



"Signs of Unbelief"

Luke 11:29-34

Luke 11:29 And while the crowds were thickly gathered together, He began to say, "This is an evil generation. It seeks a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah the prophet.

30 "For as Jonah became a sign to the Ninevites, so also the Son of Man will be to this generation.

31 "The queen of the South will rise up in the judgment with the men of this generation and condemn them, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and indeed a greater than Solomon *is* here.

32 "The men of Nineveh will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and indeed a greater than Jonah *is* here.

I remember seeing a comedy many years ago, I've forgotten the name – it's not important. In it, there is a good but gullible widower about to get married to a wicked, gold-digging woman. Everyone else realizes the truth about her, but he is so thoroughly in love he is blinded as to her true nature. There is this one scene where he stands before a portrait of his late wife and says something along the lines of "Honey, I don't want to do this without your blessing, so if I shouldn't get married to so-and-so just send me some sort of sign" At that point the portrait starts spinning, the earth shakes, the wind blows, the ceiling cracks, and there is an audible voice repeating "no, no, no, no!" He stands there with this utterly blank expression on his face throughout these events, and at the end says "***just any kind of sign at all...***" And of course he goes and marries the woman he is in love with.

It's silly but there is more than just a grain of truth there. You can probably think of examples yourself of individuals who refused to acknowledge obvious signs because they were blinded either by love or lust. If you are over the age of 16, you have probably experienced exactly what I am talking about yourself: ***A refusal to acknowledge the truth about someone simply because it doesn't correspond with what you either desperately want to believe or are desperately trying not to believe.***

"Oh, he's not really like that..." "No, no, she really is a believer, she's just ah, confused." "This whole Buddhism thing is just a phase she's going through" and so on.

That is precisely the kind of thing that is going on in the verses we just read from Luke chapter 11.

You'll remember that in verse 14 Jesus cast out a demon and man who had been both mute and blind (Matthew gives us that extra detail in his gospel account – Matt. 12:22) can suddenly speak and see.

And yet after this amazing miracle, which even the Pharisees cannot deny happened but try to explain away as the work of Beelzebub – the Lord of the Flies, what does the crowd demand? *A sign from heaven!*

A sign from heaven? Jesus has been going throughout Galilee healing the sick, giving eyesight to the blind, curing the deaf, *raising the dead*, stilling storms, feeding the multitudes, and preaching the Good News all in accordance with the Messianic prophecies of the Old Testament. And what does the crowd ask for? "Just any kind of sign at all..."

This response, of course, rightfully provokes Christ's anger and his solemn warnings. It isn't the demand for a sign, in and of itself, that is *wicked*. After all heroes of the faith like Moses and Gideon asked for signs from the Lord to prove that what they had been promised by God was true. What is truly wicked is the fact that they had already been given sign after sign and yet because of their hatred and hardness of heart, they refused to believe what was so evident. Later Jesus rebukes them for making the same request (in Matthew 16:1-4) calling them hypocrites – they could tell by the color of the sky in the evening what the weather was going to be like in the morning, and yet knowing all that they did about what the word of God said about the Messiah and having witnessed all the signs they refused to acknowledge Him.

Even had Jesus caused fire to fall from the sky or made the sun stand still, they would have found excuses for not believing the signs. Why? Because Christ refused to feed their own self-idolization, or acknowledge their man-made traditions, or tell them that their own works righteousness would earn them a place in heaven. He didn't even go around condemning the hated Gentiles and preached the good news of forgiveness through faith alone to obvious sinners who "deserved" only condemnation.

Offered a choice between a murderer and the Lamb of God who takes away the Sins of the World what is their answer? "***Away with this Man, and release to us Barabbas***"

Jesus is not going to do magic tricks for them, but He does tell them that HE himself will be the ultimate and incontrovertible sign that He is the Messiah, and that everything He preached was true. He will be to them *the sign of Jonah*.

What does Jesus mean by that?

The fact Jonah was a true prophet of the Lord was proven by his being cast into the sea and swallowed by a great fish – by all rights he should have died – and yet the Lord preserved him and delivered him up to preach His Word to the city of Nineveh after 3 days and nights in the belly of the fish.

Jesus who is infinitely greater than Jonah, will be put to death and spend 3 days and nights in the tomb, before He will rise again from the grave. By this sign Christ will prove, once and for all, that he is not just a teacher, not just a prophet, but Immanuel – God with us. The one who has come to save His people from their sins.

Jesus who came to save them from sin and death warns them of the terrible danger of remaining in their state of unbelief. He uses the example first of the Queen of the South, who visited Solomon, by which he means the Queen of Sheba.

Here is a woman who only heard reports about the wisdom of Solomon, and yet she believed so fervently that she was willing to make the dangerous trek – without an invitation – all the way from the end of the Arabian peninsula (a journey of over 1200 miles) just to meet with him. And yet here is Jesus, wiser, better, greater, than Solomon, who is right before them, who is inviting them to come to him, and yet they sin against knowledge and refuse him.

He then gives them the example of the Ninevites, here we have wicked unbelieving Gentiles who repented and believed at the preaching of a sinful and rebellious prophet, who offered them no miracles, and did not even extend to them much hope. What was Jonah's gospel? Jonah 3:4 "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!" Yet the Ninevites believed and repented at that preaching and now Jesus comes proclaiming "that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life" and doing great signs and yet his message is rejected.

He warns them of their danger, at the final judgment, these despised Gentiles who yet believed will stand with the all of the redeemed and condemn this wicked and unbelieving Jewish generation. They had the oracles of God, they had Moses and the Prophets, they Had the only Begotten Son of the Father. And yet they would not be persuaded even when he rose from the dead!

So what applications should you draw from this? Let me give you three:

- 1) 1) The Jews were more culpable for not believing than the Ninevites and the Queen of Sheba. They had far greater advantages, they knew more, and Christ himself was before them. Well O modern American, here is the first application, **YOU are even more culpable than the Jews of Christ's time if you will not believe in Him!**

While I was in seminary, a missionary to India told us the story of how an Indian pastor he had worked with was converted. The man had bought a pack of roasted peanuts from a street vendor on the way home from work. The peanuts were commonly wrapped in newspaper and leaves from old books, these peanuts happened to be wrapped in a single leaf from an old bible. That man unwrapped that page from the gospel of John, read it and repented and believed – the next morning he sought out and found a Christian church and told the pastor "I have become a Christian, I want to know everything about Jesus my Lord." I know of story after story exactly like that, all of them testimonies to the grace of God despite terrible disadvantages – Chinese churches where the entire congregation shares a single incomplete copy of the Word, yet who are willing to suffer and die for the Gospel.

Now, O American person sitting under the preaching of the word in an air-conditioned unpersecuted church. You have access to a multitude of complete copies of the bible in perhaps 10 different translations, you can easily get your hands on a wealth of commentaries, take classes, hear sermons online, listen to the gospel as you drive in your car. By comparison to those who have gone before your advantages are immense. You live after the resurrection of Christ, after the testimony of the Apostles, the expansion of the church, the completion of the bible, and on and on.

Will you too refuse to believe? Will you mimic that wicked generation by saying *Not enough evidence! I demand a sign!*

Ah but perhaps, your self-deception is different. You say, "No, no, I don't need a sign", and you have convinced yourself you are a Christian, but you have never really closed with Christ, never truly accepted, received, and rested upon Christ alone for justification, sanctification, and eternal life. If that is the case, all you have is carnal presumption.

You remember the Ninevites? They could merely have *said* they believed, but what was the evidence that proved they had a true and lively faith?

Turn to Jonah 3:5 "So the people of Nineveh believed God, proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest to the least of them.

6 Then word came to the king of Nineveh; and he arose from his throne and laid aside his robe, covered himself with sackcloth and sat in ashes.

7 And he caused it to be proclaimed and published throughout Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying, Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything; do not let them eat, or drink water.

8 But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily to God; yes, let every one turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands.

9 Who can tell if God will turn and relent, and turn away from His fierce anger, so that we may not perish?

10 Then God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God relented from the disaster that He had said He would bring upon them, and He did not do it.

Repentance inevitably follows faith, they are simply never disconnected. There is really no such thing as an unrepentant believer. What is repentance?

Q76: What is repentance unto life?

A76: Repentance unto life is a saving grace,[1] wrought in the heart of a sinner by the Spirit [2] and word of God,[3] whereby, out of the sight and sense, not only of the danger,[4] but also of the filthiness and odiousness of his sins,[5] and upon the apprehension of God's mercy in Christ to such as are penitent,[6] he so grieves for [7] and hates his sins,[8] as that he turns from them all to God,[9] purposing and endeavoring constantly to walk with him in all the ways of new obedience.[10]

"the more light, and means, and obligations men have upon them to faith and holiness, the greater will their judgment and condemnation be." – Matthew Poole

Woe to you if you have been raised by Christian parents, sat under solid biblical preaching, been wed to a godly Christian spouse, and enjoyed the blessings and good will of the covenant community and yet have never truly believed and repented of your sins! Is your heart so hard even now?

When you see all of this unbelief in the bible and reflect that it occurred even in the very presence of Christ – it shows *How Grateful you should be for the gift of faith, how we should labor to hold it fast and nurture it.*

Ephesians 2:8 For by grace you have been saved through **faith**, and that not of yourselves; *it is* the **gift** of God,

2) **The reality of the coming day of judgement – Ryle point You are reminded I hope, that this world is not everything and that as Ryle tells us, the life which man lives in the body on earth is not the only life you should be thinking of. Someday even the Kings and Queens of the earth, the great and the small all will come before the bar of God. And then, what will be the one measure of their judgment? Faith Alone. Please, I beg of you, trust me that while many things may concern you today – on that day only one thing will be of paramount importance.**

Did you believe these words of Christ, or did you go to your grave demanding yet another sign?