

## **THE SON OF MAN WILL BE THE SIGN TO THIS GENERATION (The Gospel of a Second Chance)**

Luke 11:29-54

Key Verse: 11:30

**“For as Jonah was a sign to the Ninevites, so also will the Son of Man be to this generation.”**

Happy Sunday morning! I thank God for gathering us all together to worship him in this beautiful summer weather. How many of you found today’s passage pretty challenging? The passage opens with Jesus’ lamenting a wicked generation. It ends with 6 sharp and painful woes against the Pharisees and experts of the law. Personally, I was greatly challenged by this passage. If you know me, you might say that I am an expert of the law. When I was appointed to share this message, I asked, “Lord, why me, a theologian, out of all people?” But I realized that God works in mysterious ways. It is only by God’s amazing grace that I can speak his word today.

Last week, we learned how we can be blessed by hearing the word of God and obeying it. In today’s passage, we will learn how badly we make mistakes and how much our stubbornness breaks Jesus’ heart. Yet still, we will find that this is not the end of the story. Through the sign of Jonah, we will see that God is the God of second chances. God wants us to respond to his great grace by repentance. I pray that God may enlighten the eyes of our hearts to see Jesus.

### **I. None will be given this wicked generation except the sign of Jonah (29-32)**

Following Jesus’ healing of a demon-possessed man, a growing crowd was gathering around Jesus. As we see in verse 29, Jesus said, **“This is a wicked generation. It asks for a sign, but none will be given it except the sign of Jonah.”** Why did Jesus call his generation **“a wicked generation”**? To be “wicked” means that one’s heart is not right with God and in dire need of repentance. Here, Jesus is rebuking those who demanded that he show them a spectacular sign from heaven (v.16).

A sign in itself can have a positive meaning. In the Bible, a sign is a miraculous event which points to God. Throughout redemptive history, God granted gracious signs to confirm his revelation especially in Exodus. In the New Testament, signs are mainly those miraculous events that point to the

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coming of the Messiah. Jesus supplied many clear and glorious signs to strengthen people's faith. The miraculous healing of a demon-possessed man in the previous passage was such a clear sign.

Now in our passage, we have people who keep demanding more spectacular signs. Jesus calls them a wicked generation. So, the problem is not with God's revelation, but with their hearts. We may think that the more we witness miracles, the more we will believe. But do such signs automatically lead to faith? No. As long as people decide not to believe and close their hearts, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead (cf. Lk 16:31). Jesus would never work signs on demand, just to appease skeptical people. Asking for more signs is a smokescreen for their unrepentant hearts (v.29).

Jesus said, "**None will be given it except the sign of Jonah.**" They would be given only the sign of Jonah, a sign they did not seek to have. What is the sign of Jonah? Look at verse 30. "**For as Jonah was a sign to the Ninevites, so also will the Son of Man be to this generation.**" Here Jonah is a type of Christ. It may come as a surprise that Jesus uses the disobedient prophet Jonah as a type of himself, but there are important parallels through which Jesus reveals his mission.

You know Jonah's story. He was sent to the people of Nineveh, who were the oppressors of Israel. He was supposed to preach repentance. But as he disobeyed, he was thrown into the sea and swallowed up by a huge fish. When he was delivered from his fishy grave after three days, he went to Nineveh and preached repentance. In the sign of Jonah, there are three parallels.

**1. As God sent Jonah to the Ninevites, he sent Jesus to the Jews of his day to preach repentance. 2. As Jonah was delivered from the belly of a fish, Jesus' mission was confirmed by his resurrection from the dead (cf. Mt 12:40).** The resurrection of the Son of Man from the dead would be a sign. Through his resurrection from the dead, Jesus was declared to be the Son of God (Ro 1:4). Jesus by his resurrection conclusively proved that He has been sent by God as the promised Savior. The heart of the New Testament's preaching is Jesus' cross and resurrection. Jesus' resurrection is the victory of God over all the power of evil. **3. As Jonah was a sign of a second chance for the Ninevites, Jesus is the sign of a second chance for our salvation.**

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Sometimes we ask why God didn't just finish a wicked generation by judgment right away. The answer is God's long-suffering mercy on sinners. God has sent Jesus, the crucified and the risen, to this generation. God is giving us a second chance, that is, Jesus who is the turning point for blessing or judgment. Therefore, Jesus called his mission the sign of Jonah.

In verses 31 and 32, Jesus tells two examples in history to challenge unrepentant hearts. The Queen of the South was a Gentile, who was despised by Jewish people. She made a long and difficult journey from the southern tip of Arabia (the ends of the earth at that time) and spared no effort to check out Solomon's wisdom for herself. After listening to Solomon, she was overwhelmed by his wisdom and praised God wholeheartedly. The Jews saw far more in the miracles and teachings of Jesus. Jesus is far **"greater than Solomon."** (31b). What a privilege to learn from the one greater than Solomon! Jesus is the ultimate revealer of God's wisdom (Col 2:3). Now, this Gentile Queen would rise at the judgment with the people of this generation and condemn them. It was because they remained closed and skeptical to Jesus who is greater than Solomon.

Jonah was definitely not a good example of God's servant because he was reluctant to obey God's mission. Maybe he was one of the worst messengers in the Bible because he hated his listeners who were the enemies of his people. His message was only one sentence, **"Forty more days and Nineveh will be overturned"** (Jon 3:4). But when the Ninevites heard Jonah's message, they repented from the king on down to animals, calling urgently on God to show mercy. These Gentiles, who were evil and hated by the people of Israel, repented at Jonah's preaching. Their repentance made Jonah, who was an immature messenger, a successful preacher.

Jesus said in 32b, **"and now something greater than Jonah is here."** Jesus is not only the greatest prophet of all, but he is the Lord of all prophets. He is Yes and Amen of promises made by all prophets. He is full of compassion and love to reach out to all the world. The people of Israel heard the matchless preaching of the Messiah. But they didn't respond in repentance. Such people would be condemned at the judgment by the repentant people of Nineveh.

By Jesus' cross and resurrection, God's supreme revelation came to us. In Jesus we receive forgiveness and the kingdom of God. Sometimes we take

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this grace for granted. But how should we respond to Jesus' message of repentance? Do we trust in him wholeheartedly? The problem is not with the Word of God, but with our hearts. (During my high school years, I was unhappy with my short stature. So I used to pray to God: "God, if you make me taller, I'll believe and serve you"; it was a prayer motivated by my self-serving attitude. But when my demand was not honored, I became rebellious. And studying philosophy, I left God. I insisted on more signs from God to believe. After that, I suffered a lot in rebellion, lust and low self-esteem. I deserved condemnation by the Queen of the South and the Ninevites at the judgment. But God gave me a second chance through Bible study. Finally I was convicted by the cross of Jesus that it was my heart that needed to change and repent. And when I received Jesus and repented of my hidden sins, I could experience forgiveness and overwhelming joy.) We all make mistakes because of our wicked hearts. People sin through lust of flesh, lust of eyes and pride. But thank God! We are given Jesus, this sign of Jonah. We don't need spectacular signs. The gospel message of Jesus' death and resurrection is more than enough for repentance and faith. Repentance does not come easily, but it is urgent and critical for us because we will stand at the judgement of God. The greatest sign is that another chance is given to us. I pray that we can commit our hearts to Jesus and experience joy of salvation.

### **II. See to it, that the light within you is not darkness (33-36)**

Here, Jesus uses the metaphors of light and eyes to help us to fix our heart condition. 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 they put it on its stand, so that those who come in may see the light."** The purpose of a lamp is to give light to those who need it. In this context, the lamp refers to God's word as embodied in Jesus and his mission. Jesus like a lamp on its stand enables us to see things clearly. Therefore, no extra sign needs to be given to know and believe in him. Jesus shines brightly in our dark world.

Since the light is always shining, now what matters is that we don't block, but receive this light. Look at verse 34. **"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."** The eye here refers to our heart that understands and receives God's word (Eph 1:18). The eyes of our heart will be good when we have a learning mind and repent

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before God's word. If the eyes of our hearts are healthy, the light enters our hearts and brightens our life. However, the eyes of our heart will be unhealthy when we are hypocritical and unrepentant. If the eyes of our heart are wicked, our life is full of spiritual darkness.

Therefore, what should we do? Look at verse 35. **“See to it, then, that the light within you is not darkness.”** We have to check the condition of our hearts. We have to examine what directs our thoughts and lives. We have to make sure that what guides our life is the true light. If our thoughts and lives are guided by self-centered and proud motives, our hearts will become dark without discernment. We often think that we are ok because the light within us is darkness. The human heart is deceitful above all things (Jer 17:9). Therefore, we should carefully examine what directs our thoughts and lives in the light of Jesus.

What kinds of influences are shaping your thoughts and visions? Are your spiritual eyes healthy? This generation has become digital and visual through technology. Especially, millennials are called the digital natives. People simply “google” everything if they need an answer. Scrolling through Facebook or Twitter feeds has become the main leisurely activity. (They are often present even during our worship service.) People spend more time than ever in front of a screen. There are pros and cons for this. Because of hyper-connectivity to screens, many Christians don't have time for God (Barna research). Moreover, we have to discern negative influences that infiltrate our hearts through the internet – the prosperity (wealth and health) gospel, the feel-good gospel of psychology, hypocritical Christian leaders or the religion of humanism (saying we are ok as long we love each other and live at peace). There are also mainstream secular ideas that seem to eradicate the order of creation. All these are competing for audience.

Now we have to intentionally examine what influences us. We have to fight against the bad culture of our time that blinds us. How can we have the light within us? We need Jesus. We need spiritual eyes that receive the light of Jesus. Jesus is like a bright sun that shines on us. When we repent of our proud and adulterous hearts, Jesus will shine in our hearts and lives. When Jesus shines in our hearts, our lives will be full of light, **“as when a lamp shines its light on you”** (v. 36). Then, we are full of joy and can testify about

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the light for the world. May God enlighten the eyes of our heart! May Jesus shine in our lives!

### **III. Clean your inside and love justice and God! (37-54)**

As Jesus was speaking, one of the Pharisees invited him home for a meal. So he went in and took his place at the table (v. 37). When this Pharisee noticed that Jesus did not first wash before the meal, he was shocked. He was blaming Jesus within himself, yet Jesus heard him and severely rebuked his host: “**Now then, you Pharisees clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside you are full of greed and wickedness**” (v. 39). What! How can a guest insult his host? But it was Jesus’ broken heart for them. Jesus challenged the Pharisees and experts in the law who were the eyes of that generation. Because they were rejecting the light, the whole generation was full of darkness. Jesus wept inwardly as he rebuked them in these verses. How did Jesus help these proud people? We can summarize Jesus’ rebuke through six points.

**1. Clean your inside (39-41).** The Pharisees cleaned the outside diligently observing many regulations, but inside they were full of greed and wickedness. Their ritualism and hypocrisy made them fools. It is ridiculous and foolish to focus on the outside because God first looks at the inside. Therefore, Jesus wants us to repent of greed and wickedness.

**2. Practice justice and the love of God (42).** While the Pharisees were very particular about giving tithes, they ignored the heart of the law, that is, justice and the love of God. But Jesus wants us to obey the heart of the law and practice justice and the love of God.

**3. Don’t love human glory (43).** The Pharisees loved to have the most important seats in gatherings and receive respectable greetings. Their hard work was for their own self-development and achievement. They enjoyed human honor, but sadly, they didn’t love God and people. Jesus wants us to repent of our wicked heart of seeking human recognition.

**4. Repent of heartless legalism (45-46).** The experts in the law interpreted the law and added their many traditions. As a result, they loaded people down with burdens they could hardly bear. They were heartless teachers and did not

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help people in their struggles. Jesus wants us to repent of our heartless legalism.

**5. Repent at the preaching of repentance (47-51).** God sent his servants to the people of Israel to preach repentance. But they did not repent, persecuting the prophets and killing them. The experts in the law knew this and built tombs for them. But what matters to God is not building beautiful tombs for their ancestors, but repentance of sins. Jesus gave a warning that, without repentance, they would perish for their wickedness.

**6. Repent of bad influence (52).** When the experts in the law didn't repent, they took away the key to knowledge for salvation. When they didn't repent, they rejected Jesus the Messiah and became a bad influence to their people. Therefore, Jesus wants us to repent, when we hear the message of the kingdom.

We can learn why being a Bible teacher is such a serious matter. Either we can be a blessing for people, or we can be a bad influence because of our unrepentant hearts. It is not only our own lives that are at issue, but we are also accountable for the flock of God. Are you a good influence for them? Also, parents are responsible for their influence on their children. Since I got the doctoral degree in theology, I ask often myself whenever reading this kind of warning passages, "Am I like experts in the law in this passage?" Without the grace of Jesus, all these six rebukes of Jesus apply to me. Meditating on the passage, I repented a lot of my hypocritical mindset of loving human honor, not living before God alone. Also, God helped me to repent of my heartless legalism at home. May God be with me to examine my heart and to repent every day!

Jesus directly confronted the religious leaders out of his broken heart for them. But when Jesus went outside, they began to oppose him fiercely (v. 53). This was a prelude to what would happen to Jesus in Jerusalem. Our sinful heart is never nice to Jesus, but brutal to him. The Son of God had to suffer terribly in the hands of sinners and die for our unbelieving hearts. But it was not the end of the story. Jesus was raised from the dead. As the sign of Jonah, he gives us a second chance. Jesus can forgive our sins and cleanse our eyes. Praise Jesus! I pray that we can be fully devoted to Jesus.