

# Living Joyfully in the Light of Jesus

Luke 11:29-54

Key Verse: 11:34

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

In today's passage Jesus deals with sign-seeking religious leaders. They had made life complicated and confusing for everyone. Their obsession with signs enabled them to avoid real commitment to God and to play religious games instead. Jesus rebuked their sign-seeking mentality. About forty years ago, there was a popular song called, “Signs, Signs, Everywhere Signs,” by the Five Man Electrical Band. It expressed the frustration of young people in the Hippie generation who felt restricted, harassed, and condemned by all the different signs they saw each day, such as, “Don't do this” and “Don't do that” and “Do not enter here” and “Do not park there.” Near the end of the song, the singer sees a sign on a church that says, “Everyone Welcome. Please come in.” So he goes in and prays and finds peace with God. He just needed to see one sign, the right sign. In today's passage Jesus points people to the one great sign that is essential in following him. When we see this sign clearly and keep our eyes on it, we can live in the light and grow in the light. Christian life is not frustrating and confusing, but simple and most joyful. Today let's learn how to live joyfully in the light of Jesus.

## **I. The sign of the Son of Man (29-32)**

As we studied last week, after Jesus had enabled a mute man to talk by driving out the mute demon from him, many people rejoiced in Jesus' work of deliverance. However, there was a group of religious leaders who demanded that Jesus prove his identity by a sign from heaven (16). Their request was not from a desire to know the truth. It was a mask of religious hypocrisy that disguised their opposition to Jesus and badly influenced their generation. So Jesus said, **“This is a wicked generation”** (29). The religious leaders seemed to be incorrigible. However, Jesus did not give up on them. Jesus pointed them to one great sign. Jesus pointed the whole generation to one great sign that would prove his identity and lead them to salvation.

What was the great sign Jesus gave? It was the sign of Jonah (29-30). Matthew's gospel explains the meaning of this more clearly. Jesus said, **“For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of**

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**Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth”** (Mt 12:40). This indicates primarily Jesus' resurrection. This is the great and final sign that proved with power that Jesus is the Son of God (Ro 1:4).

Jesus' resurrection would soon take place. However, there was a problem in the hearts of the people of his generation. Many did not know who Jesus really was and were relativistic toward his message. If they did not change their attitude, they would miss the great sign and perish. To help them, Jesus gave two examples from God's history and a serious warning.

**First, the Queen of the South (31).** This refers to the Queen of Sheba whose story is told in 2 Chronicles 9. She heard of King Solomon's great wisdom and made a long journey to Israel to have a personal audience with him. She asked him many hard questions. Solomon answered every question so wisely that she was overwhelmed. She praised the God of Israel and gave Solomon huge quantities of gold and spices and precious stones. She had a great desire for wisdom and spent lavishly of her time and money to obtain it. Though a queen, she also humbled herself. Jesus wanted the people of his time to have the same attitude. In fact they should have been better, for Jesus was greater than Solomon. Solomon was a mere man. Ultimately, he found life meaningless and wrote the book of Ecclesiastes. But Jesus is the Son of God. Jesus' teachings had revealed mysteries of the spiritual world that Solomon did not understand. Jesus' words were words of life and power. The people of his time should have believed Jesus' words.

**Second, the men of Nineveh (32).** Nineveh was the capital of Assyria, which was a most ruthless empire in the time of Israel's decline. There were 120,000 people there who were senseless due to moral and spiritual corruption; they could not tell their left hands from their right hands. So the Lord called his prophet Jonah to preach a message of judgment to them. But Jonah did not want to obey. He wanted the Ninevites to keep on sinning, pile up God's wrath, and perish in God's judgment. So he sailed for Tarshish--the opposite direction of Nineveh. But God caught him. God sent a storm upon his boat. Then, as frightened sailors threw Jonah overboard, God provided a large fish to swallow him. After three days and nights of being tossed around in the belly of the fish, Jonah was vomited out on the coast. Jonah got the point. He surrendered to God and went to Nineveh.

Jonah's simple message was, **“Forty more days and Nineveh will be destroyed.”** He did not tell them to repent, or promise forgiveness. He had no shepherd heart for his listeners. In fact, he really disliked them and hoped they

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would not be saved. But when they heard the message, they examined themselves instead of criticizing the messenger. Then they realized that God's word was right and they were wrong. They began to repent, starting with the king, who took off his royal robes, put on sackcloth, and declared a national fast. When God saw how they turned from their wicked ways, he had compassion and spared them from destruction. Though they were wicked, their repentance was exemplary. Jesus wanted his generation to learn from them. They should have been much more eager to repent, for Jesus was greater than Jonah. Jesus did not dislike his audience; Jesus loved sinners. Jesus preached a much better message than Jonah. Jesus not only talked about judgment but about salvation. Jesus preached forgiveness of sins, eternal life and the final victory of God and his children. Jesus' message of saving grace was wonderful news that everyone should have accepted with joy. But many in Jesus' generation did not.

So Jesus warned his generation. There would be a judgment of God. Those who received Jesus' message would be saved, but those who rejected it would perish. The Queen of the South and the Ninevites would condemn Jesus' generation: "We repented before a lesser message and messenger. You had the greatest message and messenger, but did not repent!" Jesus pleaded with his generation to repent because he loved them.

In this part we learn the importance of our attitude toward Jesus' message. We also learn the centrality of Jesus' resurrection in our Christian faith. This is important. **First of all, Christ's resurrection proves that the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is the living God.** Jesus taught us to call this God "Father." The world is not ultimately ruled by evil powers, but by our Father God who is loving and good. **Moreover, by raising Jesus from the dead, God showed us that he accepted Jesus' sacrifice.** This assures us that the full debt of our sin has been paid. Now we are justified by faith in Jesus (Ro 4:25). Our Father God gives us eternal life as a gift. **Furthermore, since Jesus is the "firstfruits" of those who have fallen asleep (1 Cor 15:20), we know that God will raise us from the dead as he raised Jesus.** God will equip us with glorious new bodies which are imperishable. We will be free from all sin and shine in the image of Christ. We will inherit his kingdom, where there is no more death or sorrow or pain, but only life and peace and joy in the love of God forever. Christ's resurrection from the dead is the great sign we must focus on. We must accept Jesus' words about his resurrection. Then we can live victoriously and serve the living God joyfully every day.

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## II. Eyes that see the light (33-36)

In this part, Jesus teaches us how to see the light. **First of all, we can take great comfort in the fact that God really wants to shine his light into people's hearts.** Look at verse 33. **“No one lights a lamp and puts it in a place where it will be hidden, or under a bowl. Instead he puts it on its stand, so that those who come in can see the light.”** God sent Jesus so that he might shine brightly in this dark world. Jesus is the light of the world. Jesus reveals God's love and purpose and saving grace to those who are in darkness. Sheila Illescas was once in the dark, feeling unloved. But through Bible study with Mary Choi, she heard God's word from Genesis 1:31: **“You are very good.”** She felt that God was pleased with her; his love touched her heart. She began to smile and to live a joyful and fruitful life. Brenden Daley once felt dark without knowing the meaning of his life. But through the word of God he began to perceive God's great purpose for him. So he began to smile and to trust God and be thankful. Last week he was granted admission to UIC medical school. I was once in the darkness of guilt and despair over my sins. But when I saw Jesus on the cross, shedding his blood for me, the power of God's saving grace drove out my darkness and I became joyful and happy. Jesus is the light of the world who guides us on the pilgrimage of life until we reach the glorious kingdom of God.

Though Jesus shines brightly, not everyone comes into his light. Jesus explains why. Look at verse 34. **“Your eye is the lamp of your body. When your eyes are good, your whole body is full of light. But when they are bad, your body also is full of darkness.”** When our eyes are working properly, they take in the light and reflect accurate images of reality. We can see things as they are. But if our eyes are bad, they distort reality. In severe cases, they make us blind; we are unable to see at all. The same is true of our spiritual eyes. If the eyes of our hearts are enlightened, we see the glorious resurrection of Christ and understand its meaning and live victorious lives (Eph 1:18). But if our eyes are not working well, everything looks dark and gloomy. So we must check our eyesight. We check our physical eyes to see if we have 20/20 vision. We must also check our spiritual eyes.

Jesus warns in verse 35, **“See to it, then, that the light within you is not darkness.”** Here “the light within you” refers to the guiding thought of a person's life. If the Risen Christ dwells in one's heart he enables us to see the truth and beauty of God's world and the glory of God who rules all things. He fills us with hope for the future and the love of God to share his salvation with the lost. But if a

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human philosophy or sinful desire rules our hearts, it makes everything look dark. We can become negative and useless. How can we have Jesus' light in us? We should meditate on the word of God until it rises in our hearts like a bright morning star (2 Pet 1:19). We should pray for ourselves, and for others, that the eyes of our hearts may be enlightened (Eph 1:18). Then Jesus comes into our hearts. We are filled with light; we see everything clearly; and we can live joyfully for the glory of God (36).

## **III. Jesus enlightens the religious leaders (37-53)**

Jesus had done his best to help the darkened religious leaders come into his marvelous light. When he finished speaking, a Pharisee invited him to eat with him; so Jesus went in and reclined at the table. But Jesus did not wash his hands first, probably deliberately. The Pharisee, who was watching very carefully, was surprised. Now Jesus had his full attention. Jesus seized the moment and began a conversation that would help the man spiritually. Jesus explained three specific problems of the Pharisees. Let's summarize the main points in a way that emphasizes the positive lesson.

**First, live a sacrificial life (39-41).** The Pharisees looked good on the outside. Just as they did their best to clean their cups and dishes, they made a great effort to appear holy before people by taking baths, wearing the right clothes and displaying their credentials. But inside they were greedy and wicked. God was sorry that they emphasized outward cleanliness while their inner lives were rotten with selfishness and materialism. These elements blind one's spiritual eyes. Jesus urged them to live a sacrificial life, giving to the needy--not only of their money, but also of their hearts.

**Second, practice justice and the love of God (42).** The Pharisees were meticulous in giving tithes to God. They even made sure to tithe from the herbs that grew in their gardens. This was rather commendable. However, they were so narrow-minded that they neglected justice and the love of God. So Jesus urged them to have a shepherd's heart for others.

**Third, live to please God, not men (43-44).** The Pharisees were very sensitive to human honor. When they went to the synagogue it really mattered to them to be greeted properly and to sit in the front row. If they were dishonored in any way, they would get so upset that they could not listen to the message. When they received proper honor, they felt good and did not listen to the message. The pursuit

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of human honor blinded them to God's presence and led them to ignore God's word. Jesus urged them to set aside their human honor and learn how to please God.

As Jesus spoke plainly to the Pharisee, a teacher of the law began to feel very uncomfortable. Squirming in his seat, he said to Jesus, **“Teacher, when you say these things, you insult us also.”** Jesus did not apologize. Jesus began to rebuke the teachers of the law out of his love. He also gave them three specific topics of instruction.

**First, love requires action (45-46).** The teachers of the law taught rules and regulations very clearly, absolutely and systematically without knowing the weakness and brokenness of their suffering people. They did not serve them with a humble and loving heart, but lorded it over them as teachers who had to be obeyed. Sometimes, they even abused their authority. In this way, they crushed the people entrusted to their care. As they watched their people floundering under the heavy load of their demands, they did not lift even one finger to help them. Jesus wanted them to be compassionate shepherds as well as good teachers. So he encouraged them to practice acts of love.

**Second, repent before God's history (47-51).** God sent prophets to the people of Israel to proclaim the message of repentance. But many times they did not repent; they became angry and killed the prophets. The experts in the law knew these facts of history and they knew their forefathers were wrong. So they should have repented. Without repentance, building tombs for the prophets was another act of hypocrisy. Jesus warned them that this cycle of hypocrisy would not continue indefinitely. Jesus foretold that his generation would be held responsible for the blood of all the prophets from Abel to Zechariah. This happened when they crucified Jesus on the cross. Jesus urged the religious leaders to have a sense of history that would lead them to repent, so they would not repeat the same sins of their forefathers.

**Third, Christ is the key to knowledge (52).** The key to knowledge is have the light of Christ in one's heart. Paul said, **“In Christ are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge”** (Col 2:3). To acknowledge Jesus as Lord and accept his word opens the door to the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. But the religious leaders rejected Christ. They remained in outer darkness and became stumbling blocks to their people. Even though they had many Ph.D.'s, they were harmful to

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their people. Jesus pleaded with them through metaphor to accept him. This was most urgent for them.

Though Jesus spoke the truth in love, the religious leaders did not accept his teaching. They hardened their hearts and began to oppose him fiercely and besiege him with questions (53). They wanted to trap Jesus in some way so they could destroy him. Jesus must have known they would react like this. But he taught them the truth that could save them at the risk of his own life. Jesus was a good shepherd, even for the Jewish religious leaders who persecuted him (Jn 10:11).

In this passage Jesus teaches us how to live joyfully in the light. Most of all, we must fix our eyes on Jesus and his glorious resurrection. May God bless each of us to do so.