

They Seek a Sign (Luke 11:27-36)

Sunday school April 16, 2017

Luke chapter 11. Two weeks ago we studied what Jesus had to say about spirit warfare. We looked at 3 illustrations Jesus gave about spirit warfare. We looked at the kingdoms (verses 17-20) and the fortified palaces (verses 21-22), but we didn't get to...

III. Cleaned Place READ v. 23-26 Verse 23 implies that there are no neutral parties in spirit warfare. You are either fighting for the kingdom of God or the kingdom of Satan. The people had accused Him of fighting for the kingdom of Satan, and He giving logical arguments against that claim. In this illustration, the kingdom of God is the one doing the cleaning; the kingdom of Satan is the unclean. If you have done any physical cleaning at all, one of the things you learn is that anything you clean will eventually need to be cleaned again. We have volunteers who are scheduled to clean the church and fellowship hall this month; we had the same last month. Why do we need to clean it again this month if we just did it last month? Because last month is last month; it gets dirty again. I clean my bathroom thoroughly about twice a year. I last cleaned it on Christmas Day, so it is starting to get dirty again. I'll have to clean it again after final exams.

Spiritually speaking, the cleaning Jesus is talking about here happens at salvation. There's also the daily forgiveness and cleaning we need to maintain fellowship with Him as well, but Satan getting dethroned from my life happened when I trusted Christ. I Corinthians 6:11 calls us washed, sanctified, and justified. That's a description of the cleaning that takes place when we trust Christ. With that understanding, verse 26 bothers some people. **READ v. 26** Some people wonder: what keeps Satan from coming back in and cause me to be in even worse shape than I was before I trusted Christ? When Jesus cleans us, He doesn't just leave us empty and unlocked so that anything can just walk right in. He leaves the Holy Spirit, who indwells us and seals us. The Holy Spirit, being God, is much, much, much stronger than Satan, so Satan can't get back in because the seal of the Holy Spirit keeps him out. It's a real blessing when you realize what you have because you trusted Christ; that includes the sealing of the Spirit, the indwelling of the Spirit, and many other things.

Transition: With that dispatched, let's move on to some new text. Let me HAND OUT OUTLINES. The next short block of text is the second time in Jesus' earthly ministry where His family comes up. It's...

I. Blessing of Mary READ v. 27-28 The blessing on Mary the mother of Jesus that this woman cries out comes in response to His logical arguments that He was fighting on the right side of the spiritual war as opposed to the side of Satan. The statement she makes in verse 27, “Blessed is the womb that bare thee, and the paps which thou hast sucked,” was a true statement, but it wasn’t the whole truth. Twice scripture tells us in the birth narrative that Mary was a very blessed woman. The angel Gabriel when he announced Jesus’ birth to her said to her, “blessed art thou among women.” That’s part of Luke 1:28. Also, when she goes to see her cousin Elisabeth, the mother of John the Baptist, Elisabeth filled with the Holy Spirit says, “Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb.” That’s Luke 1:42. So on at least two occasions scripture directly tells us that Mary was indeed a very blessed woman. That’s why when Jesus responds, He says, “yea, rather.” Yes, what you have said is true, but it’s not the whole truth. The whole truth as Jesus pronounces it is the rest of verse 28: “blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it.”

Mary was a good hearer and doer of God’s word. That’s the underlying reason she was blessed, not just her physical connection with Jesus. In Luke 8:19-21, Jesus answers a similar situation a similar way. Jesus is in a crowd of people, and someone tells Him that His mother and brothers desire to see Him. His response is Luke 8:21: “My mother and my brethren are these which hear the word of God, and do it.” I mentioned back when we studied that passage a few months ago that, for most people, the closest people they have around them are their family: their parents, their kids, their brothers and sisters. Yesterday I went to the funeral of Frances Strickland, my mom’s best friend when we lived in Athens. I’ll say more about it at the end, but all of her family was there: her husband, brothers, children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren. They took up 3 pews in the chapel. Those were the people that were closest to her. So what Jesus is telling them here is that the people who are closest to me are those who hear the word of God and do it. It’s the same idea here. If you want to be blessed like Mary was blessed, hear God’s word and do it. That’s the only way to really be blessed.

Transition: The next block of text deals with signs, and I’ve called it the...

II. Sign of Jonah Back at the very beginning of what we studied two weeks ago, the crowd made two accusations or demands of Jesus. If you look back to verses 15 and 16, in verse 15 they say “He casteth out devils through Beelzebub the chief of the devils;” that is, they accuse Him of fighting on the wrong side of the spirit war. He dealt with that accusation in the bit we just finished, verses 17-26. In verse 16, they “sought of him a sign from heaven” to authenticate His ministry. That’s what He deals with in this next block of text. It’s interesting they ask for a sign right after He just cast out a devil and allowed a mute man to talk again. You would think that would be a pretty good sign, but in this next block of text the key word is the word “evil.” It appears twice, once in verse 29 to describe the people He’s talking to (“This is an evil generation”) and again in verse 34 (“but when thine eye is evil”). I have both of those evils underlined in my Bible. He first tells them how big of a sign they will in fact get and then goes on to explain that the lack of sign is not the real problem in this situation.

Transition: First, the sign they will get...

IIA. Greatest Witness READ v. 29-32 Probably no part of the Bible, other than maybe the creation narrative, is doubted more often than the book of Jonah. You don't really believe Jonah survived 3 days and 3 nights in the belly of a great fish do you? Yes, I do. With the completed word of God, when we read about the comparison Jesus makes between Himself and Jonah, the first thing to come to mind is that Jonah spent 3 days and 3 nights practically dead in the belly of a fish just like Jesus spent 3 days and 3 nights in the ground between His burial and resurrection. It's certainly right to notice that, especially on Easter Sunday. In fact, the parallel passage Matthew 12:38-40 specifically tells us that that comparison is accurate.

But at this point in His ministry the people around Him really weren't thinking about His death, although He foretold that several times. So that's probably not what they would have thought of. Also the context is hearing and doing God's word, because this passage comes right after He says in verse 28, "blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it." So for His immediate audience, their first thought when He compared Himself to Jonah would have been the idea in verse 32: Nineveh heard and did God's word as preached by Jonah just as they need to do and hear God's word as preached by Jesus. The reference I gave you is Jonah 3:5, which describes Nineveh's reaction to Jonah's preaching: "So the people of Nineveh believed God, and proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them." They heard and responded to God's word by repenting. Therefore, they were blessed, just as Jesus promised anyone who hears and does God's word will be blessed.

The same idea comes into play with the Queen of Sheba in verse 31. Jesus is referencing her visit to King Solomon as recorded in I Kings 10:1-13. She came to question Solomon, doubting his authenticity, and when she heard his proverbs, the word that God spake through Solomon, her response was in I Kings 10:7: "Howbeit I believed not the words, until I came, and mine eyes had seen it: and, behold, the half was not told me: thy wisdom and prosperity exceedeth the fame which I heard." She heard God's word through Solomon, and she did it. The witness these people have is greater than Solomon or Jonah: it's Jesus, the Son of God and Son of man. These people had heard His word, but they hadn't repented; they hadn't done it. They accuse Him of working for Satan and demand of Him a sign. Therefore, He says "this generation is evil."

Transition: At the end of this passage, Jesus gets down to the real root cause of the problem. That's the need for...

IIB. Clear Sight READ v. 33-36 The human eye is an amazing organ. There are several parts of the human body that are amazing in their design, but the eye is one of them. It's a little organ, about an inch wide, an inch tall, and less than an inch deep. It has a small hole in the front that light enters, and that's all that enters the eye. The things you see you don't see the thing. The thing doesn't enter your eye so that you can see it but the light that reflects off of the thing. The light goes through a lens, hits the back wall, and is processed by the brain to determine what collection of light that is.

For some of us, the natural lenses on our eyes don't let in all of the light they are supposed to. That hasn't happened to me yet, but it probably will as I get older. That's why we have eyeglasses, contact lenses, cataract surgeries to help our eyes let in the light they are supposed to. That's the point Jesus is making when He talks about light and their (spiritual) eyes in this passage. The problem wasn't the lack of light. They had the greatest light anyone would ever have standing right in front of them, namely the Lord Jesus Christ. The problem was they had spiritual cataracts: their spiritual eyes did not interpret the light correctly. They didn't need more light or more signs; they needed to hear and do the word of God. This reminds us that the only person who sees everything clearly is God. That's why hearing and doing His word is so important. If I am hearing and doing His word, the word of the only one who sees everything clearly, I know I am right. If I rely on my own conscience, my own spiritual lenses, I am never 100% sure.

Conclusion

As a final thought, as we try to be lights for Jesus in this world, it's important to remember that we don't control the eyes of the people around us. We can't control how they see the light. The people Jesus is speaking to here had the greatest light this world has ever known, yet most of them did not believe; they didn't see the light correctly. We can't control how they see the light, but we can control, at least in part, how much light they see. We can control whether our light is under a bushel, and therefore very hard to see, or whether it is shining brightly and therefore easy to see. Said another way, a way I like to say it a lot, we can't control whether they believe. We can control at least in part how easy it is for them to believe.

As I mentioned before, yesterday I went down to Athens to attend the funeral of Mrs. Frances Strickland, whom you all probably don't know, but she was my mom's best friend when we lived in Athens. At her funeral yesterday, my former pastor in Athens gave the gospel much like our Pastor did at my mom's funeral a few years ago. That was actually the main focus of the service. Some people, even some Christians, do not understand that. They think funerals are for honoring the dead; telling about how good they were. Partly, but funerals for Christians are mainly to celebrate their homegoing to the Lord and explain why they have a home in heaven. The people at Fran's funeral yesterday were shown a clear light just like the people at my mom's funeral were. I don't know what they did with it, but they heard a clear gospel. So my encouragement this week is to live your life shining a lot of light to make it easy for people around you to believe.