

**Luke 11:27-32**  
**September 22, 2019**

**Open with Prayer**

**HOOK:**

Last week we processed Jesus's teaching in verses (24–26) in which He warns against complacency about God's redemptive work. The experience of salvation, which brings cleansing and forgiveness, creates a vacuum that must be filled. The Christian must fill the void created by the expulsion of the demonic with Christ Himself.

**Transition:** As a refresher, Jesus is speaking to a crowd. As He is speaking, he hears a woman shout to him. He had a choice to ignore what He heard, but instead, He thought it was important to address what He heard. Would someone read Luke 11:27-28, and then let's process why Jesus chose to address this woman.

**BOOK:**

<sup>27</sup> As Jesus was saying these things, a woman in the crowd called out, "Blessed is the mother who gave you birth and nursed you."

<sup>28</sup> He replied, "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it."

Q: Why do you think Jesus felt a need to respond to this woman's statement? [The whole nation took pride in the fact that they descended from Abraham (cf. John 8:33–39). **Jesus** pointed out that a physical relationship was unimportant compared with hearing and obeying **the Word of God**. As Luke emphasized, the gospel is not limited to Israel but is for all who trust in Christ. Mary's blessedness does not consist simply in her relationship with me, but in the fact that she heard the word of God and kept it, which is where true blessedness lies."]

**Transition:** The crowds are growing, and Jesus focuses on giving His disciples some insights into what was really happening as they ministered the Word of God. He used three illustrations to show the seriousness of spiritual opportunities, especially since the Pharisees asked Jesus for a sign to prove He is the Messiah (Matthew and Mark tell us who's asking). Let's start with the first two illustrations. Would someone read Luke 11:29-32?

*The Sign of Jonah*

<sup>29</sup> As the crowds increased, Jesus said, "This is a wicked generation (in dire need of repentance). It asks for a miraculous sign, but none will be given it except the sign of Jonah (Pharisees asked Jesus for a sign). <sup>30</sup> For as Jonah was a sign to the Ninevites, so also will the Son of Man be to this generation. <sup>31</sup> 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. <sup>32</sup> 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.

**Process Observations/Questions:**

Q V.29-30: Let's make sure we understand what Jesus is teaching the Pharisees. How was Jonah a sign to the Ninevites? [The miracle of Jonah's being swallowed by a fish and later being spit out. Matthew 12:40 affirms this as well. Although Jonah's deliverance was not witnessed by the Ninevites, Luke's readers probably would associate Jesus' resurrection with Jonah's rescue from his fishy grave. "The sign of Jonah the prophet," which is *death, burial, and resurrection*. It is the resurrection of our Lord that proves He is the Messiah, the Son of God]

Q V.31: Who is the Queen of the South? [The Queen of Sheba who traveled many miles to hear the wisdom of Solomon (1 Kings 10)]

Q: Why does Jesus elevate the Queen of Sheba? [Because when she, as a Gentile queen, heard Solomon's wisdom, she marveled and believed.]

Q V.31-32: Jesus refers to the judgment, in which the Queen of Sheba and the Ninevites will have a role in condemning this generation. What judgment is Jesus referring to? [If the Jews did not repent, then the people of Nineveh and the Queen of Sheba would bear witness against them in the last judgment, which is the final judgment when there will be a resurrection of the unbelieving dead (X-REF Rev 20:11–15) See Notes in NIV Study Bible]

**Transition:** Before we start with our standard process questions, is there anything else in this passage that you didn't understand? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you most like about this passage? What resonated with you? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you least like about this passage? [Let people engage]

Q: What do we learn about Jesus in this passage? [Let people engage]

Q: What is the application for us in light of these first two illustrations? [Let people engage]

**LOOK:**

Signs do not produce faith (Luke 16:31). If one's heart is not open to the truth, signs may be interpreted as demonic (11:15). Even the greatest sign, the resurrection, will not produce faith in an unwilling heart.

**Close in Prayer**

**Commentaries for Today's Lesson:**

**Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible Exposition Commentary* (Vol. 1, pp. 216-217). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.**

**Application (vv. 27–28)** Taking sides with Jesus means much more than saying the right things, like the woman who cried, “Blessed is the womb that bore You, and the breasts which nursed You” (Luke 11:27). She was certainly sincere, but that was not enough. We take sides with Jesus Christ when we hear His Word and obey it (see Luke 6:46–49; 8:19–21).

**Opportunity (Luke 11:29–32)**

Because He knew what was in their hearts, Jesus was not impressed by the big crowds, but the disciples were. In order to keep the Twelve from being swayed by “success,” Jesus gave them some insights into what was really happening as they ministered the Word. He used three illustrations to show the seriousness of spiritual opportunities.

**Jonah (vv. 29–30, 32).** The leaders kept asking Jesus for a sign to prove that He was the Messiah. The only sign He promised was “the sign of Jonah the prophet,” which is *death, burial, and resurrection*. It is the resurrection of our Lord that proves He is the Messiah, the Son of God (Rom. 1:4), and this is what Peter preached to Israel on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:22ff). The witness of the early church was centered on Christ’s resurrection (Acts 1:22; 3:15; 5:30–32; 13:32–33). Jonah was a living miracle and so is our Lord Jesus Christ.

**Solomon (v. 31).** The emphasis here is on the wisdom of a king, not the works of a prophet. The Queen of Sheba traveled many miles to hear the wisdom of Solomon (1 Kings 10), but here was the very Son of God *in their midst*, and the Jews would not believe His words! Even if Jesus had performed a sign, it would not have changed their hearts. They needed the living wisdom of God, but they were content with their stale religious tradition.

The important thing about these illustrations is that *they involved Gentiles*. When Jonah preached to the Gentiles in Nineveh, they repented and were spared. When a Gentile queen heard Solomon’s wisdom, she marveled and believed. If, with all their privileges, the Jews did not repent, then the people of Nineveh and the Queen of Sheba would bear witness against them in the last judgment. The Lord gave Israel so many opportunities, yet they would not believe (Luke 13:34–35; John 12:35–41).

**Martin, J. A. (1985). *Isaiah*. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, pp. 236-237)**

*b. Jesus’ teaching on the observance of God’s Word (11:27–28).*

11:27–28. This teaching is similar to that in 8:19–21. Family relationships are not the most important things in life. **A woman** noted that it must have been wonderful to have been Jesus’ **mother**. The idea of physical relationship was more important in that day. The whole nation took pride in the fact that they descended from Abraham (cf. John 8:33–39). **Jesus** pointed out that a physical relationship was unimportant compared with hearing and obeying **the Word of God**. As Luke emphasized, the gospel is not limited to Israel but is for all who trust in Christ.

*c. Jesus’ refusal to give a sign (11:29–32) (Matt. 12:38–42; Mark 8:11–12).*

11:29–32. The Pharisees asked Jesus for a sign (Matt. 12:38; Mark 8:11) which Luke did not mention. A **sign** was a confirming miracle which showed that the spoken message was true. The crowds were not willing to believe Jesus' words without external confirmation.

Jesus' response was that no sign would **be given ... except the sign of Jonah** (Luke 11:29). This sign has been interpreted in at least two ways: Many say it was the physical appearance of Jonah, for perhaps his skin was bleached white by the sea monster's inner juices. However, nothing in the context hints at this. "The sign of Jonah" must have been the words (cf. "preaching," v. 32) Jonah spoke about his miraculous preservation by God when he was at the point of death. The people of **Nineveh** believed what Jonah said, even if they had no physical evidence. Jesus' words about **the Queen of the South** lend strength to this interpretation. The queen traveled a great distance **to listen to Solomon's wisdom** (1 Kings 10). She acted on what she heard, without any external confirmation. The point is clear: the generation that was listening to Jesus' words did not have as much faith as some Gentiles who listened to the words of God in previous eras. Therefore, even Gentiles **will stand up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it**. Jesus affirmed that something **greater than Solomon** (Luke 11:31) and **greater than Jonah** was present (v. 32). That something was the kingdom of God, present in the person of Jesus. Thus, the people should listen and believe without a sign.

**Stein, R. H. (1992). Luke (Vol. 24, pp. 333-338). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.**

**11:27 Blessed.** See comments on 6:20.

**Is the mother.** Literally *the womb*, which is an idiomatic expression (a synecdoche) for "your mother" (cf. Gen 49:25). Compare "Blessed is my mother among those that bear, and praised among women is she that bore me" (2 Baruch 54:10).

**11:28 Blessed rather.** The meaning of the Greek term "rather" (*menoun*) is unclear. It is used only four times in the NT, but it has three possible meanings: (1) adversative—"on the contrary," or "no, but rather," as in Rom 9:20; 10:18. This would repudiate the blessing of Jesus' mother by the woman in the crowd. (2) Affirmative—"indeed," as in Phil 3:8. This would agree with the woman's blessing and identify Jesus' mother as an example of one who hears God's word and obeys it. (3) Corrective—"yes, but rather." This would show that although the blessing is correct, there is a greater blessing available to those who believe. Usually if Luke wanted to express the adversative meaning (1), he used *ouchi* and *legō hymin* (cf. Luke 12:51; 13:3, 5), and if he wanted to express the affirmative meaning (2), he used *nai* (cf. 7:26; 10:21; 11:51; 12:5). The third meaning is therefore more likely. An expanded translation of this sentence would read: "What you have said is true as far as it goes. But Mary's blessedness does not consist simply in her relationship with me, but in the fact that she heard the word of God and kept it, which is where true blessedness lies."

**Those who hear the word of God and obey it.** Compare 6:47; 8:15, 21. This explains what it means to gather with Jesus (11:23) and stands in contrast to the failure to persevere in faith illustrated in 11:24–26.

## **The Lukan Message**

The first saying (11:24–26) warns against complacency about God's redemptive work. The experience of salvation, which brings cleansing and forgiveness, creates a vacuum that must be filled. The Christian must fill the void created by the expulsion of the demonic, worldliness, or

immorality lest these evils be replaced by hypocrisy, self-righteousness, pride, or relapse, which would be worse still. Christian perseverance (8:15) entails devotion to God's word (11:28), to prayer, and to the breaking of bread (Acts 2:42). Otherwise, like the nine lepers, they may experience healing but not salvation (Luke 17:11–19). Some have argued that this parable is aimed at Jewish exorcists, who by failing to teach Jesus' message left those who had been exorcised open to worse trouble. Luke left open the question of who performed the exorcisms, whether Jewish exorcists (11:19) or Jesus. His readers are expected to apply the teaching to their own situation, i.e., to their own need to follow their salvation in Christ with obedience to God's word (11:28).

The second saying (11:27–28) is a parallel to 8:19–21, where a reference to Jesus' mother and brothers occasions a similar teaching that physical relationship is less important than hearing and obeying God's word. Luke did not write this saying in response to a later veneration of Mary. For him Mary was blessed among women (1:42, 45). Yet she was blessed not because she bore the Son of God but because she believed God's word (1:45; 11:28). She was blessed just as all who hear and keep God's word are blessed (11:28; 8:21).

## Comments

**11:29 As the crowds increased.** This picks up the crowd mentioned in 11:14.

**Jesus said.** The answer to 11:16 is now forthcoming.

**This is a wicked generation.** "This generation" was characterized as basically evil, in dire need of repentance. That it was an evil generation is revealed partly by its demand for a sign (11:16).

**It asks for a miraculous sign.** Literally *seeks a sign*. What was demanded was divine authentication of Jesus' message and work.

**But none will be given.** Jesus' opponents, having dismissed the "sign" of his healings and exorcisms, wanted something more spectacular, but Jesus rejected this approach at the very beginning of his ministry as Satanic in nature (4:9–12). Would even such a sign, however, lead to faith? Not according to 16:31 (cf. John 12:9–11).

**Except the sign of Jonah.** This has been interpreted as (1) the preaching of Jonah to the Ninevites and their subsequent repentance. But how could Jesus' *present* preaching have been interpreted as a *future* sign or, indeed, as a sign at all since a "sign" in the present context refers to a miracle (11:16, 29, 30); (2) the parousia, which would come too late to confirm Jesus' person and work to this generation; and (3) the miracle of Jonah's being swallowed by a fish and later being spit out. Matthew 12:40 clearly interprets it as the latter. Although Jonah's deliverance was not witnessed by the Ninevites, Luke's readers probably would associate Jesus' resurrection with Jonah's rescue from his fishy grave, for unlike his preaching that was truly a miraculous sign. The third interpretation also agrees better with the future tense of the verb "will be given" and fits well Luke 16:30–31.

**11:30 As Jonah was a sign ... so also will the Son of Man.** Even as Jonah's experience was a sign, so the resurrection of the Son of Man would be a sign, and the core of the early church's preaching would be Jesus' death *and resurrection* (Acts 1:22; 2:31; 3:15; 4:33; 5:30–32).

**11:31 The Queen of the South.** That is, the Queen of Sheba (1 Kgs 10:1–13; 2 Chr 9:1–12).

**Will rise.** This is a reference to the general resurrection of the dead at the final judgment. Jesus (and Luke) clearly sided with the Pharisees against the Sadducees on this important doctrine (Luke 20:27–40; Acts 23:6–10).

**At the judgment.** This refers to *the* judgment (note the article), i.e., the final judgment, which was associated with the resurrection of the dead (Rev 20:11–15).

**The men of this generation.** “Men” is generic for “people” (cf. NRSV).

**She came from the ends of the earth.** This part of the tradition no doubt would have been understood by Luke and Theophilus as an example of Gentile participation in the OT salvation. The same would be true of the following reference to the Ninevites, for they too were Gentiles whom God had included in the divine salvation.

**To listen to Solomon’s wisdom.** Compare 1 Kgs 10:1–4, 7.

**One greater than Solomon is here.** Literally *something greater than Solomon*. The use of “something” instead of “someone” indicates that the comparison was more than just between Solomon and Jesus but between Solomon and his wisdom and Jesus and his wisdom. Jesus is the ultimate “wise man,” and his wisdom has no equal.

**11:32 The men of Nineveh will stand up.** As wicked as the Ninevites were, they nevertheless were qualified to judge this generation, for they repented when Jonah preached. This generation, however, refused to repent, even though it was Jonah’s Lord who was preaching. Compare Luke 10:12–15 for a similar comparison.

**Now one greater than Jonah is here.** Literally *something greater than Jonah*. See comments on 11:31. Jesus is not only the ultimate “prophet” but the Lord of the prophets.

### **The Lukan Message**

Luke explained to Theophilus and his readers that the desire for a sign, which was prevalent among the Jews (23:8; John 2:18; 4:48; 1 Cor 1:22), was actually a rejection of God’s revelation in Christ. Signs do not produce faith (Luke 16:31). If one’s heart is not open to the truth, signs may be interpreted as demonic (11:15). Even the greatest sign, the resurrection, will not produce faith in an unwilling heart. This is powerfully demonstrated in John 11:1–12:11 (esp. 12:9–11). Luke’s readers are to understand that the Scriptures and Luke’s orderly account of Jesus’ life, death, resurrection, and ascension are sufficient for faith. Read in the fellowship of the believing community, this is all that is necessary for the heart that is warm toward God. (See the discussion of 24:30–32.)

A second emphasis of this account centers around the “greater” character of Jesus. Proclaimed by John the Baptist as the “one more powerful” (3:16), shown to be “someone stronger” than Satan (11:22), Jesus is now presented as greater/wiser than the wisest man of all, Solomon (11:31), and as a greater prophet than Jonah (11:32). Although this evil generation was unable to recognize him, the Queen of Sheba and the Ninevites would have. Another motif is also present although not emphasized: the certainty of a future judgment when the resurrection of both just and unjust takes place (cf. 11:32; Acts 24:15).

**The Holy Bible: New International Version. (1984). (Lk 11:27-32). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.**