

What More Do You Need?

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[0:00] Now, I'm going to read together from Luke's gospel, Luke chapter 11, and we're reading verses! Luke chapter 11, I think in the church Bibles, if you're following there, it's page 870.

Luke chapter 11, reading from verse 29. Let's hear and read together in God's Word. Luke chapter 11, 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. For as Jonah became a sign to the people of Nineveh, so will the Son of Man be to this generation. 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. 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. 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. 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.

Therefore, be careful, lest the light in you be darkness. 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.

It says, the Word of God, and to His name be the praise and the glory. There's a particular kind of conversation that most of us have probably had at some point in our lives, maybe with a skeptical friend, or maybe with a member of our family who used to go to church, and who's kind of fallen away. Or maybe it's a conversation that you've had by yourself, on a dark night, inside your head, a conversation that you've relayed maybe several times. And it goes something like this, God, if you would only give me a sign, something big and undeniable, and then I'd believe, then I'd follow you, then I could be your disciple. But you're not, God. You're not being obvious enough. Well, in some ways, maybe that sounds a little bit like a reasonable request.

[2:56] It kind of sounds humble. I'm not asking for much, just for evidence so that I can believe God. Show me something real, and I'm all in. Well, Jesus has a lot to say in response to a question like that, and it's maybe not what we might first expect. So in our passage that David read for us in Luke 11, the people are pressing in around Jesus, and they're looking for that very thing, shows a sign, they're saying. And Jesus doesn't say, okay, fair enough, here goes, here's something big.

He says something much more searching, something much more uncomfortable, something that turns the question around on these people, and asks them, is a lack of a sign actually the issue here? Well, tonight, if you or somebody that you know is considering the claims of the Bible, if you're thinking, God, if only you would give me a clear sign, clear, big, undeniable, that's all it would take for me to believe. Well, then this passage is for you.

And we're going to look through this passage together. We're going to do it in three parts. The sign seekers, the unlikely responders, and the light bearer. Okay, so first, the sign seekers.

So what's really going on when we demand a clearer sign, when we demand more evidence? Well, the crowds have been coming to see Jesus as we've been going through Luke, and they're getting bigger and bigger.

They're getting more and more pressed in on him. And the people want to hear what Jesus has to say. But Jesus tells them not what they want to hear, but what they need to hear. Because the first thing he says in verses 28 and 30 is, this generation is an evil generation. It seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except for the sign of Jonah. So that pretty blunt opening gambit, this is an

evil generation. And this is a generation that hasn't simply made a mistake or missed the truth. The word that he uses for evil in the original language is an intentional, deliberate wickedness, knowing and doing it anyway. It's a word for when something's actively corrupt. So these people are not just weak or misguided. And the evidence that Jesus gives for his claim that these people are actively, intentionally choosing evil. That's not what we might expect either, because he doesn't point to their moral failures, the things that they do or the things that they fail to do. He points to their sign seeking itself. So why is looking for a sign evil? Well, these people have seen plenty of signs. By now, Jesus has healed a man with a withered hand. He's raised a widow's son from the dead. He's healed 10 lepers. He's given sight to the blind. And then just before this exchange, he's cast out a demon and has left the man unable to speak. And the crowds have responded with absolute wonder. The religious leaders even accused him of being of Beelzebub, of being of the devil, in order to cast out demons. In fact, if we just jump back a little bit, in verses 14 and 15 of this chapter, Jesus casts out a demon. And then in the very next verse, some people, to test him, were seeking from him a sign from heaven. So these people are always looking for something more. This is really important, because these people aren't asking for a sign because they haven't had one. They're asking for a sign because they haven't seen yet the particular sign that they themselves want. You see, they want the conditions. They want to decide what is a good sign and what isn't. What is a sign that Jesus is bringing in the kingdom of God?

[7:20] Well, the sign that they want is one that would take faith out of their hands, that would force them to believe on their own terms. They want the kind of evidence that they can control because they want something spectacular and undeniable so that belief becomes unavoidable. They want a sign that's so irrepressible that it takes away the need for repentance and for faith. They want to be compelled to come to Jesus. But Jesus says, the only sign you're going to get is the sign of Jonah.

So as we may well know, Jonah is a prophet in the Old Testament. He's called by God to go and preach to people who are in trouble. Those people are evil and Jonah doesn't want to go. And so he takes off as far as he can in the opposite direction until he finds himself inside a giant fish.

We're in Luke, but in Matthew's account, Matthew makes it really clear that the meaning of the sign of Jonah is, as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the fish, so will the son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. Well, Jesus is calling himself the son of man.

That's himself he's referring to. And so the sign of Jonah, Jesus is saying, is the resurrection. Jesus is going to die and he's going to be in the grave, dead for three days, and he's going to rise again, similar to what happened to Jonah inside the fish. The one great, unrepeatable history-splitting event that took place vindicates everything that Jesus said about himself, and it's coming.

But notice what kind of sign it is, because it's not a fireworks display and it's not a spectacle. It's a dead man walking out of a tomb, visible only to those who had eyes to see, and dismissed by those who were determined not to. The resurrection is not the kind of evidence that compels belief, regardless of what your heart is like. It's exactly the kind of sign that requires a response of faith.

[9:49] These people know the scripture. They know their traditions. They know the story of Jonah. They know that Jesus is saying Jonah is a sign, a shadow of another resurrection that's going to come.

And this is where it lands, I think, with a jolt for us, because we live on the other side of that other resurrection. The sign of Jonah has been given, and the tomb is also empty.

The evidence has been laid out. We've got the testimony of the eyewitnesses who saw Jesus after he was risen. We've got the transformation of the disciples. We've got the explosion of the early church from being a handful of people locked up in a room to a movement that turned the entire Roman Empire upside down. And the question that Jesus is really pressing in verse 29 is not, why haven't I given you more evidence? But what is it in you that keeps refusing the evidence that's already been given? That's the question that Jesus is asking them. And if we're here tonight and our faith is not in Jesus, well, we've been asked exactly the same question.

What is it that's keeping you from believing? Because the signs are all there. So Jesus goes on to develop this idea a little bit further in the next two paragraphs, which takes us to our second point tonight, the unlikely responders. Jesus calls on two witnesses to show us what a genuine response looks like. So this is in verses 31-32. He says, the queen of the south will rise up at the judgment

and the men of this generation with the men of this generation and condemn them. The men of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment and this generation and condemn it.

So these are two deliberately dramatic verses from Jesus. Deliberately dramatic in the ears of these first century hearers because he reaches into history and he pulls out two highly unlikely witnesses.

[12:05] And he holds them up to the people and he says, he's called these people an evil generation and he says, they got it. These people far from us, far from God, they got it.

But you don't. So the first witness, the queen of the south. So we can read about that in the Old Testament in 1 Kings chapter 10. She hears about this man in Jerusalem who's incredibly wise and she travels over a thousand miles to hear Solomon's wisdom.

And Jesus says she came from the ends of the earth. She actually came from southern Arabia. I think that's roughly where Yemen is today. But that phrase, the ends of the earth, is a reference to Gentile foreigners, people outside of the religious tradition, people who are firmly outside of Israel. She's no Jewish heritage. She's no covenant background. She's no long-standing theological tradition to rely on. She heard a rumor.

She heard about this man and she came to find out more. And when she arrived and she heard Solomon speak, she responded with wonder and worship and outpouring of generosity.

[13:22] She came, she heard, she believed. And then the punchline Jesus delivers is devastating. He says, something greater than Solomon is here.

The one standing in front of the crowd isn't just a wise teacher. He's the eternal son of God. Wisdom incarnate. 1 Corinthians 1.24 says that Jesus is the power of God and the wisdom of God. Solomon was given wisdom, but Jesus is wisdom. And while this queen was humble enough to travel all this way, to hear Solomon, to hear Solomon speak, to hear his wisdom, this evil generation that Jesus is addressing, they can't make the short journey from unbelief to faith.

The second witness or group of witnesses are probably even more striking than the queen of Sheba. Nineveh was the capital of the Assyrian empire.

Nineveh is where God sends Jonah, which is mentioned. It's also mentioned, Nineveh is also mentioned in the book of Nahum, who's another prophet.

[14:39] And the city's called the bloody city. They were cruel and bloodthirsty and they were an enemy to Israel. When God told Jonah to go and preach to them, Jonah ran in the opposite direction precisely because he knew they were Israel's enemies.

He wasn't just afraid of what they might do, but he didn't want them to be saved. Jonah didn't want to go, didn't want to preach, but he did via a great fish and he delivered what's probably the most reluctant sermon in the whole of the Bible.

Five words in the original Hebrew, 40 days and Nineveh will be overthrown. But what happened? The whole city repented from the king on the throne to the cattle in the field.

They fasted, they mourned, they put on mourning clothes, they responded to a half-hearted message from a reluctant preacher with complete, immediate, and total repentance.

And Jesus says, something greater than Jonah is here. Jesus is not a reluctant prophet. He's not been dragged into this mission. The son of God who dwelt in glorious perfection came willingly into the world to preach with perfect authority and compassion to perform many miraculous signs in front of their eyes.

[16:07] And the generation that's seen this, all of this, stands unmoved while the evil Ninevites repented at the message that barely got out of the preacher's reluctant mouth.

I mean, can you feel the weight of what Jesus is saying to these people? He's not mocking them. He's being urgent. The comparison with the Queen of Sheba and the Ninevites is not primarily condemnation.

It's a wake-up call. He's saying, look how little it took for them to respond. Look how much it's taken for you. Look how much you have got and how little you've moved.

So, how is that? What's going on? How can these ignorant outsiders go from a place of unbelief to faith and the people right in front of Jesus aren't?

Well, God says in Jonah that the Ninevites didn't know their left hand from their right hand. They were ignorant but they accepted the message. The people he's speaking to have had generations

of benefits, teaching, tradition and they failed to hear an even clearer message.

[17:22] in the 18th century, the philosopher David Hume, Edinburgh boy, he wrote a paper called On Miracles and in that he mounted what he considered to be a decisive argument against the possibility of miracles taking place.

Essentially, he argued that it's never rational to believe in miracles because the evidence for violation of natural law can never outweigh the uniform experience against it.

So Hume always maintained that it's more probable that witnesses are mistaken or lying than it is for a miracle to take place.

But here's the thing, his objection isn't about evidence, it's about his prior commitment. He's already decided before looking at any miraculous claim that no evidence can be good enough.

The conclusion that he comes to is already built into his premise. He wasn't engaged in open-minded inquiry. He wasn't letting the evidence fall where it might lie.

[18:33] He was protecting a predetermined verdict that he decided in his head. And Jesus is saying, this is what's happening with this generation. Jesus is saying that the signs he can, it's not genuine openness, it's a request for the kind of overwhelming resistance bypassing proof that would make faith unnecessary and repentance unnecessary as well.

So why can Jesus make this claim? Why are these people looking for a sign when so many signs have been given?

Jesus is connecting sign-seeking to an inner condition. And he's going to go on to say that in point three.

Jesus says in point three, sorry, I've lost my place. That the reason that this generation can't see the signs that are right in front of them is not due to a lack of light.

It's not because there's not sufficient evidence, but it's because their capacity to receive that evidence is broken. Well, Jesus says, your eye is the lamp of the body.

[20:07] So in the ancient world, the eye was understood not just to be the receiver of light, but a transmitter of light. So through your eye you see, but through your eye you also receive light, which then lights your whole body.

And in the original language, the words that are used to describe the eye in our passage, we've got bad in English.

but actually it's the same word that he uses to describe the evil generation. He's talking about an evil eye. This evil generation has an evil eye.

It seeks a sign because its eye is evil, clouded, distorted, aimed at something wrong, serving divided masters, not seeing clearly.

Jesus uses an interesting word for a healthy eye too. Because the word that he uses for the healthy eye is single or undivided. So Jesus is connecting, sign seeking, looking for more and more evidence, when plenty evidence exists, to an inner condition.

[21:22] It's not really about the eye, but it's about the heart. The light's on. It's their capacity to receive it that's broken.

God's trying to evaluate Jesus. They're looking at Jesus and trying to make a decision about whether he's telling the truth, whether he is in fact the light of the world as he tells us that he is in John.

But they're doing it with eyes that can't see clearly. Their priorities are already distorted. Their will is already set against repentance.

And here, I think, at the end of this part, it becomes the most searching line in the entire passage. Jesus says, therefore be careful lest the light in you be darkness.

So Jesus says it's possible not just to be in darkness, but to mistake your darkness for light. So to have a religious framework, a set of confident convictions, a well-developed theology, and to be so thoroughly in the dark that you think you're fine.

[22:34] The Pharisees thought that they were the custodians of light. They thought they knew what light was and wasn't. They were, by every external measure, the most serious religious people in Israel.

And Jesus says to them, check whether what you think is light. is actually darkness. Because if your fundamental orientation towards God is wrong, if your heart's closed, if your will's set against him, if your religious practice is about being seen by other people, or to make yourself feel satisfied in your own performance, then your most confident religious light might be darkness through and through. sin. Since Adam and Eve, in the garden, since they fell, our capacity to receive and to respond to truth, it's not just intellectually limited.

It's morally compromised as well. So sin in us means that we are not detached, neutral, neutral observers of the evidence about Jesus.

we're not looking at it all from behind the glass screen. We're fallen, and our desires are distorted, our egos are defensive.

[23:56] We've got deep instinctive resistance to surrendering control to anyone, including to God. Our eye is bad, and a bad eye doesn't know that it's bad.

Darkness doesn't announce itself as darkness. It announces itself as perfectly reasonable skepticism, as intellectual rigor, as legitimate, fair questions, but often right down at root level.

It's our will that's turned away from God, and we're looking for reasons to stay that way. Jesus says, be careful, lest the light in you be darkness.

It's one of the most important warnings in the whole of the Gospels. It's a warning addressed not just to the Pharisees, not just to the 21st century crowds that are gathered around Jesus, but to everyone who handles light, religious light, with confidence.

It's a warning to preachers and to elders, it's a warning to people who have sat in free church pews their entire lives, who could recite the catechism from memory. It's possible to know a great deal about light and yet never be in it.

[25:18] So how can we know? How do you check whether your eye is good or your eye is bad? Well, the primary test that Jesus gives us here in this passage is repentance.

repentance. So the queen of Sheba came and she was changed. The Ninevites heard and they were changed. A healthy eye, one that's aimed at Christ, it leads to genuine transformation.

Have you been sitting under the word for years and your fundamental posture towards God remains unchanged? If you're not more humble, more repentant, more dependent on God, more loving towards other people, more desperate for God's grace, we need to stop and ask ourselves whether the light that we're pursuing, the light that we're standing in is actually darkness.

But here's the good news, and it is great news. Jesus doesn't just give us a warning and leave it at that.

He also gives us a promise. He says in verse 36, if 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.

[26:38] So Jesus talks a lot about lamps and light in the Gospels. In Matthew 5, he says that we're to let our light shine before others so that they can see by our good works, our Savior, our Father who's in heaven.

Bright people point others to Jesus. But here in Luke, we get a slightly different development, a picture of ultimate illumination, a whole person, no dark corners, but somebody flooded with light. You see, the passage isn't just a warning about what we lack, it's a promise about what's available. Jesus is the light of the world, greater than Solomon, greater than Jonah.

He gave us the side of the resurrection. When he went to the cross willingly, died for our sins in our place, took the punishment that we deserved, and he's the one that opens blind eyes so that we can see it.

We call Jesus the great physician. Do you know how great a physician he is? He can perform eye surgery and heart surgery at the same time.

[27:49] If you ask him, he'll take your bad eye and make it good. He'll take your heart that's turned away and turn it back to him. And in the end, he will flood every corner of you with light.

Let's pray. Father, we confess that we are not always honest inquirers that we imagine ourselves to be. We confess that our resistance to you is often deeper than our questions.

Forgive us for the times we've asked for more light when what we needed was open eyes to see the light that's already been given. Lord Jesus, you're greater than Solomon, greater than Jonah. You're the light of the world. God, illuminate the corners, the dark corners of our hearts. Defend us from the evil one. Help us to stand in your light.
Give us eyes that see hearts willing to repent for your glory and for our good. In Jesus' name.
Amen.