

LIVE IN THE LIGHT

Luke 11:29-54

Key Verse: 11:34

“Your eye is the lamp of your body. When your eyes are healthy, your whole body also is full of light. But when they are unhealthy, your body also is full of darkness.”

Earlier in Luke 11, Jesus healed a mute man out of his compassion. Jesus also encouraged the religious leaders to turn their hearts to God. Jesus said, “If (you believe that) I drive out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you” (11:20). If we believe in Jesus, the kingdom of God comes to our hearts.

In today’s passage, Jesus teaches us that we must overcome sign-seeking mentality by drawing our attention to the word of God. Let us think about what it means when Jesus says, “Your eye is the lamp of your body.”

I. ONE GREATER THAN JONAH IS HERE (29-32)

Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem to die on the cross to take away the sin of the world. But he was so eager to share the word of God with people along the way. Look at verse 29. *As the crowds increased, Jesus said, “This is a wicked generation. It asks for a miraculous sign, but none will be given it except the sign of Jonah.”* It is not always bad to ask God for a sign. Gideon asked God for a sign before attacking the Midianites who were harassing his people (Judg 6:36-40). God gave King Ahaz and his people the sign of Immanuel during their national crisis. Jesus performed many miraculous signs in his ministry. So why did Jesus call the people a wicked generation? It was because they did not turn their hearts to God after witnessing his miracles. Earlier that day, Jesus had healed a mute man. It was a wonderful miracle. This man’s life was changed. But the people’s hearts were cold as stone. The miracle was for them as well. Jesus wanted them to see who he was and turn to God. But they didn’t praise God. They didn’t turn to God. Instead, they tested Jesus by demanding more miraculous signs (16). They were saying, “That miracle is cool. But maybe it was a fluke. Show us some more so we can believe you.” They tried to make him out to be a street entertainer. Jesus lamented over their sign-seeking mentality and rebuked them. He said: “This is a wicked generation. It asks for a miraculous sign, but none will be given it except the sign of Jonah.”

The people wanted Jesus’ miracles on demand. They wanted to push their remote control button to see more miracles. But Jesus said none would be given except the sign of Jonah. Why? What is the sign of Jonah? Jonah was an Old Testament prophet. God told him to go to Nineveh, a city in Babylon, and proclaim a message of the impending judgment on the wicked city. But Jonah really did not want to do that, because the Ninevites were the enemy of his people. He would rather see them perish. He bought a one-way ticket for a ship sailing to Tarshish, a city located in the opposite direction of Nineveh. Jonah did not understand the compassion of God for all peoples of the world.

He thought God should love only the chosen people of Israel. So he disobeyed God's direction. On the way to Tarshish, however, the sea became turbulent. The sailors cast lots to find who was responsible for their plight. The lot fell on Jonah and they decided to throw Jonah overboard. Jonah thought he was going to die in the sea. But a big whale swallowed him even before he touched the water (Jnh 1:17).

Jonah was in the stomach of the big fish for three days. He prayed to God earnestly for his rescue. Then God let the whale vomit Jonah on the beach of Nineveh. Jonah had to deliver God's word to the people of Nineveh after all. He told them reluctantly, "Forty more days and Nineveh will be overturned," probably under his breath. To his dismay, the Ninevites accepted the word of God and repented. When God saw them repent, he had compassion on them, and did not destroy them (Jnh 3:10).

So what is the sign of Jonah? Matthew 12:39-41 gives us a clue: He answered, "A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a miraculous sign! But none will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. The men of Nineveh will stand up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and now one greater than Jonah is here." The sign of Jonah is the cross and resurrection of Jesus. Jesus came to this world to save us from the bondage of sin and death. He was crucified as the sacrificial Lamb of God to take away all our sins and was buried in a tomb. But after three days he rose from the dead, completing the redemptive plan of God. Whoever repents and believes in him will receive eternal life. This is the one miraculous sign that all of us sinners need. Indeed, this is the greatest miracle that each of us can experience personally by coming to Jesus. Do you feel you need God's miracle in your life to make things better? Then remember that God has done that miracle already. Jesus died on the cross to take away all your sins. He was buried and was raised to life on the third day to open the door for you to enter the kingdom of God. I pray that we may always remember this miracle of Jesus in our lives!

Jesus told the crowd Jonah's story in the hope that they might also repent and receive salvation. He also encouraged the religious leaders to proclaim the message of the kingdom of God to people—even to those whom they did not like. Look at verse 29 again. *"This is a wicked generation. It asks for a miraculous sign, but none will be given it except the sign of Jonah."* Jesus told them they were wicked. They had already witnessed many miraculous signs but they did not believe. Instead, they demanded more signs. They were only interested in miracles *per se*. They paid no attention to Jesus or his message. Even the Ninevites did not ask for a miraculous sign. They repented after hearing the message of Jonah. But the people in Jesus' time asked for signs for a wrong motive. For example, once Jesus had compassion for 5,000 hungry people and fed them with five loaves and two fish. The next day, they came to Jesus again. This time Jesus wanted to tell them about the spiritual bread, not the physical bread. But they didn't want to hear about the spiritual bread. When Jesus said that he was the bread of life and anyone who eats the bread would live forever, some accused

him for being a cannibal (Jn 6:51-53), and all went away until no one was left except the twelve disciples.

In his deep concern for the sign-seeking people, Jesus told them another story in the hope of drawing them to the word of God. At the time of King Solomon, the Queen of the South heard about the wisdom of Solomon. She was the queen of Sheba, a mercantile kingdom that flourished in southwest Arabia around 900-450 B.C. She came all the way to King Solomon with a large amount of gifts and asked Solomon the questions she had in her mind (2Ch 9:1-12). Solomon answered all her questions. He taught her about the Creator God, how the universe came into existence and the mysteries of nature. After listening to Solomon, the Queen of the South praised God who made the heavens and the earth and everything in it and who granted Solomon the wisdom. By telling this story to the sign-seeking people, Jesus urged them to pay attention to the word of God as had the Queen of the South. Jesus urged them to repent so that they might escape the judgment of God.

Look at verse 32. *“The men of Nineveh will stand up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and now something greater than Jonah is here.”* Jesus is one greater than Jonah, because he is the Son of God, the Savior himself, while Jonah was merely a messenger. The people of Nineveh repented when they heard the message. But the sign-seeking people did not repent even when the Savior himself preached the good news to them. Jesus warned them that the Ninevites would stand up at the judgment with the generation and condemn it.

II. WHEN YOUR EYES ARE GOOD (33-36)

Look at verses 33-36. *“No one lights a lamp and puts it in a place where it will be hidden, or under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, so that those who come in may see the light. Your eye is the lamp of your body. When your eyes are healthy, your whole body also is full of light. But when they are unhealthy, your body also is full of darkness. See to it, then, that the light within you is not darkness. Therefore, if your whole body is full of light, and no part of it dark, it will be just as full of light as when a lamp shines its light on you.”* No one lights a lamp and puts it under a bowl. A lamp is put on a stand so that people may see the light. What does this simple parable teach us? Jesus teaches us to learn God’s heart in giving his word to us. God really wants to reveal himself to us. God has given his word to be a lamp for our feet and a light for our path. God puts it on a stand and makes it most prominent for all to see. God’s light shines brightly in the dark world. But not everyone sees it. Only those who have good eyes can see the light (34). Biologically speaking, light enters our bodies through our eyes and enables us to see. Spiritually speaking, the word of God enters our inner beings through the eyes of our hearts (Eph 1:18). The eyes of our hearts are good when we have the word of God. The word of God enlightens our mind, heart and soul. Without the word of God, our hearts are filled with things of this world. Then the eyes of our hearts become dim. Consequently, our minds, hearts and souls remain in spiritual darkness. Jesus

openly preached the word of God and healed the sick, but not many people saw the truth about him and believed in him. It was a tragedy.

How can we have good spiritual eyes? Like the Queen of the South, we must have a desire to listen to the word of truth. Like the Ninevites, we must repent our sins when we hear God's word. If we only seek miraculous signs but do not listen to God's word and repent, our spiritual eyes go bad. If we don't have Jesus, the true light, with us, we are in darkness and we cannot see where we are going. On the other hand, if we study the Bible sincerely and repent, we can receive spiritual insight to see God, man and the world. We don't have to grope in darkness any more, for we are full of light (36).

Do you want to have good eyes? Come to the word of God with a great desire to learn from Jesus. A man in Kansas City was severely burned from an explosion. He lost both eyes and both hands. He had become a Christian just before the accident and what disappointed him the most was that he couldn't read the Bible. Then he heard a story about a woman who read braille with her lips. So he ordered the Bible in braille. But he discovered that the nerve on his lips were damaged that he could not read it. What a disappointment! Still, he didn't give up. He learned that he could feel the letters with his tongue. He was so excited. He read the entire Bible four times using his tongue! Most of us have good eyes to see. Yet we make excuse to set aside the word of God because of our busy life, work and school. But there is no good excuse for neglecting the word of God. May God help us to come to his word day by day so that the light of Jesus may shine on us! May God open our spiritual eyes as we study his word through personal studies, 1:1 studies, group Bible studies, Bible Café and Sunday worship service!

III. JESUS CHALLENGES THE RELIGIOUS LEADERS TO REPENT (37-54)

Look at verses 37-38. *When Jesus had finished speaking, a Pharisee invited him to eat with him; so he went in and reclined at the table. But the Pharisee was surprised when he noticed that Jesus did not first wash before the meal.* Jesus, the Wonderful Savior, came to his house, but the only thing the Pharisee noticed was that Jesus did not perform his ceremonial washing. He was spiritually blind. He didn't have good eyes. When the religious leaders did not repent before the word of God, they could not see God in Jesus (Lk 7:29-30). They were called to be spiritual leaders. But they were hypocrites. With a broken heart, Jesus challenged them to repent. Let me summarize the main points of Jesus' teachings.

First, live a sacrificial life (39-41). The Pharisees looked clean on the outside. But inside they were greedy and wicked. Their hypocrisy did not fool God. Jesus urged them to repent their greediness and live a sacrificial life, giving not only their money, but time and heart for the needy.

Second, practice justice and the love of God (42). The Pharisees were meticulous in giving tithes. They even offered 10% of their backyard garden produce. But they neglected justice and the love of God. Jesus urged them to have a shepherd's heart for others.

Third, live before God, not men (43-44). The Pharisees were very sensitive to human honor. They loved the important seats in the synagogue. They looked good in their purple robes. But inside they were dirty and corrupt. They needed to repent before God and live before him.

Fourth, love is action (45-46). One of the experts in the law answered him, “Teacher, when you say these things, you insult us also.” Jesus replied, “*And you experts in the law, woe to you, because you load people down with burdens they can hardly carry, and you yourselves will not lift one finger to help them*” (45-46). The experts in the law burdened people with a long list of do’s and don’ts. Jesus told them to lift even one finger to help others. Jesus urged them to put the love of God into action.

Fifth, repent before God (47-52). God sent prophets to the people of Israel to proclaim the message of repentance. But they did not repent; they became angry and killed the prophets. The experts in the law knew these historical facts and they knew their forefathers were wrong. So they built beautiful tombs for the prophets, but they did not repent. Without repentance, they became just like their forefathers in their pride and self-righteousness. Jesus warned that they would be held responsible for the blood of all the prophets from Abel to Zechariah. A sense of God’s history should lead us to repent humbly before his servants.

Look at verse 52. “*Woe to you experts in the law, because you have taken away the key to knowledge. You yourselves have not entered, and you have hindered those who were entering.*” Jesus rebuked the experts in the law for taking away the key to knowledge. The key to knowledge is repentance. When they did not repent, they remained spiritually ignorant and were a bad example to their people. They needed to repent when they studied the Bible.

In today’s passage, we learned how some people rejected Jesus and his word when they kept on asking for miraculous signs. The problem is that we are not very different from such people. We also want something fantastic to happen to our lives in some miraculous fashion. Like the religious leaders, we are also greedy, we want people’s recognition, and we like to tell people what to do rather than deeply care about them. Jesus would call this generation “a wicked generation.” He would still say that no sign will be given to us except the sign of Jonah. Praise God for the sign of Jonah, because this is the best sign we can have. May God help us to pay attention to the word of God! May God help us repent as we hear the word of God!