

May 26, 2019
Sunday Morning Service
Series: Luke
Community Baptist Church
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Greer, SC 29650
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SEEK TRUTH NOT SIGNS
Luke 11:27-37

The information Luke recorded in our chosen text is still part of the conversation Jesus was having with the Scribes and Pharisees that began in 11:15. Some of those religionists accused Jesus of exercising the power of Satan in order to cast the demon out of the mute man. Others of them insisted that Jesus give them a sign in heaven as a way to prove that He was the Son of God who He claimed to be.

In reality it didn't matter what Jesus did or would do or could do. Those evil religious leaders were not about to believe Him. Jesus was a great offense to them. He impeded their work, disrupted their money-making schemes, and publicly exposed them as frauds. They had plenty of evidence and multiple reasons to believe Jesus. The greatest evidence of God speaking to humanity was standing in their very presence, and they could not see Him. Because they were spiritually blind, they were as incapable of seeing the truth of life as the literal blind man is incapable of seeing the things of real life.

Surely things would be different in a modern world that possesses infinitely more knowledge than the uneducated, backward ancients did, right? Not necessarily. Fallen human nature still looks for wisdom and understanding in signs instead of God's word. Some evidence suggests that over 90% of adults know their zodiac sign, and well over half of them agree that the characteristics of their sign aptly describe them. As many as 31% of adults surveyed admitted that they regularly read their horoscope (www.theconversation.com/how-many-people-actually-believe-in-astrology-71192). Worse is the evidence from another survey that revealed that 58% of young people between the ages of 18-24 believe astrology is scientific (www.independent.co.uk/life-style/horoscopes-millennials-why-do-so-many-believe-zodiac

[star-signs-a753186](#)).

How sad it is that we, with pristine intentions and love for others, offer the truth of the Bible to people estranged from God because of their sins, only to have them reject it and us out of hand. They would rather embrace the deceptions and lies of Satan than to consider God's truth. They would rather order their lives according to the pooled sinful conclusions of other people who are at odds with God.

There is a good reason for all of this. It is for people today, just as it was for the religious leaders in Jesus' day. They observed incredible evidence that Jesus was God in the flesh but rejected the truth, favoring instead their man-made traditions. They could do no other because they were devoid of the work of regeneration through the Holy Spirit. People today reject the truth of the Bible as archaic, unrealistic, unnecessary, or unbelievable for the same reason. The spiritually blind person cannot see the truth of the Bible. While such people load themselves up with all kinds of foolishness to substitute for truth, they make their spiritual darkness even darker.

In our text, Jesus warns us to rightly assess the so-called light we embrace. It might not be light at all, but in reality the deepest spiritual darkness.

The Crucial Principle (vv.27-28).

In the larger context of Jesus' conversation, a woman stated her opinion. She reveals that at least someone was impressed with Jesus' authority. Luke recorded, *As he said these things, a woman in the crowd raised her voice (v.27a)*. Again, we know that Jesus had just demonstrated His power and authority over the spirit world. As He often did, He released a poor mute victim from the power of a demon (v.15). The authorities responded by falsely accusing Jesus of casting out demons by the power of Satan. Some critics demanded that Jesus perform a sign in the heavens in order to prove that He possessed divine authority (v.16). Jesus responded to the critics with authoritative teaching. He clearly refuted the religious leaders' false accusations (vv.17-19). He assured the people that they had just come face to face with the "finger of God" as they witnessed the power of the kingdom of God demonstrated through Jesus (v.20). Then, Jesus

explained that He was in the business of breaking into Satan's palace and stealing His possession (i.e. people under Satan's control), vv.21-22.

It is refreshing to see in our text that not everyone in the crowd that day was opposed to Jesus or critical of Him. One woman in particular considered Mary mother of Jesus to be blessed. She *said to him, "Blessed is the womb that bore you, and the breasts at which you nursed!"* (v.27b). The woman's words were important. In that culture, the mother was measured through the accomplishments of the son. To say that Mary was very blessed was to acknowledge that Jesus was very special. The idea behind the woman's "blessing" might be that she was seriously pondering (or possibly convinced) that Jesus was indeed the Messiah.

But what could be greater, more important, more essential than this contrast between the doubting Pharisees and a trusting woman? On one hand were the critics, the doubters, the adversaries who lied about Jesus and put Him to the test. On the other hand was this woman who recognized that Jesus was really special, if not an admission that He was the promised Messiah. Saint Augustine said, "Mary was more blessed in accepting the faith of Christ rather than in conceiving the flesh of Christ" (Augustine, *Holy Virginity*).

Sure Mary was blessed. But hear Jesus' greater assessment of who is blessed. *But he said, "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it!"* (v.28). First, Jesus taught that those who hear the word of God are blessed. We wrongly assume that hearing the word of God is natural and even a human entitlement. It is true that God has revealed His word to us in so many ways. As we have often concluded in the past, God reveals His law in creation (Romans 1). He reveals His law in our conscience (Romans 2). He reveals His law in the written word we call the Bible (Romans 3). And God reveals the most intimate details about His word and Himself through Jesus Christ (Hebrews 1:1-3).

More than that, God spoke audibly to certain privileged individuals throughout human history (Adam, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, several of the judges, Samuel, the prophets, etc.).

But in spite of God's many ways of speaking, the vast majority of all humans have never heard God's word. We are by nature blinded by sin so that we cannot see God's self-revelation in creation.

We are by nature twisted in conscience so that we do not sense God's law. We are by nature distracted by the appeals of the flesh to sin so that God's word is a nuisance at best. We cannot hear God's word clearly and we do not want to hear it when it convicts us of sin.

We hear God's word speaking to our hearts only because of His special work of grace. If you are able to read the Bible, hear the Bible preached or taught, and your conscience responds to the message, consider yourself blessed because most people cannot. The Bible is like a dog whistle. When I was a kid, I had a little whistle that no human could hear when I blew it. But the dog could hear it just fine, and he didn't like it. The pitch was too high and hurt his ears. That is how sinners often feel about God's word.

The Bible is like an ambulance siren in the ears of a coyote. I forget that we have coyotes around our house. Most of the time they sit silently in the woods waiting for a neighborhood cat to walk through. But when an ambulance races down Wade Hampton Boulevard with its siren blaring, the pitch is too high for the coyotes and it sets them to howling. That is what sinners often do when they finally hear the word of God. It sets them to howling and they run from it. They are not blessed.

Second, in Christ's assessment the people who hear God's word are blessed, but even more blessed are those who keep the word of God. It is good to hear the word of God, but only when our response is obedience to what we hear. But James reminds us that to hear the Bible and not put the instruction into practice is to deceive ourselves (James 1:22). Jesus taught that the real intimate family members with Him (like brothers and sisters) are those who hear His word and do it (Matthew 12:21). Jesus also taught that the wise person builds his spiritual house on the rock by doing Christ's words (Matthew 7:24). Keeping Christ's words is proof positive that we really love Him (John 14:15).

Therefore, it is only right to conclude that the Lord's blessing is obvious to those who keep the word of God. *Whoever keeps his commandments abides in him, and he in them. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit whom he has given us* (1 John 3:24).

But keeping the word of God is not even possible through human wisdom, strength, determination. Only after a person has

experienced the miracle of regeneration, been given a new heart, and is indwelt by the Holy Spirit is he able to strive to obey what he has heard from God. Therefore, we must be aware that being able to hear God's word and being able to do it is not a matter of human strength, wisdom, determination, or even choice. It is a matter of God's grace.

Be Careful Light Does Not Become Darkness (vv.29-36).

There are people who are determined that God must give more signs of spiritual enlightenment (vv.29-32). Jesus calls them an evil generation. They seek signs instead of truth. *When the crowds were increasing, he began to say, "This generation is an evil generation. It seeks for a sign" (v.29a).* This was not a new warning. On multiple occasions Jesus warned the people that an evil generation demanded signs. What more did they want? Jesus had already given them a plethora of signs that proved He was from God. Of the first miracle, turning water into wine at the wedding in Cana, we read, *This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory. And his disciples believed in him (John 2:11).* When He purged the temple of the thieves and merchants, the authorities asked Jesus for a sign that gave Him the right to do it.

Why this ceaseless demand for more and more signs? People governed by sin and evil demand a sign rather than to accept God's word by faith. Like the doubters and skeptics in Jesus' day, the evil people still claim they would be willing to trust Jesus if God would just give them a sign. But it is not just the unregenerated people who look for signs. Even we children of God are still like Gideon who looked for a miraculous sign before submitting to God's will.

Jesus promised that the evil generation would receive the sign of Jonah. They look for multiple signs, *but no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah (v.29b).* *For as Jonah became a sign to the people of Nineveh, so will the Son of Man be to this generation (v.30).* Note that Jesus was talking about a "sign." A sign was something unusual, something miraculous. The purpose of the miracle was to prove or affirm God's power and authority. The plagues against Egypt were signs of God's power over them. So, too, what the religious leaders demanded from Jesus was proof, a miracle that He

was from God. But Jesus had already given the people innumerable proofs of His divine origin and relationship.

Therefore, Jesus promised a very significant sign at some point in the future that would prove the veracity of God's word through Him. What was the sign of Jonah? The Old Testament tells the amazing story of Jonah. God tapped him to be God's messenger to warn the evil, wicked people of Nineveh that divine judgment was pending because of their wickedness. Jonah freaked out because the people in Nineveh had such a horrible reputation for sin. Instead of obeying God, Jonah tried to run away by getting on a ship sailing in the opposite direction. God sent a miraculous storm, because of which the sailors threw Jonah into the sea. Then God miraculously sent a great fish to miraculously swallow Jonah, who miraculously survived and was miraculously vomited onto dry land. Jonah conceded to God's will, preached in Nineveh, and God miraculously caused the people to repent of the sins.

So which of those many miracles was the sign that would apply to Jesus in order to prove His divine authority and work? Let Jesus explain. During the previous and similar conversation recorded by Matthew, Jesus revealed, *"As Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth" (Matthew 12:40).* He meant that the day was coming when Jesus, having been killed by the religious authorities, was going to get up and walk out of the tomb.

When Jesus rose from the dead, it proved that He was God the Son. His resurrection proved that He is the author of life and life eternal. His resurrection verified the good news that His sacrifice was sufficient to cover the offense of our sins against Him. His resurrection validated His promise of eternal life. The sign of His resurrection shouted loudly and clearly that we are wise to believe every word God speaks to us in the Bible. In the words of Isaiah, "Who has believed our report?" Jesus provided the ultimate miraculous sign so that the sinners would believe Him, and they went out and lied about it. And still sinners reject the incredibly verifiable proof that Christ rose from the dead.

As a result, the evil generation will be judged by past generations. A pagan queen's example will pass judgment. *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 (v.31).

The queen of the South was also known as the Queen of Sheba (1 Kings 10:1-10). Sheba was probably located in the southern Arabian peninsula or possibly northern Africa. It was almost certainly over 1,000 miles away. Be that as it may, when the queen heard about Solomon's wisdom, she went at great expense to seek out the truth. She came to him with a great retinue and treasure. As far as we know, Solomon did not invite the queen. She took it upon herself to risk much because she wanted to hear wisdom and see the results of it.

The queen's conclusion is her judgment against unbelievers. *And she said to the king, "The report was true that I heard in my own land of your words and of your wisdom" (1 Kings 10:6).* More than that the woman confessed, *"Blessed be the LORD your God, who has delighted in you and set you on the throne of Israel! Because the LORD loved Israel forever, he has made you king, that you may execute justice and righteousness" (1 Kings 10:9).* This pagan woman who knew nothing about God, sought wisdom and concluded that God is faithful to keep His promises.

The evil generation will be judged by her because of their response to Jesus. Jesus is greater than Solomon. Jesus has perfect wisdom and never ever sinned one time. Jesus proved over and over that He was God the Son equal with God the Father. Jesus continually invited the evil people to trust Him, to accept the truth He taught. The people rejected Him out of hand. As a result, the Queen of Sheba will rise up in the day of judgment and prove by her own desire for truth how wickedly stubborn the people in Jesus' generation were. What will her testimony to know and do truth say about us?

Furthermore, Jesus warned that the people of Nineveh will pass judgment on the evil generation kind of people. *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 (v.32).* Jonah's message to the Ninevites was not about God's grace, but about God's judgment against their sins. Nevertheless, the people repented, responded with obvious sorrow for sin, obeying God. What will their actions say about us who have received so much more truth about God? What will their

response to the lesser prophet Jonah say about our response to the Greatest Prophet?

The Ninevites' response to Jesus speaks volumes to us. Just how important is Jesus to you? How does His teaching, the truth He communicated in words and actions impact you? Is the influence of Christ's teaching obvious in the way you live? Do you even know what He said? Is it possible that your life is governed more by the traditions of your parents and peers than by the truth Christ taught?

Life governed by lesser truths, or outright error, was the religionists' problem. Jesus gave a simple illustration about light in order to challenge them to embrace the right light (vv.33-36). The simple illustration is in verse thirty-three. *"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" (v.33).* It is a common sense principle. No one lights a light and then hides it. The purpose of the light is to illumine, to reveal, to show reality and truth.

In truth, God is light. The very being of God is characterized as light. Paul taught us the truth regarding God: *Who alone has immortality, who dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see. To him be honor and eternal dominion. Amen (1 Timothy 6:16).* No only is that true, but God's word is light. *Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path (Psalm 119:105).* *For the commandment is a lamp and the teaching a light, and the reproofs of discipline are the way of life (Proverbs 6:23).*

But the greatest light of truth is Christ, God the Son. John described Him as, *The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world (John 1:9).* Jesus said of Himself, *"I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life" (John 8:12).* The people do not need more light! God has provided plenty of spiritual light. Lack of light is not the problem.

Having eyes to see the light is the problem. That is truth Jesus brought out in the application of the illustration. Your spiritual eye is the channel of spiritual light. That is what is meant by the words, *"Your eye is the lamp of your body" (v.34a).* The "eye" Jesus referred to here is not the physical eye, but spiritual eyes. It is the channel to bring light to the heart. It is the heart, the part of us that thinks, feels, and decides.

Our spiritual eyes need to be healthy. *“When your eye is healthy, your whole body is full of light, but when it is bad, your body is full of darkness” (v.34b)*. A healthy spiritual eye is one that sees all that God has for us to see. The healthy spiritual eye is cleansed from all the gunk, cataracts, and dust of sin. Until we have faith in God, our spiritual eye cannot let the light of God into our hearts.

In fact, there is danger of light actually being darkness. *“Therefore be careful lest the light in you be darkness” (v.35)*. The religious hypocrites’ problem was that while they knew much truth from the Old Testament, they refused to submit to it as truth. They twisted the truth of God into rules that God never intended. Their pride in their own conclusions prohibited them from seeing Christ. And like them many, many religious people today are content with cultural morality as opposed to embracing Christ alone by faith. The sinner’s satisfaction with self-righteousness keeps him in spiritual darkness.

Keep yourself in the light. *“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” (v.36)*. This is the best solution to debilitating sins in the believer’s life. Sin shall not have dominion over God’s people when God’s people embrace the light of Him and His truth. The light of God’s truth is still the best deterrent to the darkness of sin. This will require us to know God’s truth, love God’s truth, embrace God’s truth, and live in the light. What could be sadder than living a life in the presence of God’s light but having spiritual eyes closed to that truth? There is no greater or more deadly spiritual darkness than blind spiritual eyes.