

JESUS TEACHES HOW TO LIVE IN THE LIGHT

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 the last passage we learned the compassion of Jesus. Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem to suffer and die for the sin of the world. But he stopped to help one suffering man by driving out a demon that had made him mute. When the religious leaders accused Jesus of working by the power of demons, Jesus taught them about spiritual reality. There are two, and only two, kingdoms. One is the kingdom of God and the other is the kingdom of the devil. All people belong to one kingdom or the other; there is no middle ground. But in terms of power, God’s kingdom is incomparable. Jesus said, “But if I drive out demons by the finger of God, then the kingdom of God has come to you.” Almighty God can drive out all the power of the devil’s kingdom with one finger. This finger of God is the word of God. As Martin Luther wrote, “one little word shall fell him (the devil).” When we have one word of God in our hearts, we have the kingdom of God in our hearts and enjoy complete victory over the devil’s work. May God help each of us to have one word of God in our hearts. May God use each of us as a one-to-one Bible teacher by the finger of God to spread the kingdom of God all over Chicago, all over America, and all over the world.

In this passage Jesus deals with the sign-seeking mentality of his generation. Jesus teaches us that instead of seeking signs we must seek wisdom and repent before God’s word. Then we can have real spiritual insight to live as God’s children. Jesus also deals with the problem of the Pharisees and experts in the law. They were called to be spiritual leaders, but they were spiritually blind and hypocritical. Jesus exposed their hypocrisy to lead them to repent. Today, Jesus teaches us how to live in the light of God’s word. May God help us to do so.

First, Jesus encourages us to seek wisdom and repent (29-32).

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.’” Probably, when the man who had been mute began to speak, he did not stop talking, especially about what Jesus had done for him. It stirred up people everywhere and many came to see Jesus. We might think that Jesus would be glad and have a “fan appreciation” night to honor and thank all those who were coming to see him. But Jesus never did that. Rather, he said, “This is a wicked generation.” Jesus rebuked the entire generation of his time as a wicked generation. They were wicked because they asked for a miraculous sign out of deliberate unbelief. It is not always bad to ask God for a sign. Gideon asked God for a sign before he attacked the Midianites (Jud 6:36-40). Gideon wanted to be sure that God was with him before he risked his life and his men’s lives to fight the enemies of his people. God honored Gideon’s request. God also gave the sign of Immanuel to King Ahaz and the people of Israel to assure them that he was with them during a threat of foreign invasion (Isa 7:14). God himself gave this sign to his people. But in verse 29, Jesus rebukes the wicked generation for asking for a miraculous sign. It is because their hearts were not right. They had already seen Jesus perform many miraculous signs. Their request for a sign was to test Jesus out of their pride and deliberate unbelief (16).

Look at verse 29b. Jesus said, “...but none will be given it except the sign of Jonah.” Jesus did not perform a miracle on demand, but Jesus would give them a sign, the sign of Jonah. This is explained more fully by Matthew’s gospel. There Jesus says, “For as Jonah was three days and nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and nights in the heart of the earth” (Mt 12:40). In fact, the greatest sign of all would be given to that generation: Jesus’ resurrection from the dead. St. Paul says that this sign shows with power that Jesus is the Son of God (Ro 1:4). Our Christian faith is built on the fact that Jesus rose again from the dead. The resurrection of Jesus proves that God is living. The resurrection of Jesus is the victory of God over all the power of the devil. The resurrection of Jesus shows us that Jesus is the one and only way to God. The resurrection of Jesus gives us a living hope in the kingdom of God. There is no stronger evidence that Jesus is God than his resurrection from the dead. This sign would be given to that generation. But if their hearts were not ready for it, it would not help them to have faith in God. Therefore, Jesus deals with the root problem that they needed to overcome to have saving faith in Jesus.

Look at verse 31. “The Queen of the South will rise at the judgment with the men of this generation and condemn them; for she came from the ends of the earth to listen to Solomon’s wisdom, and now one greater than Solomon is

here.” The Queen of the South is also known as the Queen of Sheba. She once visited King Solomon to listen to his wisdom (2Ch 9:1-12). She asked him many hard questions. Solomon, in his wisdom, answered all of her questions. He expounded on all the terrestrial secrets. He explained the first cause, harmony, and the mysteries of nature. After listening to Solomon, the Queen of the South accepted the universal truth that God made the heavens and the earth and everything in them. She could not but praise the God of Solomon and acknowledge his presence as the living God. Her pursuit of wisdom led her to meet the Creator God through Solomon.

The people of Jesus’ generation had one who was greater than Solomon among them. Jesus’ wisdom was dripping like honey and they had only to listen to him and accept it in their hearts. Jesus is in very nature God, who made all wisdom. But they were not interested in wisdom. They demanded miraculous signs. They must have read the book of Proverbs many times as Jewish children. But the appeals to seek wisdom were not important to them. They were like students who fail to do their homework because they prefer to watch exciting sporting events or go to parties. Instead of following their noble desire to study and gain wisdom, they followed their baser appetites and their humanity degenerated. Finally, they only wanted to be entertained, ignoring the pursuit of truth. When Jesus did not entertain them, they became demanding and testy. Jesus warned that the Queen of the South would rise at the judgment to condemn such people. She will condemn them, not because she has a condemning spirit, but because her great learning mind had set a good example of pursuing wisdom that leads to God’s revelation. Jesus himself is the best example. As a boy of twelve, he remained in his Father’s house after the Passover Feast, listening to the teachers and asking them questions. Because of his great learning mind and desire for God’s word, the boy Jesus grew in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and men (2:52).

The opposite of wisdom is folly. The counterpart of a wise man is a foolish man. In Hebrew thought, fools were regarded as morally deficient. If a student who has the potential to get all A’s is lazy and spends time in the shopping mall or watching too much television and ends up as a mediocre student, he is a fool by Biblical standards. God made man with a great learning mind. God made man to grow endlessly in wisdom and stature. Ultimately, the desire for wisdom leads us to Jesus Christ, who is the Wisdom of God (1Co 1:29). We must study the Bible diligently. We must study our school subjects diligently. We must seek wisdom until we meet Jesus personally as the Wisdom 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 one greater than Jonah is here.” It was probably hard for the Jews to accept these words because Jesus spoke favorably about the men of Nineveh, who had been historical enemies and oppressors of Israel. At the same time, Jesus spoke negatively about the Jews. But Jesus deliberately used this example to help the Jews realize the gravity of their spiritual problem. When the men of Nineveh heard Jonah’s message, they repented. Jonah’s message was not very long. It was one sentence, “Forty more days and Nineveh will be overturned” (Jon 3:4). Jonah may have whispered the words so that the men of Nineveh would barely hear them, because he really wanted them to be destroyed, not saved. Jonah may be one of the worst preachers in the Bible because he hated his audience and was reluctant to obey God’s mission. His preaching may have been most dutiful and heartless. But when God spoke through him, the people of Nineveh believed God. They declared a corporate fast, put on sackcloth, and repented. Their repentance moved God’s heart and he spared them from judgment. Here Jesus is making a simple point. When people hear the word of God preached, they should repent, not ask for signs. We know that Jesus’ preaching was beyond comparison with that of Jonah. Jesus had a broken shepherd heart for the people of Israel and for all mankind. Jesus’ voice was like the sound of rushing waters. His understanding of spiritual reality was perfect because he is the only one who came from God. His parables are the most exquisite literature in history. The men of Israel had heard the matchless preaching of Jesus. But they did not repent. They would be condemned at the judgment by the good example of the men of Nineveh.

Sometimes we think repentance is a bad word. But it is a life-giving word. It simply means to turn from ourselves to God. When we study the Bible or listen to a Bible message, we must put aside other concerns and give our full attention to God’s word. We must listen to God’s word until one word of God comes into our hearts which we can hold on to and put into practice. We should expect our lives to be changed and improved every time we sit down to study the Bible or listen to God’s words through a message. Sometimes repentance is painful, but it is the basic attitude we must have to listen to God’s word.

Second, Jesus tells us how to have spiritual insight (33-36).

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 may see the light.” Through the simple parable about the lamp on a stand, Jesus wants us to understand God’s heart in giving his word to man. 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. Look at verse 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.” 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 a learning mind and repent before God’s word. Then God’s word comes in and enlightens our entire inner being—mind, heart and soul. But when we are stubborn and unrepentant, the eyes of our hearts become blind. Consequently, our minds, hearts and souls remain in spiritual darkness.

Look at verse 35. “See to it, then, that the light within you is not darkness.” Here, “the light within you” means the idea or thought that governs our lives. If “the light within us” is a mere human idea, it belongs to the darkness. It will make our whole body dark. We must examine ourselves. If our minds, hearts and souls are dark, we need to repent. Our self-examination should stop here. We do not need to probe the darkness further. Rather, we must turn from the darkness toward God and let his word come in. We can do this when we ask Jesus into our hearts. Zechariah calls Jesus “the rising sun” who comes to us from heaven to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the path of peace (1:78,79). Simeon calls Jesus, “a light for the Gentiles” (2:32). Jesus’ light fully illuminates our inner beings. Then we can walk in the light and enjoy fellowship with God and with God’s people. We can see how God is working in our nation and in other people and in our own lives. We can see clearly how to serve others in the way of God. Most of all, we can rise at the judgment and receive eternal life and the kingdom of God as our inheritance.

Third, Jesus challenges the religious leaders to repent (37-54).

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, noticing that Jesus did not first wash before the meal, was surprised. Jesus came to his house, but he only noticed that Jesus did not wash. He was spiritually blind. 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 little more than hypocrites, full of contradictions. With a broken heart, Jesus challenges the Pharisees and experts in the law to repent. Most likely, Jesus wept inwardly as he spoke the words in these verses. Let’s summarize the main points.

? 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.

? Practice justice and the love of God (42). The Pharisees were meticulous in giving tithes. But they neglected justice and the love of God. In a word, Jesus urges them to have a shepherd heart for others.

? Live before God, not men (43-44). The Pharisees were very sensitive to human honor. It made them spiritually blind. But God knew their hidden sinfulness. They needed to repent before God and live before him.

? Love requires action (45-46). The teachers of the law taught rules and regulations and burdened suffering people. Sometimes, they abused their authority. Jesus wanted them to lift even one finger to help others. Jesus wanted them to put the love of God into action.

? 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 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. This happened when they crucified Jesus on the cross. A sense of God’s history should lead us to repent humbly before his servants.

? Repent (52). 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 this passage Jesus teaches us to have a learning mind that seeks wisdom and to repent when we study the Bible. Then God's word can shine into our souls and we can live in the light of God's word.