

## Something Greater

Luke 11:29-36

Sunday, April 19, 2026

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This weekend, a number of our middle and high school students went to the District Blitz Conference in Duluth. Pastor Shane will have a report next Sunday, so I won't steal any of his thunder. What you should know is that this weekend, they've been studying the book of Jonah.

In case you need a refresher, Jonah was a prophet, and his story is recorded for us in the Old Testament book that bears his name. There are actually two intertwined stories in the book of Jonah. The first is all about Jonah's message. God commissioned Jonah to bring a message of rebuke and judgment to a notoriously wicked people.

"The word of the LORD came to Jonah son of Amittai: 'Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because its wickedness has come up before me'" (Jon. 1:1-2).<sup>1</sup>

Eventually, Jonah did go and preach to the Ninevites, but not before running from his assignment. That's the most well-known part of the story. As a result of Jonah's disobedience, God put his prophet in a three-day timeout in the belly of a great fish.

Chapters 1-2 of Jonah detail the prophet's dereliction of duty and his near-death experience. Chapters 3-4 describe Nineveh's city-wide repentance, followed by Jonah's disgruntled conversation with God. I won't go into much more detail now, but I encourage you to take 10 minutes later today to read through Jonah on your own.

In Luke 11:29-36, Jesus references the story of Jonah as he addresses his hearers. People were increasingly coming to hear him teach and—if they were lucky—witness one of his miracles.

That said, we shouldn't confuse Jesus' popularity with genuine faith. Since this passage piggybacks off what we looked at last Sunday, I want to go back to verse 16 for a moment. Following the healing of a demon-oppressed man, we read in verse 16 that some in the crowd,

"tested [Jesus] by asking him for a sign from heaven" (11:16).

Jesus first addressed the false allegation of his affiliation with the devil. That's what we looked at last week. Now, in verse 29 and following, we hear Jesus' response to those asking for a sign.

"As the crowds increased, Jesus said, "This is a wicked generation. It asks for a sign, but none will be given it except the sign of Jonah" (11:29).

Clearly, Jesus was bringing a word of rebuke. When he described that generation as "wicked," Jesus wasn't addressing a particular age group. He was referring to the pervasive spirit of the day. By referring to them as a "wicked generation," Jesus was implying that their attitude toward God mirrored that of the Exodus generation that was rescued from slavery in Egypt.

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are from the NIV Bible (The Holy Bible, New International Version, © 2011 by Biblical, Inc.)

Like the wilderness generation centuries before, unbelief was demonstrated by God's people not taking him at his word.

Was it wrong for them to want a sign from God? Yes and no. Signs in themselves were not the problem. Jesus often used signs to point to the *significance* of his ministry. But looking at verse 16, we see that the motivation behind their request was to *test* Jesus. What they wanted from Jesus was authentication from above.

*How do we know God sent you? Why should we believe you are who you claim to be? What gives you the right to speak on God's behalf? Show us your heavenly credentials, or we won't believe you!*

Before we pass judgment on these people, I wonder how many times we've shared a similar attitude? How many times have we failed to trust the Lord and instead wanted him to prove himself before we were willing to act in obedience?

The root problem here is a lack of faith and a reluctance to take God at his word. I want you to hold on to that thought as we dig deeper into what Jesus says next.

In response to their demand for an authenticating sign from heaven, Jesus said that no sign would "be given...except the sign of Jonah" (11:29). In the following verse, Jesus then explains what he means by "the sign of Jonah."

"For as Jonah was a sign to the Ninevites, so also will the Son of Man be to this generation" (11:30).

How many of you took the ACTs or SATs in high school? Those tests, and other tests like them, often include an analogy section. Some of those questions were relatively easy: "Apple is to Red, as Banana is to (Yellow)." The more difficult questions were there to test your vocabulary.

Notice the analogy Jesus gives in verse 30.

"For as Jonah was a sign to the Ninevites, so also will the Son of Man be to this generation" (11:30).

Like those analogies on the SAT, for us to understand how the Son of Man was a sign to that wicked generation, we first need to know how Jonah was a sign to the people of Nineveh.

Earlier, I mentioned that two stories are intertwined in the book of Jonah. On one level, the book's message is all about repentance. Jonah's mission was to deliver a prophetic word of judgment and to call the Ninevites to repentance. Here's how that part turned out.

"Then the word of the LORD came to Jonah a second time: "Go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you." Jonah obeyed the word of the LORD and went to Nineveh. Now Nineveh was a very large city; it took three days to go through it. Jonah began by going a day's journey into the city, proclaiming, "Forty more

days and Nineveh will be overthrown.” The Ninevites believed God. A fast was proclaimed, and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth” (Jon. 3:1-5).

The passage goes on to say that,

“When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he relented and did not bring on them the destruction he had threatened” (Jon. 3:10).

What then did Jesus mean in Luke 11:30 when he said,

“For as Jonah was a sign to the Ninevites, so also will the Son of Man be to this generation” (11:30)?

Just as God sent Jonah to call people to repent of their sin and to return to him, so too had the Father sent Jesus to preach repentance. Jesus said of himself back in Luke 5:31-32,

“It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance” (5:31-32).

But as we’ve seen throughout the Gospel of Luke, Jesus was much more than just a preacher. He was more than the great prophet of God that some people believed him to be. There was more to Jesus than just a preacher of repentance, just as Jonah served as a sign to Nineveh in more ways than just through his prophetic ministry.

What is Jonah most famous for? We don’t remember Jonah for his obedience; we remember him for his *disobedience*, for running 180 degrees in the other direction, away from God’s mission. We remember him for ending up in the belly of a whale for refusing to do what God asked of him.

In the final verse of Jonah 1, we read,

“Now the LORD provided a huge fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights” (Jon. 1:17).

It makes sense that Jesus would draw the analogy between Jonah’s preaching ministry and his own, calling sinners to repent. But why would Jesus compare himself with one of the most notorious, rebellious prophets in the entire Old Testament?

Let’s go back to Luke 11:29-30,

“As the crowds increased, Jesus said, ‘This is a wicked generation. It asks for a sign, but none will be given it except the sign of Jonah. For as Jonah was a sign to the Ninevites, so also will the Son of Man be to this generation’” (11:29-30).

They wanted a sign. They wanted authentication from heaven that Jesus should be taken at his word. Apparently, his authoritative teaching was not enough of a sign. His ability to heal the sick, cast out demons, and even raise the dead had not convinced them of his heavenly identity.

It's not clear what kind of sign would have satisfied them. But Jesus spoke of a greater sign to come that would authenticate his ministry and his identity as the Son of Man like no other.

The version of this exchange found in Matthew's Gospel brings a bit more clarity to what Jesus was saying here.

"Then some of the Pharisees and teachers of the law said to him, 'Teacher, we want to see a sign from you.' He answered, 'A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a 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'" (Matt. 12:38-40).

Little did they know that in time, what Jesus predicted back in Luke 9 would soon come true.

"The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life" (Luke 9:22).

What are we to take away from this conversation between Jesus and those demanding a sign?

What this passage shows us is that **our root problem is a lack of faith and a reluctance to take God at his word, but Jesus calls us to repentance and a life of obedience to him.**

The question behind the test and request for a sign, and the root problem that defined that wicked generation, was a lack of faith and a reluctance to take God at his word. But here's the kicker: this lack of faith and reluctance to take God at his word was not limited to people living in those days. This same spirit has been characteristic of all people for all time.

Consider the temptation of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. What was the nature of their sin? Wasn't it a lack of faith and a reluctance to take God at his word? Let me read from Genesis 3.

"Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, 'Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden?'" The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.'" "You will not certainly die," the serpent said to the woman. "For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves" (Gen. 3:1-7).

This isn't a sermon on Genesis 3, so I won't linger here. Notice, though, how Adam and Eve tried to fix the problem once they realized they had messed up. They tried to cover up their shame themselves. They continued to demonstrate a lack of faith and a reluctance to take God at his word. Rather than confess their sin and repent of their rebellion, they attempted to fix the problem themselves.

But through Christ, God offers us a better solution. In Jesus, we're given something greater. That's what Jesus illustrates in verses 31-32.

"The Queen of the South will rise at the judgment with the people of this generation and condemn them, for she came from the ends of the earth to listen to Solomon's wisdom; and now something greater than Solomon is here. 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" (11:31-32).

Jesus does something here to get his listeners' attention, and it likely ruffled their feathers. He points to two examples of people who took God at his word and showed evidence of faith. Jesus highlights the example of unlikely people showing repentance and faith.

One example is one we've already considered: Jesus highlights the Ninevites who repented in response to Jonah's preaching. The other example can be found in 1 Kings. Jesus points to a pagan queen who reversed her skepticism once she heard and understood God's wisdom.

We could dig into these Old Testament stories in detail if we had more time, but Jesus' point can be summarized by his repeated phrase, "something greater...is here." Jesus points to the faith and obedience of unlikely people to provoke a response from his listeners. Jesus wanted them to do some self-evaluation by comparing themselves to these pagan believers.

The Queen of the South received God's wisdom revealed through King Solomon and responded with humility and faith. And now, Jesus says, something greater than Solomon is here. The Wisdom of God had come in the flesh, and he was speaking directly to them.

Likewise, when the Ninevites heard Jonah's message of judgment and his offer of salvation, they took God at his word and placed their faith in him. But now, Jesus says, something greater than Jonah was here. The Son of Man would soon be put to death, buried, and after three days rise again so that all who would take him at his word and place their faith in him might be made alive in him forever. Jonah's resurrection from the belly of a whale was great, but Jesus' resurrection from the dead would serve as an even greater authenticating sign.

Once again, this passage shows us that **our root problem is a lack of faith and a reluctance to take God at his word, but Jesus calls us to repentance and a life of obedience to him.**

Something greater than Solomon, something greater than Jonah had come, and those listening to Jesus needed to decide if they would take him at his word and respond to him in faith. Jesus was issuing a warning to those who might persist in unbelief.

That tone of warning carries over into the last part of the passage, 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” (11:33-36).

If verse 33 sounds familiar, it's because Jesus used the same illustration back in chapter 8. But, in this context, Jesus wasn't talking about believers letting their light shine. Here, Jesus' point is that he had not hidden the light of the gospel; rather, as the light of the world, his light was clearly visible. The crowds and skeptics were asking for an authenticating sign from heaven. But what they needed was not more light; they needed to receive the light they had already been given and respond with repentance and faith.

Jesus spoke of the human eye letting light into the body and illuminating the person from within. To change the metaphor a bit, let's picture a person pulling back the curtains and opening the blinds to allow light to fill a room.

As our Northern Minnesota days grow longer and winter finally gives way to spring, we rejoice when the sun shines in, filling the room with light. Yet, when light floods a room, it also reveals. Light exposes what is dingy, dirty, and broken. Light shows us what we want to see, but it also shows us everything we want to keep hidden.

The alternative picture is of someone who keeps the windows covered and chooses to stay in the dark. Nothing is revealed, and nothing is exposed. But that doesn't mean nothing's wrong.

The big question that Jesus wanted his hearers to consider is the same question he wants all of us to think about today.

### **What are we doing with the light we've been given?**

Our root problem is a lack of faith and a reluctance to take God at his word, but Jesus calls us to repentance and a life of obedience to him.

Some of us at church today or watching online profess faith in Jesus Christ. As we've walked with him over the years, our faith in Christ has deepened. And yet, while that root problem is being rooted out as we follow Christ, there are still times when we show a lack of faith and a reluctance to take God at his word.

Perhaps there is an area of your life right now where this is true of you. Where do you see reluctance to listen to Jesus? What are you doing with the light you've been given? Where might Christ, by his Holy Spirit, be revealing and exposing areas where you need to step out in faith and take God at his word?

Others of you may be in a different spot with Jesus. You might still be considering whether or not this thing we Christians call *following Christ* is for you. First of all, I want you to know how grateful we are that you're here and that you're considering that step of faith.

Even though you may still be dipping your toe into the waters of Christian faith, I want to ask you the same question this morning: What are you doing with the light you've been given?

You might be someone who is waiting for God to give you a clearer and more confirming sign before you take that next step. While none of us here are experts at faith or taking God at his word, it would be my privilege to visit with you after the service to talk more about what that next step of faith might look like for you.

Our root problem may be a lack of faith and a reluctance to take God at his word, but Jesus calls us to repentance and a life of obedience to him.

What are you doing with the light you've been given?

Let's pray.