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Luke

Chapter 11 - A Polarizing Wish

Clarity of Contrast - Greater Condemnation (vs. 29-32)

Luke 11:29-32: As the crowds were increasing, He began to say, “This generation is a wicked generation; it seeks for a sign, and yet no sign will be given to it but the sign of Jonah. For just as Jonah became a sign to the Ninevites, so will the Son of Man be to this generation. The Queen of the South will rise up with the men of this generation at the judgment and condemn them, because she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and behold, something greater than Solomon is here. The men of Nineveh will stand up with this generation at the judgment and condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and behold, something greater than Jonah is here.

“Something greater is here.” Did you hear that message? Something greater. We all have our ideas of what is great. Something greater. And that, of course, is Christ Jesus. How miraculous this message, how wonderful it is, how it touches hearts and changes lives, and yet how repulsive it is to so many. The more Christ's light begins to shine, the more darkness begins to reveal itself. And really, you begin to see a clarity of contrast as you see Christ as He takes this journey to the cross to where ultimately you come to the point and you go, “The world is dark; Christ is light.” And you see that wonderful picture of Christ on the cross. How wonderful it is to see the contrast. But the clearer you see Christ, the more you see contrast. I've oftentimes thought about that with the sin in my own life. The closer I am to God, the more conscious I am of my sin. This is why 1 John will say, “You say you have no sin, you're lying. The truth is not in you.” The fact that the truth is in you is you become sin conscience. So, the closer you walk with God, there are things that at one time you thought, “Well, that's not a bad thing.” But then you get close to God, and you go, “That's a horrible thing.” And light and darkness begin to be separated. In

fact, there begins to be a more pronounced variance between the two. You see that not only with light and darkness, right and wrong, truth and a lie, good and evil; Christ comes on the scene and begins to separate. It is an interesting picture of the sun coming up as Psalm 19 will give that picture of the Christ, the Messiah, the bridegroom coming up. And as He comes up, these things begin to get more pronounced, and you begin to see what truth is. It is this passage that will emphasize this. Now, it actually begins at the beginning of this chapter as we read that the disciples are going, "How do we pray? What do we wish for? We don't even know how to be thinking." And Jesus goes, "You need to think His kingdom come." In other words, His rule, His standards, His way of thinking above yours. More than anything else, you want His way. That's the way you need to be thinking. That immediately begins to separate people. Because when you begin to tell people that they need to submit, that they need to humble themselves, that they need to actually repent, they begin to push away. "Because I don't want to give up my lifestyle. I don't want to give up the things that I love. I don't want to do things God's way. Quite frankly,

sometimes the way God says to do things will actually hinder me from getting what I want.” And so, you become extremely adversarial.

In this passage, as it begins, we begin with the disciples wanting to know how to approach God in heaven, but then as it goes on, we begin to see the divisiveness that this wish causes. This is a wish that is polarizing. “Thy will be done. Thy kingdom come.” That's a polarizing wish. And we begin to see that actually taking place. Efforts to subvert the wish come into the text, as well as Jesus making a clear and decisive point.

If you look with me in particular in verse 23,

(Luke 11:23) “He who is not with Me is against Me; and he who does not gather with Me, scatters.”

In other words, “You're either for Me or you're not. You're with Me or you're not.” And gee, I wish He just wouldn't get that clear. And what you're going to see in the passage, Jesus will actually towards the end of this chapter, go to the Pharisees, and He'll go, “Woe to you Pharisees!” And these are religious leaders. And you go, “Well, I thought at least religious leaders were kind of

good.” He goes, “They're horrible people.” And you're going, “That's so light and dark. That's so good and evil. Couldn't they be sort of good?” And so, the division becomes more clarified; the opposition becomes more intense, and everything begins to be escalated within the passage. He also wants you to know in this particular chapter that there are malevolent forces at work in your life, hurtful forces at work in your life. Things that happen in your life that you wish wouldn't happen, that are painful, that cause sorrow, suffering. There are forces that come in. And these forces are there to push you to make a decision. So, these malevolent forces come, they cause pain and sorrow and loss and frustration. This calamity comes in your life and cruelty and abuse sometimes. People suffer these things. “Why am I subject to all of this horrible abuse by these individuals?” And God goes, “Yeah, that's what the forces are doing. They're pushing you. They're pushing you to make a decision.” And what begins to happen is that all of those hurtful things in your life cause an emptiness and a turmoil which then begins to compel you and drive you to find something that will give you peace. Do you remember the parable that He

gives of the demon that's in the person? And then he begins to go in waterless places looking for a place of peace. The point of the matter is that these malevolent forces will push you. You might say, "I'm sort of for God." Look, evil doesn't rest till you're all for evil. "Oh, we'll just let everybody exist the way they want to." Oh, you think they're going to leave you alone? You think that evil's going to hold back? "Oh, okay. Live and let live. We'll just let them do that." No, evil's coming at you. And it's going to keep pushing until you make a decision. And what is the decision they want you to make? Well, ultimately, the decision they want you to make is they want you to put your trust in some sort of program, some sort of method, some sort of club, some sort of society, something that is perhaps a self-discipline, meditation, something that causes you to be in control "perceivably." Or as the text says, they swept their house, it was all in order, everything looked okay. There's a lot of different sources that you can run to when you have these times of trials, heartache, pain, suffering. You can go to a psychologist, you can take a pill. I mean, there's 1001 places that you can run to. The question is, are you going to run to Jesus?

Because He's the great physician, He's the healer, but malevolent forces are pushing you. You're going to make a decision. You're not going to stay on the fence.

Something's going to happen in your life and it's going to push you to make a decision. And the question is, who are you going to turn to? Where are you going to turn? Well, in some ways, this passage is dealing with that particular issue. And though there are a lot of good resources and things that we perceive as places to go, venues to go to, what we're going to find is there's only One to go to. And I know people don't want me to make that clarity, but that's what Scripture says.

You come into Luke chapter 11, if you look with me in verse 29, and what's interesting about the text is the crowds are increasing. "Oh, good. More in church." No, not necessarily great. I mean, just because the crowds are increasing doesn't mean that's a good thing. I said that right at the very beginning of this church. People would say, "We would think that you'd be a lot bigger by now." I said, "I know, I keep scaring people off." Because as we said at the very beginning, I'd rather have five people that

love the Lord than 5,000 that don't. And finding people that love the Lord, that's pretty hard to find. It's a very hard thing to do.

So, verse 29 reads,

(Luke 11:29) “As the crowds were increasing, He began to say...”

“Good to see you guys. We're increasing. We can now build big buildings. We can have Christian Disney Worlds.”

“As the crowds were increasing, He began to say, “This generation is a wicked generation...””

Jesus knows nothing about politics, does He?

“... it seeks for a sign, and yet no sign will be given to it but the sign of Jonah.”

Oh, He's really drawing a line here. “You're a wicked people.” The word that He uses in the text is “*ponēros*,” which makes reference more to the effect than the character, which is interesting, because the effect is emphasizing being hurtful. When we keep coming to God and going, “We want You to do this for us, we want You to do this for us,” and it's more about our whims and our

personal desires, God goes, “Do you have any idea how much that hurts Me? That you don't believe I'm God unless I do this thing for you, which quite frankly is not going to help you. It's going to destroy your life. Do you know how much you hurt Me?” Scripture actually says, and I always thought this was such a strange phenomenon, that we can grieve the Spirit of God. How in the world could I grieve an eternal God? But He loves me so much that my actions could actually bring grief to Him. Jesus turns to them, and He goes, “You people just are hurtful. The things that you say to Me and my Father; We came to save you. And you don't like the things that We're doing? We're healing people.” Go back to Luke 4, right? I mean, the lame are walking. The blind are seeing. The poor have the gospel preached to them. “I mean, We're setting prisoners free. What is it? What sign are you looking for?” And fundamentally, what people are looking for is a sign that satisfies their desires, the lust of the flesh, the pride of life, these things that they're looking for, rather than the things that are beneficial, the things that will truly heal and bring forth good.

He turns to them and He turns to the crowds, even though they're increasing, and He tells them, "You're a wicked generation, you're hurtful people. And you seek for a sign, not the sign, once again, of a holy God, but a sign that affirms what you want." This is why James will say, "Look, if you have a need or you want something, ask of God who gives to all men generously." But the bottom line is, don't come to Him asking things to consume after your own lust. He's not going to give that to you. Once again, He's not going to give you things that will hurt you.

"The sign of Jonah" is actually an interesting phrase because that whole thing with Jonah, if you've never read the story, if you go in the Bible and you start looking, find a book called Jonah. And that's the book. It's talking about Jonah. And in that book, it starts off by telling us that there was this individual by the name of Jonah, and God had called him to go to a place called Nineveh, which was in the process of becoming the capital of Assyria, this great nation at this time that had begun to infiltrate literally the four corners of the world, and it was becoming a great kingdom. They were starting to take all

these places in, and they were infringing at this time on Israel. They were a wicked. They were a cruel people. They were a hurtful people. They would impale people on sticks, fillet them, take the skin off them. They were a horrible kind of people, mutilating people's body parts, waving them around, as oftentimes they would circle a city to intimidate the cities that they began to conquer. They're just a horrible people. And so, God says, "Go to Nineveh, we want to save them." Well, what do you think Jonah's thinking? "No way." I mean, his name means "dove". I think he's thinking more eagle. But anyway, instead of going towards Assyria, which at this point is probably 500 to 600 miles to the east, he decides to go to the little town Joppa and catch a boat to Tarshish, which is now 2,500 miles to the west. What we understand is that Tarsus is probably in the area of Spain, and there were always ships going that particular direction because that's where they mined the gold and the silver. So, Assyria was always sending ships to go there. It was the Phoenicians that were probably the guys steering the boat because they were the seafaring people. But they had sort of been taken over by the Assyrians. They hadn't

quite taken control of the city yet, but they were getting there. So, they had their hand in it, and they're beginning to manipulate. So, you have these Phoenicians, and then the Philistines are also in that particular area.

The reason why I bring up the kinds of people that are there is because their beliefs are somehow going to come into the picture. So, you have Philistines, and you have the Assyrians. Now, once again, the Assyrians are the big nation. But interestingly enough, they would oftentimes have the same gods. Although, fundamentally, they were polytheistic, they would have major gods that they would worship. So, the Assyrians and the Philistines had a similar god. And that similar god was the god by the name of Dagon. You'll see it in the Book of Judges. You'll see it in the Book of Samuel as well. And Dagon was a fish god. So, that was the god that they worshiped. The Phoenicians had a god, the god of the seas, and this particular god that they had was Melqart. This god was a god that was actually described as a god of dying and a god of rising again. It's very interesting that they would have a god like that. But he was the god of the seas. So that as Jonah gets

on the boat, going away from Nineveh as far away as he could, God begins to stir up the waters. You know the story. Many of you have read the story. It becomes so rough that the ship begins to come to the point of breaking apart. And the guys on the ship, the Phoenicians, are probably figuring out, "What do we do? What do we have to do?" They're probably calling to their god, Melqart, "What do we do? Save us. You're the god of rising. You could rescue us out of this sea." And yet no help is coming. Jonah comes up and he goes, "I know what the problem is. It's me. I've offended my God. Throw me over." What's interesting, in the process, the Phoenicians actually begin to pray to the God of Jonah towards the end. So, God is doing a work, obviously, in saving, in spite of Jonah's life, and he gets thrown over. He gets thrown over and gets swallowed by this huge fish. And I can't imagine being inside a fish; what it would be like, the acids, everything going on. Scripture actually likens it unto hell. So, it's like the three days in the belly of the fish. And I've often wondered, why did it take Jonah 3 days to cry out to God? I mean, that's one stubborn guy, isn't it? I mean, I thought I was stubborn, but wow, this

guy really wins. So, in the process of all this, God sovereignly takes him back to shore, where he should be. Now, once again, the people that are going to witness this are going to be the Phoenicians, the Philistines, and the Assyrians, because the Assyrians are in that particular area. He'll take a bus to Assyria. I mean, he'll head towards Assyria from Joppa, and it'll be a normal trade route to the Assyrians. So, there will be Assyrians that will probably take him to Assyria, i.e. to the major city of Nineveh. But as he comes on shore, this will become a public moment. So, the people are watching this fish come on shore, and as Scripture tells us, vomit Jonah out on the shore. Now, I don't want you to get too much into this, because it will make you sick. But as he's being vomited out, what you have is Jonah's head coming out, and then the back part is the fishtail. Well, that's the god Dagon. Dagon is half human and half fish. And so, the sign of Jonah is the god that they worship is coming at them with a message. Now, when Jonah comes with this message and he has this entourage that takes him, that were probably all Assyrians with him, I'm sure they're talking about the whole time, "You're Dagon, you're

Dagon. You're the guy.” He just fundamentally says to them, “You guys are going to die. I just want to let you know that. And quite frankly, I'm good with that.” He'll go to Nineveh and he'll say, “You've got 40 days, 40 days, then you're dead.” And I don't see any more details of his message than that. 40 days, dead, gone. But the king of Nineveh will repent and he'll say to all the people of his kingdom, “I want every one of you, including the animals, not to eat. And I want you to confess and humble yourself to this God that comes in the form of Dagon to us. I want you to repent.” And they do. Now, God has been setting the stage all along because what has been happening historically in this particular region is Assyria, though, has been expanding and is taking control, is in a dip. You know how nations have these times of climbing and then all of a sudden they start dipping a little bit? Well, Assyria will then get greater really fast in a short time. However, at this time in their life, the nation is in turmoil. The capital city, Ashur, is starting to crumble because of internal strife. Sound familiar with politics? So, internal strife is starting to wear away at it. It's one of the reasons why the capital then shifts to Nineveh, because of the

internal strife. And by the way, it is recorded in the Assyrian documents that there was a total eclipse about the time that Jonah went to Nineveh. And it's recorded in the Assyrian scrolls. They take that as the judgment of God. God was doing a work. And because He was doing a work, they were being sensitive to that work. And the work and the message of Jonah was, "The judgment of God has come upon you. Humble yourself." And they did. They did. Nineveh was transformed at that moment. Did it go into the next generation? Not really. But that generation was saved, and God knew what He was doing, in spite of Jonah, in spite of all those things. They're going to be used as an example within the passage.

If you read with me, it reads this way,

(Luke 11:30) "For just as Jonah became a sign to the Ninevites..."

See how it reads, Jonah was the sign. I bet that was some sign. "It's Dagon."

"... so will the Son of Man be to this generation."

You'll see a sign. Now, the sign of the Christ is clearly not a sign of judgment, but of God's grace. Scripture tells us that He went about doing good. And even when John the Baptist goes, "Who is this guy? We have the right guy?" Jesus keeps coming back and saying, "Look, the lame walk, the blind see, the deaf hear, the poor have the gospel preached to them. Yes, this is who God is." The message is far greater.

Hebrews will say in Hebrews 2, "How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?" In other words, the message is a far greater message than the message of Jonah. What was Jonah's message? "You're going to die." That was the message of Jonah. But the message of Christ is, "You can live." Now, think how miraculous and wonderful that message is!

The passage goes on and says,

(Luke 11:31) "The Queen of the South will rise up with the men of this generation at the judgment and condemn them..."

Condemnation, that's judgment. "You mean there's actually going to be a time of judgment?" Yeah, people

are going to stand before the judgment seat of Christ. “What are they going to be judged for?” Well, according to the way I read Scripture, people are going to be judged according to what they know (2 Peter 2). People are going to be judged according to what they don't do; the fact that they don't do what they say. As Romans 2 says, “You know all this stuff, but you're not doing it.” You're going to be judged according to that. And James will say, according to the position that you hold. Jude will make reference to this, too. The greater the position, the greater the judgment, the greater the condemnation upon you that's going to be revealed. And in this particular passage, it's making reference to, and the messenger makes a big difference. In other words, that Jesus was there giving the message, this is a greater condemnation.

You see this parallel in Luke 10, in which Jesus literally begins to curse the cities of Chorazin, Bethsaida, and even Capernaum, where He was living at that particular time. Why? Because He was in those towns, and they rejected Him. The fundamental bottom line is that the greatest

crime against God is your rejection of His free gift, because it's a greater message. It's a message of life. It's a message of God's love. How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?

So, the way it reads in verse 31,

(Luke 11:31) “The Queen of the South will rise up with the men of this generation at the judgment and condemn them...”

The Queen of the South being, of course, the queen of Sheba that we read about in 1 Kings 10. 2 Chronicles 9 makes reference to the queen of Sheba that came to see and to hear all the wonderful things of King Solomon. It reads that she's going to condemn this particular generation. That's a phenomenal point. If you just take note of that; that she's going to rise up in that judgment day and point her finger at these people that came quite a long way down the road.

“... because she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and behold, something greater than Solomon is here.”

And of course, Solomon represents the supreme sign of wisdom. There's no greater wisdom. The wisdom was so great that kings were coming from all over the world. And she comes from what we understand to be Ethiopia. I remember my dad, he was with Sudan Interior Mission, and he said, "Boy, those Ethiopian people are some of the most attractive people I've ever seen." So, here's the queen of Sheba. She comes over in all of her glory. And why does she even bother herself to make this long trek? In fact, she not only makes this long trek, but she makes it with a lot of goods. And she says, "If this guy's half the guy that I think he is, wow." And then she finally ends up going, "He's far more than I thought he was." So, the wisdom was so far great. So, not only does she give him all the stuff that she brings, but from what I calculate, she gives him \$100 million in gold, in just gold. We're not talking about the animals and all the other stuff that she gives him. So, what is the text saying? She saw the wisdom of Solomon as being that valuable. I mean, how much would you pay for wisdom? How valuable is it to you? Well, I mean, to the queen of Sheba, it's pretty valuable.

The Ethiopians oftentimes come into play in Scripture. I don't know if you noticed it or not. Remember Moses? He has a wife. She's a Cushite. That's an Ethiopian. So, Moses is married to an Ethiopian. And you go a little bit further, in the Book of Jeremiah, a servant in the king's household actually rescues Jeremiah. He's an Ethiopian. And you go into the Book of Acts, and a guy is in a chariot, and he's reading the Book of Isaiah. He's in the household of the queen of Ethiopia, and he's reading the Book of Isaiah. Where did he get that from? You know, there's a large group of Ethiopians that call themselves Ethiopian Jews. They're called "Beta Israel". Did you know that? Yeah, in 1984 and '85, they did an airlift because these who called themselves Jews in Ethiopia, which many feel the tie was both to Moses and to Solomon, but they actually checked their DNA, they are Jews. But they airlifted over 6,500 of them at that time because they were being persecuted for their worship of Judaism. They actually flew them out. They called it "Airlift Moses". Some of you probably remember. I remember them doing that. And they took them to Israel. In '91, they did another airlift. And this time they airlifted 14,000. They called it "Airlift Solomon".

Pretty interesting, isn't it? There are now over 160,000 Jewish Ethiopians in Israel, called "Beta Israel". Someone listened. Someone valued, and they valued to such a degree that they would be willing to give up anything to have that wisdom. Now, in that case, we're just talking about wisdom. In the other case, we're just talking about avoiding judgment. But something greater than both of them are here. And that is the message of good news, the love of God, God's Son. We're not just talking about Solomon; we're talking about God. We're not just talking about a judgment; we're talking about salvation. How much would you give for salvation? I mean, what would it profit you if you gained the whole world and you lost your own soul? How much is eternal life to you? How valuable is that? Think about that. What would you pay for that? And yet we oftentimes flippantly think about these things. Jesus says, "Because of this, these people are going to rise up and condemn you. And they're going to say, 'The most valuable thing, you rejected.'" There will be a time of judgment. Scripture calls it the great white throne judgment. But how wonderful it is, as Romans tells us, that there is no condemnation in Christ Jesus. And as you

receive that most valuable gift, you are eternally saved and no longer subject to the judgment that we so clearly deserve. God has washed away our sins. I can't think of a better message than that. I can't think of a greater thing to reflect upon. So, what's holding you back from opening up the Bible? You've got the most valuable thing, the words of life, right in front of you. What holds you back? Why would you not dig in? Why would you not let it saturate your thoughts. I mean, how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? Everything's escalating in this text. Right and wrong, good and evil, light and darkness. Everything's getting clearer. The closer you get to God, the more that'll happen. And you'll no longer begin to think in terms of, "Can I do this and get away with it?" Or "Can I do that?" You'll think, "Let us press on towards the mark of the high calling." Because something greater is moving you than just the fear of judgment or the infatuation of wisdom.

Closing Prayer:

Father, we give You thanks for Your word. We ask that You would speak to our hearts as we come before You today with an open spirit; Your Spirit moving within us, calling us to Yourself, to a relationship. We come in humility, realizing that it's not by any works of righteousness in which we have done, but according to Your mercy, You have saved us. What a marvelous word this is. Forgiven of all of our sins, removed as far as the east is from the west, everlasting life with You? How shall we escape if we neglect this?

Your heads bowed and your eyes closed. What I'm asking you to do is reflect upon the Word of God. Let the Word of God dwell in you richly. And let the Spirit of God move your hearts. Today, if you hear His voice, respond.