

Part 42: The Sign We Cannot Miss

Tyler Velin | Luke 11:29-36

March 5th, 2023

At long last we are back working through our study of the book of Luke. A bit of a refresher is helpful for us as today we are picking up in the middle of a dialogue that was left almost three months ago.

Having helped his disciples understand the central claims of his messianic identity, Jesus transitioned his ministry out of northern Judea and set his face to journey towards Jerusalem where he predicted he would be crucified and raised again.

This path to Jerusalem makes up the largest section in the book of Luke, almost ten chapters, and in it Luke is highlighting for us the culture, the cost, and the conflict which shapes the lives of those who follow Jesus. The path of discipleship is the path of the cross.

Last time we were in the Luke, Jesus performed a miracle by healing a man who was mute and demon possessed, and while some people marveled, some grumbled and scoffed. Here, and over the next few chapters, this conflict between Jesus and unbelieving opposition increases. But as it relates to our text today, we must remember the specific complaints surrounding Jesus: **Luke 11:15-16**.

In Luke 11:17-26, Jesus addressed the first critique: that he was really just Satan playing tricks on people by defeating Satan's servants. But in our text today, verses 29-36, Jesus is going to answer the second challenge: if he would only perform more signs, we would believe him.

As the crowds around Jesus were increasing, he begins to lean into this challenge. Here's the opening context to our passage today: **Luke 11:29**.

In the presence of a multitude of people, in the face of skepticism and doubt, Jesus wants you see something clearly. In other words if you want to be convinced of Jesus, what do you need to see, what sign is sufficient?

Jesus helps us understand what kind of skepticism is present here by identifying it as evil. Now the word "evil" means all the things you think about with the idea of evil—moral failure, corruption and wickedness. But behind this Greek word is also the idea of stingy. As it relates to hearing and believing, seeing and submitting, Jesus points out the problem of stingy, evil, hearts. Those are hearts that are withholding, always demanding, never opening up.

We live in a world today where people demand proofs and signs to believe in anything. Maybe you've shared the gospel with someone and they answered, "I would believe in Jesus if _____," and they insert their own sign. Or maybe you've wrestled with a similar challenge in your own heart, "If only Jesus would _____ I would trust him."

In Jesus' teaching there is both a challenge and a comfort. The challenge is that wicked and unbelieving hearts will always resist Jesus. The problem is not in what they see on the outside, but the stingy and unbelieving heart on the inside. But there is also a comfort here. That comfort is that Jesus is speaking

and informing us of a sign so powerful that it can overcome the stinginess in our hearts and bring us to repentant, transformative faith.

Our big picture today can be made in two quick points: **Out of everything, Jesus is the one thing we must see** but to follow that up **Seeing Jesus as the one thing changes how we see everything**. We will see the idea of one thing over everything in Luke 11:29-32 and in verses 33-36 we will see how everything in life then fits under that one thing.

First let's examine what Jesus says about **One thing over everything**. Read with me **Luke 11:29-32**.

So in the face of people demanding a sign, Jesus says something incredible. He says no sign will be given except this one sign. Now in order for us to really understand the stunning significance of what he is about to say we need to remind ourselves of the story.

Would you believe in God if all of a sudden an angel of God appeared to you? Would you believe in God, would you take it as a sign, if all of a sudden an angel of God appeared to you and told you that your wife who was barren would conceive and bear a son? Would you take it as a sign if God appeared to you by an angel, told you your wife who was barren would conceive and when you doubted that caused you to become mute? Would you take it as a sign if the God who appeared to you by an angel, who promised you a son, who made you mute, then caused that son to be born, and reopened your mouth causing you to praise the God who opened the mouth, who born the son, who was promised, by an angel, that was revealed to you? That's how the book of Luke began.

From there a virgin conceived, giving birth to Jesus, just as God told Mary.

But that's not the end, this Jesus did some stuff too. In Luke 4, Jesus begins his preaching ministry proclaiming that he is the anointed Messiah of God. But words mean little right? But what would cause you to believe his words? Would you take it as a sign if he cast out a demon while he said this? Would you take it as a sign that he healed all who came to him in Capernaum? When he made a leper clean by the lake? When he caused a lame man to walk in Galilee? When he restored a man's hand in the synagogue? When he healed a man from miles away with just a word? When he raised a widow's son back to life after he died? When he calmed a storm with a sentence? When he liberated a man who couldn't be contained by a whole village? When he raised a young girl back to life? When he was transfigured, even to a select few, in radiant glory before their eyes?

By the time we read Luke 11, this is only a glimpse of what Jesus had already done publicly and visibly before the crowds. Yet despite all of this Jesus says, "No sign will be given but this one."

Maybe, just maybe, we can piece together two important truths: 1. Seeing does not always equal believing. Maybe, just maybe, Jesus solving the "blanks" of your life isn't what you need the most. 2. In light of all that has been seen, this one sign, the sign Jesus is about to teach us, is therefore one we cannot afford to miss. We need to listen, we need to see this sign.

This sign, Jesus says, is the sign of Jonah. As we will see, this sign shows us the most important thing we can see about Jesus is not the miracles of what he's done, but the miracle of who he is.

Coming out of our Bible survey series, it's no surprise to us that Jesus locates an understanding of who he is within Old Testament history. The Jews here would have automatically imported a whole framework of understanding what Jesus is saying here, but we might need some help.

What does Jesus mean when he says, "For as Jonah became a sign to the people of Nineveh, so will the Son of Man be to this generation"?

Who was Jonah and what did he represent to Nineveh? That's what we need to understand this morning if we ourselves don't want to miss this significant sign. Look at how Jonah is introduced and his mission in **Jonah 1:1-2**.

Jonah was sent to Nineveh. Why? Because of their sin. Jonah came as a sign of judgement. He went to call them to repentance. Why? Because their evil (hear Jesus Luke 11:29) had come up before God and he was going to do something about it.

Jonah came as a representation that those in Nineveh were evil. He came to reveal this to them. I watched a fascinating documentary about the old children's program Barney and they attempted to understand the phenomenon of hatred that arose towards a children's character. The conclusion they came to was that in the 90s where culture was grungy, increasingly hostile, moody and dark, a character which embodied love without the failings and faults present in the culture stood as an indictment of the culture itself. People hated Barney because Barney was a sign of their own sin.

Jesus shows up, and he is the perfect man. He not only lived a perfect life as a man, but he was God in the flesh. He was perfect divinity and perfect humanity. He came not only as a witness of who we should have been, but also the judge who is able to punish those who are condemned in their sin.

But Jonah was not merely a sign of judgement. In fact Jonah ran from God's call. Why? Because he hated the Ninevites. Nineveh was the capital city of the nation of Assyria and they had waged war on Israel and were a thorn in their side. Now, if Jonah hated Assyria, and if God called Jonah to go to Nineveh on account of their sin, why would he refuse?

Because Jonah knew that when God manifested himself with warnings of judgment, repentance often followed, and God is compassionate and gracious to those who repent. Jonah knew that if he preached judgement, Nineveh might respond in repentant faith and God might grant them salvation.

As we will see later, that's exactly what happened. But it only happened after God captured the runaway Jonah and confined him to the belly of a fish for three days. Once he was freed, he went and preached his message, and the city repented and was saved.

In other words the sign of Jonah was a sign and warning of certain judgment, but also the potential of salvation. What lay at the center? Three days in the fish, three days which changed the course of history from the certainty of judgement to the potential of salvation.

In the book of Matthew Jesus adds this to our situation in Luke: **Matthew 12:39-40**.

What do you need to see if you want a true sign of who Jesus is? You must see that he is the messenger of judgement and of salvation just as Jonah was. And just as Jonah spent three days in the fish to

emphasize judgement and allow salvation, so too will Jesus spend three days in the grave before rising again.

Judgement exists whether you hear of it or not. At the entrances to Missoula's city limits are signs posted that using your cell phone while driving will get you a ticket. But you can have a child in Missoula, who never leaves the city limits, who never sees those signs, and who gets pulled over and is still liable to that judgement. Judgement exists, but signs help us see it so that we might respond to it.

To understand Jesus fully, to see him as who he really is and to believe in him properly we see the reality of judgement. The cross solidifies it. All who have sinned deserve death. Death is inevitable. Judgement will come. But because Jesus' life, ministry and death warn us, and because he came out of the grave, he is also a sign of the possibility of salvation. Just as the cell phone sign gives a possibility to respond properly, the cross of Jesus proves that those who see the warning of judgement, might receive the warmth of salvation by seeing Jesus as the one who takes away our sins by faith. Jesus, just as Jonah was, reminds us that judgement is certain but salvation is possible.

This is the central sign of Jesus. So how do you understand him? Jesus can be everything else to you, but if he is not this one thing, he is nothing.

Jesus' next portion goes to show what our responses to this sign should look like. If Jesus is the sign of Jonah then how should we respond? He gives two examples: lest we want to be condemned, we should seek Jesus for wisdom and worship him, and we should respond to Jesus' preaching and by repenting.

He gives the first case study of this in **Luke 11:31**.

Again, Jesus dips into his Old Testament bag with a story about the queen of the South. He's speaking about the Queen of Sheba who lived in the days of King Solomon. She heard a rumor of Solomon's glory and his wisdom and sought to see if it were true. Look at this account in **1 Kings 10:1-10**.

A foreign Gentile Queen heard, went, saw, and worshipped the God of Israel.

Jesus then returns to the story of Jonah for the second part of the case study. But this time instead of focusing on Jewish Jonah, he focuses on the sinful Ninevites: **Luke 11:32**.

Even after Jonah went to Nineveh, he preached a very meager message at a very meager pace. He was hoping that Nineveh would not respond. Jonah wanted judgement to fall on Nineveh like fire. But look at what happened: **Jonah 3:4-10**.

They repented and they were spared.

Now remember who Jesus is primarily wrestling with here. He's wrestling with Jews and religious teachers. But who are the superstars Jesus is talking about? A foreign Gentile Queen, and a pagan villainous nation. There's a scathing critique here.

At a rumor the Queen of Sheba packed up her riches and traversed the globe to hopefully see the rumor confirmed so that she might offer rich worship. At a whisper, the pagan Ninevites render the whole of their lives as one of repentance, renovation and conversion desperately hoping that a contrite heart the Lord would not despise.

What's the rhetorical effect this should produce in this generation—this evil generation sitting before Jesus? If the Gentile Queen came from that far, and if a pagan nation repented that hard at the work of ordinary men, how much more should God's own people come in desperation to the wisdom of God in Jesus Christ and offer worship in return?

The Queen of Sheba turned the tribute paid to her and paid tribute to the King of Israel. The pagan nation who warred against God, rendered the whole of their life to God.

What then does this mean for you? How far will you come for Jesus' wisdom? How soberly will you repent?

I've seen how far we go for entertainment. How far for words of comfort in scripture? I've seen how powerful repentance is in the form of a new diet, a new wardrobe or a new habit—lives have been renovated by the diagnosis of food allergy. But at the preaching of Jesus and the promise of judgement on behalf of the terminal nature of our sin, where is your repentance seen?

What you see here is so incredibly sobering. The Queen of the South, the men of Nineveh will rise up with this generation. That's what Jesus said. What does that mean? It means your issues with Jesus are not a momentary or past issue. They are a present and future one. One day, even those who are dead will be raised to give an account.

And when that happens people who have seen less than us, they will condemn us for they did more with less. They saw shadows where we see substance and it revolutionized their lives. There's a level of ashamedness that should strike us in this text. For those who pound the table for signs and proof, do you see how your own desire condemns you?

Abraham believed on nothing more than a promise and God made him a nation. Israel hoped that a substitutionary lamb would spare them the judgement of Egypt, and it worked. David walked into battle with nothing more than raw hope in the heritage of the Lord, and that stone struck with the force of a sniper's bullet. The Queen came at a rumor and left rejoicing. The Ninevites repented at a whisper and received relief. The disciples believed at the message of what Jesus was going to do. The church grew out of the real witness that Jesus did all he said he would, that he really died, he really rose again.

The church across the globe as flourished by the promise of God enduring bloodshed, persecution, calamity and more. People so hardened in heart, so calloused in sin have found relief in the fount of Jesus' blood. We live in the days which angels long to see.

The signs are there—so too is the shame of those who refuse to see.

But if you feel the twinge of that ashamedness, if you feel the guilt of wanting to see something, if you fear the ramifications of those who do not repent, take heart—for a sign has come, and a light has dawned. We must see that in Jesus as our judge and our savior we have the one sign that makes sense of everything. But we also see that if we get Jesus right, everything else begins to be shaped by it as well.

This is our second point, **Everything under one thing.**

Read with me **Luke 11:33-36**.

Do you see the relief intermixed with Jesus' warning here: resurrected witnesses will be called, judgement will follow, condemnation will be a reality for some. But, God has given a sign.

He has lit a lamp and he has no intention of hiding it. Jesus has come not to be hidden, but to be displayed. Why? So that we may have light. So that we will not be those who refuse to come, we will not be those who refuse to repent, but instead we receive grace upon grace through the light of Jesus Christ.

That same Jesus presses the parable into our own lives when he talks about our eyes. He says that if our eye is healthy (generous) then your whole body is full of light. But when it is bad, the whole body is dark.

This makes sense in our bodies right? If you have good eyes, how much light gets in? All of it. Enough for the whole body to make sense of it. But if the eye is bad, wounded, closed, how much light gets in? All that the body sees is tainted with darkness, not on account of the light, but on account of the eye.

That word translated "bad" (vs. 34), is actually the same word (poneros) Jesus used in verse 29 as "evil." The problem in this parable is not that the light doesn't shine bright enough, it's that the eye is morally evil and willingly stingy.

If we are kept from seeing Jesus and his sign of judgement and salvation, then the loss of that one thing makes everything dark. But when the one thing is seen with a healthy eye, our whole body is made light.

It's here that Jesus gives the only imperative command in this whole passage. Look with me at **Luke 11:35-36**.

Be careful lest the light in you be darkness.

Glow worms are pretty astounding. They emit light by wonderful creative splendor. But at the end of the day, when the greater light of the sun does shine on them, they are shown to be what they are. Glow they might, but still they are worms. Dirt is their kingdom and they are consumed by the lowest of all creatures.

Bask not in the light of the worm when the rays of the sun are offered to you in Jesus!

So how do we know if the light we have is darkness? Does the light you follow consume the whole of your life? Can it make sense of your sin, does it offer you true salvation in the midst of it? Are we driven by the splendor of Jesus which shines on our vocation, our vacation and our education?

Does the gospel emit the same gravity of attraction in your life that Solomon did to the Queen of Sheba?

But what if you feel you don't see it? Well, Jesus would be first to tell you—be warned. But he's also the first here to tell, you by way of the Ninevites, repent. Come to him. Have your stingy eyes healed by the generosity of his grace.

God is generous to the Gentile Queen and merciful to the pagan Ninevites. If you are one who has questions, who has sincere doubts, who has heard a rumor of the grace and truth that is offered in the

gospel and wonder, "could it be true"? Come and see, come from afar by the path of repentance and see.

It's not a shame to wonder at the miraculous claims of the gospel, it's a shame to never come.

So if you need wisdom, if you wonder if your eye is healthy, what do you do? **James 1:5.**

For those who come sincerely, even sincere doubts, hoping against hope, God will not meet you with reproach. But instead he will show you the light of Jesus which changes everything.

It changes how we view ourselves. Light shines on what is dark. It always will. But more than simply illuminating what is gross, this light heals us. Look at Paul's words in **Ephesians 5:13-14.**

When we see the light of Jesus we no longer hide our wicked parts, but we offer them up to him wanting him to heal them by his grace. We see ourselves differently in light of the gospel but we also see the whole worldly differently.

Have you ever seen the eyes of an animal at night? How they light up? That's because God has so designed the back of their eye to capture the light from your car, and reflect it back out so that they can see clearly even at night. God has designed the soul of the Christian in such a way that when the light of Jesus enters into it, it also provides the light we need to make sense of the whole world.

Richard Baxter, the old puritan pastor, once had to reconcile himself with the simple and raw reality of who Jesus came to be and the truthfulness of his world. But once he saw Jesus in scripture for who he says he is, once he was struck by the sign of Christ, his whole world changed. He said after this: **"None of the parts or concerns of religion seemed small; and man seemed nothing at all, and the world was a shadow, and God was all."**

When he saw the one thing over everything, he began to see everything through the lens of the one thing. Today, will you join me in this one point of application? Will you "be careful" to assess the significance of the gospel in your life? Will you soberly ask yourself if your faith is exclusively confirmed in the events of the cross, and then pray to God for wisdom that the cross begins to illuminate everything things else for you?

This hope has saved and satisfied foreign queens and pagans across the globe and throughout history, and through repentance it will satisfy and save us as well.