

***Faith Postponed***  
**Luke 11:27-36**

We are going to continue in our sermon series through Luke's gospel and will be picking up where we left off in chapter 11.

Just a quick review, because the context is important for our passage this morning, last week we read about a particular time in Jesus' ministry when He casts out a demon, which He would do at times, but this time there were people there who accused Him of casting out demons by the power of Satan, to which of course, He responded.

However, there were also others there who, Luke says...

**Luke 11:16**

...to test him, kept seeking from him a sign from heaven.

In other words, they had witnessed miracles from Jesus, including casting out this demon, but they wanted more. While there were others who *rejected* faith in Christ, these *postponed* their faith in Christ. In other words, their curiosity was piqued but their skepticism was not satisfied yet.

And this such a good description of our modern times as well. There are many who have questions about Jesus, curious as to who He is and what He said, but not quite ready to call on Him as their Lord and Savior. Theirs is a "faith postponed." Well, Jesus is going to address these people in our passage this morning, and to be honest, He has some tough, but good, words for them and some instruction for all of us as well...

**I. The Call to Listen, Not See**

**Luke 11:27**

**27** As he said these things, a woman in the crowd raised her voice and said to him, "Blessed is the womb that bore you, and the breasts at which you nursed!"

Now, at the sight of the exorcism and hearing the incredible teaching of Jesus, this woman, in the midst of the crowd, yells, "Jesus, how blessed is your mother to have a

son like you!” Now, we don’t know if this woman was a mother or not, but we can only imagine if she was and her child was with her, them thinking, “Sheesh, Mom, thanks a lot.”

But there is some truth to what she said. Mary, the mother of Jesus, was considered blessed. If you remember at the beginning of Luke’s gospel, Elizabeth, who was pregnant with John the Baptist was visited by Mary who was pregnant with Jesus. And Luke tells us that Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit...

**Luke 1:42**

And she exclaimed with a loud cry, ‘Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb!

And though many have taken this to an extreme and attributed to Mary titles and work that goes far beyond what the Bible would say about her, we would agree, yes, she was blessed to be used in such a way in redemptive history.

But listen to Jesus’ reply back in chapter 11 to this woman in the crowd...

**Luke 11:28**

**28** But he said, “Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it!”

As amazing as it was that Mary was used in the way she was, bearing in her body the incarnate Son of God, Jesus says that it is possible to be blessed in an even greater way, and that is to hear the word of God and keep it.

Now, remember the context. There are people there calling for miraculous signs and wonders and Jesus does not indulge them. Rather, in response to this woman who yells above the crowd Jesus, replies back in front of everyone to hear, Blessed are those who *hear* the word of God and keep it!

What’s He doing? He’s calling out all of those who want to see more. Jesus calls them, and us, to listen, not see. The emphasis is on hearing the message of Jesus rather than seeing the miracles of Jesus. And it remains this way to this day.

Remember Paul’s words in Romans 10...

**Romans 10:17**

So faith comes by hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ.

Again, emphasis in Scripture is always given to the message of the gospel proclaimed and the message of the gospel heard over and above any miracle or sign that is seen.

So we might wonder then if that’s the case why did Jesus do miracles at all? Jesus did miracles out of compassion many times, to confirm his authority at times, however, he didn’t always do miracles. There were certainly times when He didn’t heal. The reason

being that His miracles were never meant to be the end all of his ministry. They were to give just a glimpse of what the new creation would be like after the completed work of Christ after His return.

Again, the emphasis is to listen, not see. In fact, listen to what Jesus continues to say...

## II. The Sign of the Gospel

### **Luke 11:29-30**

**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.

Jesus doesn't pull any punches here. He says that the desire for those back then to tempt Jesus to show a sign so that they could see something, was an “evil” desire. And because of that He says that He will not give them what they want, *except* “the sign of Jonah.”

And that might sound confusing, but it makes complete sense if you remember the story of Jonah in the Old Testament. To understand the sign of Jonah you have to remember the story of Jonah.

If you don't remember the story of Jonah, Jonah is the guy who is called by God to go to a city called Nineveh to warn them of coming judgment unless they repented. Jonah, however, hates Nineveh so he decides to board a boat that would sail in the opposite direction. While on the sea, God sends a storm, and Jonah, knowing the storm was his fault, tells the people in the boat to throw him overboard, which they do and the storm ceases.

But while in the water, God sends a giant fish, presumably a whale, to swallow Jonah, whose life is preserved in the belly of the whale for three days until God causes it to spit him out. Jonah then, if you remember, goes to Nineveh, preaches to them, and the entire city repents. They are spared God's judgment.

Now, the question is what does Jesus mean by the “sign of Jonah” and how will Jesus show it? Well, like Jonah who was in the tomb of the whale's belly for three days and then came back to life, so to speak, Jesus would go to the cross and be buried in a tomb for three days, after which He would be raised back to new life. This is what Jesus means by “the sign of Jonah.” Jesus will not offer any sign to that generation with one major exception: His resurrection.

What I want us to catch here is that the sign that Jesus offers a skeptical world is the gospel. The message of Jesus' life, death, and victorious resurrection from the dead.

This is the “word of God” Jesus speaks about and the sign that is given to the world to hear and believe. The gospel is the sign.

### III. The Greater Solomon and Jonah

#### **Luke 11:31-32**

**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.

Jesus here compares Himself to two OT figures, Solomon and Jonah, and says that He, Jesus, is greater than both. When we grasp in our understanding of Scripture, what Jesus is talking about here, namely, that many of the people we read about in the OT are lesser types of the coming Christ, I think we will grow in greater appreciation for our OT as well as a greater appreciation and love for Jesus.

First, Jesus says He is greater than Solomon. Solomon, known for his wisdom and wealth, was the great King of Israel. The son of David, Solomon reigned over Israel during the height of its kingdom. Israel enjoyed great riches and great peace during the time of Solomon’s reign.

However Jesus is **greater than Solomon in a number of ways:**

-Jesus has a **greater kingdom**. Unlike Solomon, Jesus’ kingdom will never end and will enjoy eternal peace.

-Jesus has **greater riches**. We, who are in Christ, have an inheritance that is “imperishable, undefiled, and unfading. (1 Peter. 1:4)”

-Jesus has **greater wisdom**. Solomon was known for his great wisdom, but in Jesus “are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.” (Col. 2:3)

-Jesus has **greater character**. Solomon famously had several hundred wives and gave into the pagan idolatry of other nations. Jesus though, of course, walked in perfect obedience to the Father and knew no sin.

Jesus is the greater King of God’s people in every way imaginable.

But second, Jesus is **greater than Jonah**. And he’s greater in a number of ways.

-Jesus has a **greater resurrection**. Jonah’s resurrection was **symbolic** (he didn’t really die), Jesus’ resurrection was **literal** (Jesus really died and was raised to new life).

-Jesus showed **greater obedience**. Jonah rebelled against God and ran the opposite way of where God had called him, Jesus faithfully fulfills the mission for which he was sent. Jonah stubbornly and reluctantly watches God's plan unfold, while Jesus prays, even though He experiences intense agony in the Garden of Gethsemane the night of His arrest, prays, "not my will but yours be done."

-Jesus has a **greater mission** (that is, a greater scope of ministry). Jonah was sent to preach to a single foreign city, but Jesus' mission is not for one people group, one nation, or one generation. Jesus' reconciling work is aimed at every generation of every culture in history.

-Jesus showed a **greater commitment to his mission**. We see multiple times in the story of Jonah that he would rather die than fulfill the calling on his life, however Jesus dies *so that* his calling is fulfilled.

-Jesus has a **greater message**. If you remember the story, Jonah preaches of only a coming judgment leaving the people of Nineveh to beg for mercy they didn't even know was available. Jesus preached and preaches still a message of repentance that leads to reconciliation and eternal life. One brought a message of doom the other, a message of hope.

-And finally Jesus has a **greater love**. At the end of the book of Jonah we see Jonah sitting on a hill that overlooks Nineveh angry at God for showing compassion, hoping to see the city destroyed. But in Matthew 9 we see Jesus on a hill overlooking Jerusalem moved with compassion because He knows their need for the Great Shepherd.

So Jesus is greater than both Solomon and Jonah, and the point He is making is that because of that, that generation, and any generation after it, that rejects Jesus would be condemned by who He identifies as the "Queen of the South" and the people of Nineveh.

This "Queen of the South" is the Queen of Sheba you can read about in 1 Kings 10. The Queen heard of Solomon's wisdom and wealth and went to great lengths to find out the truth of Solomon. Jesus' point is, if the Queen of Sheba would pursue knowing the truth of Solomon, then how much more should they pursue truth when the greater Solomon is there?

If the people of Nineveh repented at the preaching of Jonah, how much more should they repent when they hear the preaching of the greater Jonah?

Jesus is telling them, they are without excuse for not believing in Jesus. If lesser prophets and lesser wisemen in the times before Jesus were worthy of attention and respect, how much more should the very words of Jesus demand our attention and respect?

Then Jesus goes on with what could be a kind of complex final statement to the crowd there on this topic...

#### **IV. Lessons on Light**

##### **Luke 11:33-36**

**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.”

Ok, now, we have to do some work to figure out what Jesus is saying here.

##### **Jesus Shines Bright...**

In other places in the Gospels, Jesus speaks of the church being the light of the world and that the church should not hide its light but shine brightly for all to see. However, that is not what Jesus is talking about here.

Here, Jesus is speaking of Himself as the light. And in verse 33 He says that the light has been put on a stand, not in a cellar or under a basket, in other words, the light that Jesus brings into the world is not hidden. It shines bright for all to see.

John would write at the beginning of his gospel that..

##### **John 1:4-5**

**4** In him was life, and the life was the light of men. **5** The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

Jesus is light of life for all men, and he shines bright. But Jesus points out, there is a problem...

##### **...But We Are Blind**

##### **Luke 11:34**

When your eye is healthy, your whole body is full of light, but when it is bad, your body is full of darkness.

The point being, if they couldn't see, it wasn't because of the light. It was because of their own eyes. If they couldn't see the beauty of Jesus, it wasn't because Jesus was not beautiful, it was because they were blind to his beauty. And it is true for us today as well. If we can't see Jesus for who He is, it isn't because He is hidden or doesn't want to be seen. The problem is that our eyes, without the help of the Holy Spirit, are unable to see His glory.

The Apostle Paul speaks of this in his second letter to the Corinthians...

**2 Cor. 4:1-4**

**1** Therefore, having this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart. **2** But we have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways. We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God. **3** And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. **4** 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.

So if you are not a believer in Christ this morning, it is important for you to hear Scripture's diagnosis for your unbelief.

This is important because our state of unbelief causes us to assume that the difficulties of believing in Jesus lie exclusively outside of us. That the *only* reason we can't and don't believe in Him is because we haven't been convinced intellectually of His person and work. Now, there is a place for asking those questions and seeking answers. I don't want to discourage you from doing that. It is good. However, know that Jesus is confronting them and is confronting us today, that the *ultimate* cause of unbelief is in us, and not in Jesus.

One of the things I've learned about myself over the years is that I can have a tendency to procrastinate. Like any good procrastinator, I think why do something today that I can do tomorrow? That is future Cody's problems. Oftentimes I make excuses for not doing something right away, like maybe I don't have what I need, or I can't give it the attention it deserves at the moment. But really reflecting on my own procrastination, I realize that I don't do that with everything. In fact, some things I work ahead on. Some things I push through even though they are difficult. And you are probably like that too. But what that tells me is that when I make excuses for not doing something right now, it may just be that I just don't want to do that thing right now. There isn't any external cause for my procrastination, just my own internal desire to do something else. I postpone what I don't want to do, and give my immediate attention to what I do want to do.

Here's the thing. Some of you have postponed your faith until you have something more convincing. Maybe you are waiting for some kind of sign. You are waiting to be convinced of who Jesus is and of what Jesus can do for you beyond what you've already heard in the gospel. But the warning for you here is that Jesus has done enough in the gospel to be compelling. The true obstacle of your faith is not a deficiency in Jesus and His message but in the unwillingness of your own heart to repent and believe.

And as difficult as Jesus' words might be, they are for your good. When we come to understand the radical nature of our rebellious hearts, only then can we abandon ourselves to the grace of God. And the good news is that Jesus stands ready to

welcome all those who would come to Him for life and forgiveness, and He will not hold your previous unbelief against you when you come to Him in repentance.

So Scripture bids you to come to Christ, turn to Him with repentance and faith, trusting in His finished work on the cross for you. As the writer to the Hebrews says, don't neglect such a great salvation. Don't postpone your faith in Christ any longer. Turn to Him today.

### **Patient and Gracious Gospel Witness**

But, for those of us who are believers, this is a good reminder that we should speak with patience and grace with unbelieving family, friends, and neighbors.

Tim Keller wrote a book awhile back about sharing the gospel in our postmodern age, explaining the various challenges a postmodern worldview brings with it when talking about Jesus. And in it he said something I think is so important for us to understand.

*“Contemporary people are the victims of the late-modern mind far more than they are its perpetrators. Seen in this light the Christian gospel is more of a prison break than a battle.”<sup>1</sup>*

And though he was talking about helping people wade through specifically a postmodern worldview towards a biblical worldview, there is some similarity in talking to all unbelievers. Knowing the inability for their eyes to see the glory of Christ, we ought to passionately pray for them and patiently speak the gospel to them, knowing that if it weren't for the grace of God your eyes would be closed too. If it weren't for God's grace you would still be spiritually blind.

In fact these are Paul's words as we continue in 2 Corinthians 4...

#### **2 Corinthians 4:5-6**

**5** For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. **6** For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

Again, the diagnosis of our unbelieving hearts in Scripture is dark...literally. They are dark, unable to see the light of the glory of Jesus Christ. But the good news is that light overcomes darkness. Just like God at the very beginning at creation spoke into the darkness and flooded it with light, God can and does speak into the darkness of our hearts. And in so doing, by the work of the Holy Spirit, we are given eyes to see “the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”

Don't be discouraged when you are sharing the gospel and it seems to fall on deaf ears. Don't be discouraged that others just don't seem to see it. Their hearts are not too dark for light to flood in by the sovereign work of the Lord through your witness.

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<sup>1</sup> Timothy Keller, *Preaching: Communicating Faith in an Age of Skepticism*, 156.

Keep praying for them. Keep speaking to them. And keep thanking the Lord for His gracious work in your own heart, that at one time you postponed faith in Him no longer, and falling on His grace you found new life.

So Christian, respond in thankfulness to the grace God has shown you by shining the knowledge of Himself in your hearts.

And for all others who wouldn't call themselves Christians, I want to encourage you to consider why have you not trusted in Jesus yet? The gospel message of his life, death, and resurrection is the sign that He offers you that He is who He said He is, the Son of God who died to bring you back to God. I implore you, don't postpone your faith any longer. Call on Him today.

## **VERSES**

Luke 11:16

Luke 11:27

Luke 1:42

Luke 11:28

Romans 10:17

Luke 11:29-30

Luke 11:31-32

Luke 11:33-36

John 1:4-5

Luke 11:34

2 Corinthians 4:1-4

2 Corinthians 4:5-6

## **SERMON DISCUSSION GUIDE**

In our passage this week Jesus addresses those who desired to see more signs and wonders. They had "postponed" their faith, so to speak, until their skepticism was satisfied. Jesus responds with lessons on spiritual blindness and the light of the gospel.

### **I. The Call to Listen, Not See**

Jesus responds to a woman in the crowd who says his mother, Mary, is blessed. Jesus says that those who hear the word of God and keep it are the ones who are truly blessed.

*Have you ever wondered why God doesn't just show more miraculous signs to convince people of His existence? Why might He not?*

## **II. The Sign of the Gospel**

Jesus says the only sign He will offer is “the sign of Jonah.”

*Explain what the “sign of Jonah” is.*

*Cody said that “the gospel is the sign.” How can a spoken message be a sign?*

## **III. The Greater Solomon and Jonah**

Jesus declares that He is greater than two Old Testament figures: Solomon and Jonah. Because the Queen of the South listened to Solomon and the people of Nineveh repented at Jonah’s preaching, they will condemn the stubborn, skeptical generation who heard Jesus.

*Discuss the various ways that Jesus is greater than Solomon.*

*Discuss the various ways that Jesus is greater than Jonah.*

## **IV. Lessons on Light**

Jesus then describes Himself as light that has not been hidden, therefore, if someone can’t see the light, the problem is with their eyes and not with the source of light.

*Jesus declares Himself as the light of the world. In what ways does that metaphor accurately describe the person and work of Christ?*

*Share your own testimony. Describe your life before coming to faith in Christ and how the light of the gospel broke through to your heart and mind.*

*How does having a biblical understanding of the unregenerate heart and mind shape your gospel witness to unbelievers?*

*Spend time praying for lost family and friends.*