



Catalog No. 1938

Luke 11:29-36

38th Message

Shawn Reese

October 27, 2013

THE INS AND OUTS OF DISCIPLESHIP

SERIES: GOSPEL OF LUKE

When I grew up, my life revolved around sports and church, but mostly sports. I was the typical church kid. We were in church at least four nights a week, sometimes five. So, I was definitely an insider when it came to church. But, what people didn't know (or I thought they didn't know) was that I typically only went to church to play sports because we had a nice gymnasium. So, I looked for every opportunity possible to get into the gymnasium. Sports were really my first love. You could say that was my first idol. And, of all the sports, baseball was my favorite. I loved baseball. In those days if you wanted to play baseball you played little league until it was done, then you would try out for your high school team. That was basically the only option. So, when I was in 9th grade, I tried out for our high school baseball team. I gave it my best effort, played well and hustled (or so I thought), and I thought I was in. The last day of tryouts came, and the coach called me into his office where I thought I would be given a jersey. I went into his office and he told me to sit down in a chair. That's not a good sign. Then, the coach said something like this, "you know Shawn you're a good player but you're just too little to be on the team this year." My heart sank. He then went on to say, "So, go away this year and grow, then come back out and tryout again next year." I was like *I can't make myself grow!* Here I was thinking I was in when really I was out. Has that ever happened to you?

Well, we're in the book of Luke, and Luke, being a Gentile, is especially concerned about who's in and who's out and why. Not for something like a baseball team obviously, but for who's considered *in* the Kingdom of God and why are they in.

After two weeks in the Lord's prayer with Brian, today we go back into the public scene beginning in Luke 11:14.

Now he was casting out a demon that was mute. When the demon had gone out, the mute man spoke, and the people marveled. (Luke 11:14 ESV)

Jesus performs a mighty deed, casting out a demon that was mute. The people are amazed at this mighty work. We get two different responses from the crowd:

But some of them said, "He casts out demons by Beelzebul, the prince of demons," while others, to test him, kept seeking from him a sign from heaven. (11:15-16)

On the one hand, some of them say that He is casting out demons by Satan, Beelzebub. On the other hand, some want to see more signs. Those are the two responses. Brian is going to go over Jesus' response to the first group next week. That's

the group that is accusing Jesus of being on the side of Satan, which is covered in verses 17-28.

This week we are going to look at Jesus' response to those who are seeking more signs, verses 29-36.

Before we get to Jesus' response, what we can't miss is this little phrase in verse 16 that says that this group is "testing Jesus". Now the word there for test is the same word used in Luke 4:2 where we often say Satan is "tempting" Jesus, but it can be translated testing. So, just like Satan tests Jesus or tempts Him to abuse His power, this testing is in the same vein. This word *test* betrays a malicious intent, and this response reveals the condition of their hearts. Their hearts are cold and dark. That sets the stage for Jesus' response, which is pretty strong as we'll see. So, if we jump to verse 29, we'll start there.

I. The Ins Are Outs (11:29-32)

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. (11:29-32)

Jesus begins by making a reference to "this generation." He has referred to "this generation" before in chapter 7 and chapter 9 and neither time was good. Typically, when He talks about generations, He's not referring to everyone living. He's referring to the leaders and dominant voices of the culture.¹

Now, He names this generation as we like to name our generations today.

We had the silent generation.

We have the boomers.

We have the Xers, which I'm a part of.

We have the millennials or gen Y

And I think the current generation is gen Z.

But, Jesus doesn't give bland names like those. He names this the "evil" generation! Pretty strong words from Jesus. He is definitely not creating rapport with His audience here...

But, this reminds us of how Israel is portrayed in the OT. They're portrayed as a stiff-necked, stubborn and hard-hearted people. So, here, I think Jesus wants to make the connection that this generation is no different from the Israel of old. Their stubbornness and hard-heartedness is manifest in their seeking of more signs.

Jesus continues on. No other sign will be given except the sign of Jonah. *As Jonah became a sign to the people of Nineveh, so Jesus will be to this evil generation.*

Who is Jonah and what is this sign of Jonah? Well, Jonah is the comic relief of the OT. "He is the prophet who runs away, the problem passenger thrown into the sea, the dinner the whale can't stomach, and the hothead who gets cross with God over a withered plant."² Veggie Tales tells the story well: *Jonah was a prophet ooh ooh, he never really got it ooh ooh ooh...* Most of you know the story; during Jonah's adventures he tells the people of Ninevah to repent, never suspecting that they will. But, in the end, they do repent. And, now fast-forward a few hundred years and here's Jesus, anything but comic relief, asking a crowd made up of mostly, if not all, of *His own people* (a point that can be inferred from the fact that He's using stories from Israel's history) to repent, but they stubbornly will not. They are blind to what is right in front of their eyes. Their hearts are too hard.

So, what is this sign of Jonah? It's a bit ambiguous because it is not explained here in Luke. In Matthew's Gospel, the sign of Jonah is explained as Jesus' death and resurrection. As Jonah was in the belly of the fish for three days and nights, so Jesus will be in the heart of the earth for three days and nights. One could go with Matthew's explanation, but the theme of this section revolves around repentance and how the Ninevites responded in repentance to the preaching of Jonah. So, I tend to lean more toward the sign being simply Jesus' presence and preaching—specifically His preaching of repentance. No other sign will be given. You must see and hear what is right in front of you and respond appropriately.

Jesus is now going to call two groups of people from Israel's history to judge and condemn this evil generation. Note that both are gentiles (i.e. outsiders). The first is the queen of the south and the second is the Ninevites of whom we just spoke. First let's discuss the queen of the South.

The queen of the South is also known as the Queen of Sheba and her story is from 1 Kings 10:1-13. Sheba was an ancient civilization in Southern Arabia, modern day Yemen. The Sabaeans were a very wealthy people because they lived along a main trade route connecting Africa and Asia. In 1 Kings 10, the queen from this great civilization hears of the wisest man to have ever lived, Solomon, and decides to visit him. So she makes a long, dangerous, expensive and uncomfortable journey to hear all of His wisdom. After talking with him about all she had on her mind, the text says that Solomon answered all her questions and nothing was too hard for the king to explain to her. When the queen hears all his wisdom and sees

all of his wealth, the text says that she has no more breath left in her. She is breathless at Solomon and his God. She then praises Yahweh, the God of Solomon. She, an outsider, repents through the revelation of Solomon.

But now someone greater than Solomon is here!

The next group of people that Jesus calls on to judge this evil generation are the Ninevites who repented at the preaching of Jonah as we just said. They, outsiders, repent through the revelation of Jonah.

And now someone greater than Jonah is here.

In these two stories of old, the gentiles (the outsiders) become the judges of the Jews, the (insiders). This is a severe rebuke to Jesus' audience. These "outsiders" can sit in judgment over this evil generation. And why? Because they repented at the Word of God. And here is someone greater and wiser than Solomon and Jonah, yet there is no response. There is nothing but cold, dark hearts.

This text invites us to check our own hearts, especially if we are "insiders," if we are regular church goers, if we are "church kids" or "church people." Because it's really easy to show up, do all the right things and think we're in. And then an outsider comes in and shows that we're actually out. What a sad day that would be.

Someone greater than Solomon is here!

Someone greater than Jonah is here!

Now, if you are a church kid or church adult, you know that Jesus is greater than Solomon. You know Jesus is greater than Jonah. But, is He greater than sports in your life? Perhaps baseball? See, the problem is not recognizing the greatness of Jesus over Solomon or Jonah, it's treasuring Jesus above all else. In Jesus' day, the Jewish leaders were the insiders. They did all the right things. They said all the right things. They went to Synagogue four days a week. They prayed all the time. They knew the scriptures backwards. But in the end, they made an idol out of the Law and treasured it above all else. They missed God when He showed up right in front of their eyes.

Do you treasure Jesus above all else?

The speaker at our upcoming men's retreat, Tremper Longman, has written a book entitled, *Breaking the Idols of the Heart*. He characterizes the typical idols as being things such as power, money, pleasure and knowledge amongst other things. These idols cloud our vision and darken our hearts. Of course, it doesn't happen overnight. It's far more subtle than that. It's like slow-moving storm clouds slowly coming over and clouding our vision. Sometimes we don't realize it. So, this is a call to remind ourselves that something greater is here!

Something greater and more valuable than moving up the corporate ladder is here!

Something greater and more valuable than your stock portfolio is here!

Something greater and more valuable than your health, your depression, your sickness is here!

Something greater and more valuable than knowledge, your grades, your education is here!

Something greater and more valuable than pleasure is here!

Something greater and more valuable than _____ (fill in the blank) is here!

Will you respond appropriately by repenting?

Or, are you seeking more signs? It's so easy to fall into this trap of sign-seeking or looking for more evidence. We always want more! Before I repent, I want just one more sign! If I had just one more sign, then I would give this idol over to Him. If I just had one more piece of evidence... if I just had an answer to why this happened or why that happened then I would believe. If I had some bolt of lightning from heaven or some personal healing, then I would really give my life to Christ.

Well, I would offer this as a response: be careful! Read any of the Gospels and when there is a mighty work performed, almost always that miracle serves as a catalyst to further harden hard hearts or further soften soft hearts. When Jesus performs a mighty deed, what you typically see are people digging in deeper to wherever they are, spiritually. So, if the heart is already hard, 500 miracles won't help, 500 signs won't help. As one writer says, "ten million signs and wonders would not make the world turn to Christ. Belief is a choice."³ It's not a lack of evidence, it's a stubbornness of the heart. What is needed is submission. Submission to the person and teachings of Jesus Christ, and that comes about only through a soft heart.

There's a line in an early Jewish extra-Biblical text that says, "I bow the knee of my heart" (Pr. Man. 11). This is a great word picture which is a great word picture for submission. That's what we need to do: bow the knees of our hearts in submission to the Word and will of the Father. Not my will, but Yours be done.

Jesus now moves on to a few small parables about light which drive home His message that we must make every effort to open up our hearts to the light of His Words and revelation.

II. Let the Light In (11:33-36)

"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 (evil), 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." (11:33-36)

Now, at first glance, these two passages seem to have nothing in common—the sign of Jonah connected to the eye of the body? And, if you read most English translations, they don't usually help us. But there is a very significant linguistic connection between the two: the word "*evil*." Back up in verse 29, Jesus named this generation "*evil*." And here the word used

to describe the eye when it is unhealthy is the same word, translated "bad" in the ESV, but the same word in the Greek, *poneros*. It means "evil" or "wicked." By repeating this word, Jesus is implying that these sign seekers, this evil generation, has evil or unhealthy eyes, resulting in their entire body, including their hearts, being full of darkness.

The Source

So, if we look at these verses in detail, Jesus begins this section by proclaiming the common sense wisdom that a light source, a lamp, is only useful when it actually illuminates. If it is hidden or covered, it cannot guide someone's path, it cannot reveal what is hidden, it cannot drive back the darkness. What Jesus is saying is that He is the lamp, the source of light, and we shouldn't hide Him or His words, but should openly proclaim Him so that He may be seen by everyone.

The Gate

He then changes analogies somewhat in verse 34. It's a bit harder to understand because Jesus seems to say that our eyes are lamps, and our eyes, strictly speaking, do not generate light. So, what is Jesus saying here? I think what Jesus is getting at is simply that if the eye brings in light, the whole body glows.

In effect, the eyes function as a gate for the body and heart. Another way to say it: what the eye fixes on, the heart gets set on. So, if your eyes are healthy—literally, "*single or undivided*"—and singularly focused on Jesus, (i.e. unclouded by evil or sin), they will be fixed on light. Then the heart gets set on light and the whole body glows. So, have healthy eyes. Have singular eyes.

The Warning

But there is a warning here that continues in verse 35. "*Therefore be careful lest the light in you be darkness.*"

Watch closely that your eyes are healthy. **Watch closely** that your eyes are single. **Watch closely** that your eyes take in light and not darkness.

The children's song comes ringing back in my ears: *Be careful little eyes what you see...*

If I were to cover my eyes and walk around in darkness, it would illustrate that when our eyes take in darkness, our entire bodies are dark. We are lost when our eyes do not take in light.

Have healthy eyes so that His light will enter you and drive back the darkness within you—not just some of the darkness, *all* of the darkness within you. The word "whole" is repeated three times here. That's our goal, that our entire body will be full of light. Not just some of our heart, not just some of our body, not just some of us. All of us!

But that's a problem for us, because we tend to like our sin, and hence the reason for this warning. We like those dark rooms in our heart. We like to hang onto some darkness in our lives. We end up managing our sin instead of eradicating it. We become divided and compartmentalized. We have secrets; we live a divided life and we are no longer whole and Jesus

says: I want you to be whole. I want you to be pure in heart, unmixed and undivided. I want you to live life abundantly.

So watch closely that darkness is not within you! Bring those skeletons in the closet out into the Light of Jesus and allow Him to make you whole.

Verse 36 is the amazing result of opening all of ourselves to Him:

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.

The Result

If the heart is completely illuminated then you will shine as the lamp shines! You will shine as Jesus shines!

And that's what this world needs: glow in the dark baseballs, or maybe bats...It's a simple analogy, but I think it fits: these glow in the dark things have to sit under a lamp before they will glow. The marketing is all wrong for them because they say that if they sit under a light for minutes, they will glow for hours. The opposite is actually true—if they sit under a light for hours, they will glow for minutes. But that's exactly what we need to do. We need to repeatedly be placed under a lamp in order to shine, and the lamp for us is the lamp of Jesus. When we do we will glow like Him in this dark world, and I know for me, if I'm not sitting under the lamp of Jesus, I don't glow when I'm driving down 280 and that car next to me cuts me off. If I'm not sitting under the lamp of Jesus, I don't glow when my neighbor decides to throw a party until all hours of the night when I have to get up early. If I'm not sitting under the lamp of Jesus, it's hard for me to get excited about His mission in this world of drawing the lost to Himself or caring for the poor or reaching out to the underprivileged. But it all begins with healthy eyes, taking in the light of Jesus through praying, reading Scripture and spending time with Him, then sharing that light in the world.

III. Conclusion

At the end of the day, we all need to check our hearts, whether we are insiders or outsiders. If we are insiders though, this text should make us sit up and reflect.

In our busy, scattered and whirlwind lives of the bay area, it's pretty easy to find and make idols for ourselves. It's pretty easy to simply seek signs instead of taking the time and effort to submit.

And, for me, it's really easy to not make room for Jesus, the Lamp of the world, in my daily routine. So, as you go forward, I would encourage you to ask these questions this week of yourself:

- Are you treasuring Jesus ultimately?
- Are you submitting to His will consistently?
- Are you taking in His light regularly?

And may we learn how to bend the knees of our heart toward Him always.

Amen.

1. Wayne Grudem and Thomas R. Schreiner, "Luke," in *ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Bibles, 2008), 1966, s.v. 7:31-34.

2. N. T. Wright, *Luke for Everyone* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2004), 140-141.

3. Kent Hughes, *Luke* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 1989), 15.