbor who just blows up at those “crazy kids” who keep riding their bicycles on his lawn or the neighbor who looks past such minor transgressions and let’s the boys play baseball in his yard, even pitches to them, knowing that one of the boys doesn’t have a dad in his life? Do you get what I’m saying, my good friends? True sight comes from the light within that is given to us by God and shaped and perfected by his Word.

Now, there’s a connection between what Jesus first taught and what he’s saying in this paragraph; let me show you. Jesus says in vs. 29, “This generation is an evil generation. It seeks for a sign.” How do you think the people were seeking a sign? They wanted to see one. They saw the demon-possessed man delivered; now they want to see another (and than another). Jesus called that evil. Do you see the word *evil* in vs. 33-36? Take a look. It’s there, but you can’t see it because most english translations don’t translate the word evil. In vs. 34 Jesus says, “When your eye is healthy, your whole body is full of light, but when it is *bad* - do you know what Greek word that is? It’s the exact same word Jesus used a few sentences ago when he called this generation evil - but when your eye is evil, your body is full of darkness.”

Jesus is saying that the evil that is this generation is ultimately an evil deep within them that keeps them from seeing the things they need to see. They want to see a sign; they want to be dazzled by a fireworks show. But only because they are unwilling to trust Jesus. Someone greater than a miracle is right in front of them, but they don't care. And friends, the evil inside of them is the same evil inside of us that keeps us from seeing the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. That's why Jesus says, "be careful lest the light in you be darkness," meaning, "be warned if there is darkness in you instead of light that keeps you from listening to the message of repentance and turning back to God."

Let me make two quick points of application: first of all, consider again the ancients intuition that to see well you need to have light within you. Do you want to see well, my good friends? I know you do. But you won't without God's help. How do you think he helps you? Remember, God has means. If you just say, "Well, God will help me; I have his Spirit so I'll see well." Most likely, friends, you won't. And here's why: you benefit and experience the blessing of God's grace, of God's Spirit, when you put it into operation by faith. And where does faith come from again? Romans 10:17- Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of Christ.

Look at Psalms 119:105 says, "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path." We need the word of God, the sword of the Spirit, to be the lamp that lights our way. With it, we can see rightly; without it, we will be stuck in darkness. Or if there's darkness in you you will see nothing but darkness. Jesus said in the passage we studied last week, "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep." Don't stop, FBC, taking God's word and hiding it in your heart.

Secondly, be watchful for dissatisfaction in God's words. That's what the people had; they really weren't satisfied in Jesus' message. They were hoping for something different because Jesus' warnings, Jesus' teachings weren't enough. You know, I have to fight for this. It doesn't always seem to me that God's words are enough. They don't get me all that excited; the warnings don't frighten me; the promises don't assure me. But that's a me problem; the problem isn't with the word. So, I try to keep on the lookout for when my spiritual senses are dull to the things of God. I pray to the Lord to keep me sensitive and sharp to him and his words. I need to hear how the word is helping others. I don't want to grow cold or hard. God alone can help with this; that's why we need to plead to him, look to him, and seek him for this help.

Key vs. Luke 11:29

Questions for the week

- What was the most important word you heard today? How come?
- Are there times when you feel dull to the things of God? What's that like? When does that happen?
- What did you hear today that will help you keep your faith fresh and strong? What are you willing to try in faith?