

## Luke 11:27-32

### Blessed are Hearers of the Word

**Prayer** Father, we thank you for your Word. It is a blessing to us, and we are blessed if we hear and keep it. Give us ears to hear the truth of the gospel contained within, hearts to search out its wisdom, and to see your gracious call for us to repent and turn to you in response to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. In his name, we pray, Amen.

**Seeking a Sign** Before we really launch into today's text, we need to rewind a little bit and revisit last Sunday's text, which was Luke 11:14-26 Jesus is actively doing ministry, casting out demons and healing mute people. He's probably preaching as well, and out of nowhere, some folks start saying that he's from Satan and other folks demanding a sign from heaven, some sort of validation that this miracle-working messianic figure among their midst is the real article. What we saw last week was Jesus responding to the criticism that he might be sent by Beelzebul. This week we're seeing Jesus' response to a demand for a sign. But right in between these two topics, this little nugget occurs that ties these two sections together.

And by way of illustration, last week a lot of you went with us, and we celebrated in a packed room at St. John Baptist Church with folks from there and Paramount Baptist and Power Church and in the place while Pastor David or Dr. Hebert or Pastor Anthony or Pastor Manny spoke truth to us, many people shouted their amens, and hallelujahs, and come-ons, and just generally got excited about what was going on and what Jesus was doing in reconciling believers of different stripes together. It was great! Well, Jesus is preaching and teaching about how to combat Satan and seemingly out of nowhere, the woman shouts out "Blessed is the womb that bore you, and the breasts at which you nursed!" Basically, you're great and you're

so great, your mom must be really proud of you. She's blessed to have raised a son like you. It's probably telling that in this culture, you praised a man by praising his mother, and in ours, you don't really do that. You insult a man by insulting his mother. And by the way, only a woman could have said this. This would be so weird coming from a man.

And that could have been it, a kind of funny show of support from the crowd for Jesus and he could have said, "Yeah, I love my mom! She's great; you should try her apple pie." As one theologian put, "Something very impressive is present in Jesus, but to be impressed is not enough. What counts is committed response to the message that Jesus brings."<sup>1</sup> But Jesus seems to be really good about taking anything and making it a teaching moment. And so he says, v 28, "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it."

**Blessed are Hearers of the Word** – Now Jesus isn't saying his mother, Mary, is not blessed. The Bible says that Mary is blessed among women. And from what we can tell, she was a person who consistently heard the word of God and kept it. Nor is Jesus blowing off the compliment from the woman in the crowd. He is instead taking what she says, and seeing, and. Luke's usage of the Greek word behind "Rather" seems to create a meaning something along the lines of "You're not wrong. But while we're talking about blessing, let me tell what blessing really is. Blessing is hearing the Word of the Lord and keeping it."<sup>2</sup>

Blessing is not, simply being related to Jesus. Blessing is not, as the rest of this passage will show, belonging to a certain ethnic group or in crowd, or even gender. Blessing isn't how much money is in the bank account. The #blessed life that we curate on to Instagram is not the

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<sup>1</sup> John Nolland, *Word Biblical Commentary Vol. 35b, Luke 9: 21-18* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Inc, 1993), 648.

<sup>2</sup> Robert H. Stein, *Luke*, vol. 24, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 333.

sum total of God's blessing. Blessing, True Blessing, is tied to the Word of God. And not just hearing the Word, but keeping the Word.

But why is the Word of God a blessing to hear and to keep? Jesus says, in verse 29, **"This generation is an evil generation. It seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah."**

Now that seems like a non sequitur but track with me for a minute. As humans, we are innately hostile to God's authority. We are skeptical of God. That has been true since the Garden of Eden. What changes is the sign we are looking for to prove or rather disprove God's Word and give us an out so that we can escape his authority. The people in Jesus day were asking for some sort of divine miracle they could hang their hat on – or rather an absence so they could dismiss Jesus' authority. Dismiss his call to repent or turn away from sinful desire and injustice in their society. They are little bit like the Old Testament judge Gideon, who in Judges 6 is looking for some way to not go into battle on behalf God with the odds overwhelmingly stacked against him. And so he tests God asking him to leave a fleece wet and ground dry or the ground wet and a fleece wet. He wanted a way out, a way he could weasel out of God's authority.

For us, in our culture, we look to science or politics or the cultural *zeitgeist* and say that if God's word doesn't at first glance line up with or outright contradicts those things, then it isn't authoritative. We can dismiss it and not take it too seriously. But hearing and keeping the word of God is a blessing because, within the word of God, Jesus has given us a sign that God is authoritative, and he is Good. We've been given the sign of Jonah.

And what is the sign of Jonah? Matthew 12:39-40 makes it clear that the sign of Jonah is the eventual death, burial in the ground for three days, and resurrection of Jesus. Luke doesn't get that specific, but will tell us that at Jonah's preaching, the Ninevites, the godless, evil people, who stabbed their enemies through with spikes and then raised their bodies to rot in the sun, those Ninevites repented and believed (at least for a time) that the wrath of God was coming toward them for their evil ways and repented of the sin. The reason they could believe Jonah's preaching, Jesus is saying, is because of the sign that Jonah carried, that he was thrown to his death overboard a ship because of his sin, was sinking to the bowels of the earth, then rescued by a great fish in which he resided for three days before the fish vomited him out at shore. This story serves as a type or a shadow of Jesus' own death on behalf of our sins, his burial in a tomb, and his resurrection. The reason we can believe the Word of God, as preached by Jesus and taught in God's scriptures is because Jesus was crucified, buried, and rose as a testament to God's power and the authority that Jesus carried, authority that was so great he could exercise it over death.

In short, we can be hearers and keepers of God's word, because Jesus' resurrection proves to us that God is good, and he is powerful and that God. That should be the only sign we need to take God at his word. No matter how what your background. No matter what you've done or has been done to you. God has proven his love and his power through the cross. That's all we actually need from him. That's the molten hot core of the gospel. And rather than downplay that or turn Christianity into a self-help religion or hunt for extra signs, our response should be like Paul's in Romans 16:16, when he says that he is not ashamed of the Gospel for it is the power of Salvation, first to the Jew, then to the Greek. In other words, the death and

resurrection of Jesus Christ is salvific for whoever embraces it. And it is a blessing for us to hear this Good News more than anything this world has to offer.

Jesus says it's an evil generation that hunts for something else as confirmation, demands more from God than the greatest gift God could have given us. But we are blessed who hear and keep the word. We are blessed when we hear the gospel message over and over again and respond appropriately. What does that look like, practically? Well, Jesus seems to indicate at least two ways that we go about being hearers and keepers of the Word. And he does that by using Old Testament examples: Jonah, which we've mentioned, and we'll speak a little more about that in a minute and the Queen of the South, or the Queen of Sheba with whom we'll start. V. 31 **"The queen of the South will rise up at 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 behold, something greater than Solomon is here.**

**Blessed are Seekers of its Wisdom** – With the Queen of the South, Jesus shows us that we are to be seekers of the wisdom of the Word. Jesus is referring to the account in 1 Kings 10 of the Queen of Sheba, probably a country in southern Arabia, where Yemen is today, though some Shebans ended up in the Horn of Africa as well. In the account, the Queen heard about how great King Solomon of Israel's wisdom was, and, probably looking for a good, fair trade deal, traveled to meet Solomon and test his wisdom, giving him tough questions to make sure he actually had the wisdom that he was purported to have. Her hopes were confirmed, and Solomon performed well on the ethics exam she gave him, and they sign a trade deal.

What does this have to do with seeking the word? Well, King Solomon is notable in that, he is responsible for writing down huge chunks of the Old Testament, namely the Wisdom

Literature, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon. The connection that Jesus makes is that like the Queen of the South; we are to be people who seek out the Wisdom of God contained in his Word. There is some implication that Jesus' audience isn't doing that, or at least, not reading the Word correctly, and there's some judgment, there's some shade being cast to a lot of Jesus' audience because this Gentile woman was seeking out God's wisdom, and they weren't.

But we don't need to get in a caravan to go to Israel. Most of you have a Bible in your hands right now. If not, you are more than welcome to borrow one of ours. The Word of God and its wisdom is right in front of you. We can together be a people who seek the wisdom of God in the Word. There are a variety of ways you can do that.

1. **Read your Bible.** Get a Bible reading plan and a good Study Bible if you don't own one. The Word Eater plan is great, so is M'Cheyene. The ESV Study Bible is a really good edition. Get a pen, and a journal make a plan for a time of day that you will sit down and read the Bible. But here's the deal, I know I'm saying this after the beginning of the year, and the temptation is to wait until next year to start, but don't. No one cares if you start reading your Bible on January 1<sup>st</sup> or January 13<sup>th</sup>. Get in the Word. And if you miss a day, don't worry. Our Youth Director Andrew is fond of saying the goal isn't perfection; it is faithfulness. He's right. There is a great resource that LifeWay publishes that our Mom's Community Group and Youth Students have used called Foundations. Foundations is basically a guided reading plan of the Bible that doesn't hit every verse but brings you into contact with most of the Bible. It also has journal entry pages with a guide for how to journal.

2. **Don't go it alone.** The book of Hebrews says in 10:24-25 that we should **"stir one another up to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near."** Show up to church regularly. Our hope is that at Redeemer, we can faithfully preach the Word of God, digging in and drinking deeply from this well. And we won't apologize for it. We want to preach the Bible and if that stretches you on Sunday, great! We're doing our jobs. As well, get in a Community Group or form up a discipleship group of 2-3 believers that go through something like Foundations or a reading plan or reads books of the Bible. Most of our Community Groups also spend time discussing how our sermons impacted our lives, but a discipleship group, especially if its formed with people you are already in community with can provide a way to dig deeper.
3. **Memorize Scripture.** Hide the Word in the your heart. Joshua 1:8 says **"the Book of the Law, shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosper. And then you will have good success."** Use a verse memory plan. A great one to start with is the Topical Memory System from NavPress. Right now, some of the staff are going through that together. It's not always easy, and I'd be lying if I said it came naturally to me or that I get everything verbatim every time. But when I am saddled with the weight of my sin, because I have 1 John 1:9 locked in my head I can rattle off "If we confess our sin, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. It becomes a

small gospel sermon I can preach to myself simply because I've committed that verse to memory. There is also a great smartphone app from the kind folks at Desiring God called Fighter Verses. I use that to add in the verses I am memorizing, but there is a verse memory scheme built in.

4. **Read Good Books or Articles about the Bible** If you don't know where to begin, that's okay. Ask. Staff here are always glad to make recommendations. It's kind of a joke here that we start anything we do with a book study, but good Christian authors who take the Bible seriously can be a real blessing to us. One that I would send your way, in addition to reading the Bible, is **Knowing God** by J.I. Packer. It's a classic now, and we usually keep a copy or two in the library here, but it's worth owning.

If we see that God's word is good and trustworthy because of the sign that Jesus gave us in his death and resurrection, we can seek out the word and allow it to begin to renew our minds. And the always perfect Word of God now testifies to Jesus who is greater than Solomon is; we have more incentive to seek out the Word of God than the Queen of the South. But simply reading the Bible or committing some verses to memory. We must, like the Ninevites let the Word, cut us to the heart.

**Blessed are the Repentant** – Jesus tells us that we truly are blessed by the Word, not just when we read it, or memorize it, or hear it preached, and all those good things I just told you to do, but unless the Word of God opens up our heart and exposes what is within them and drives us toward a new life in Christ, then all I mentioned is for naught. Jesus finishes this passage by saying, v. 32 **“the Men of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation and**



**condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold something greater than**

**Jonah is here.”** In other words, the Men of Nineveh repented – they turned away from their lives of sin and toward at least initially a fear of the Lord and what he could do to them if they didn’t abandon their sin. In the book of Jonah, we see them begin a fast and dress in sackcloth and the king of Nineveh, probably a governor of the local province around the area, got off his throne and sat in ash. They were broken hearted over their sin in the face of God’s righteousness. They wanted to stop and begin to do those things that please God. If the Jonah is a type or shadow of Christ, then the Men of Nineveh are a type of Christians. In the book of Acts, in chapter 2, men to whom Peter preaches, have a similar experience. Luke writing in Acts 2:37 says the men hearing the Word of God preached by Peter were “cut to the heart” and said to Peter and the rest of the Apostles, **“Brothers what shall we do?” And Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”**

I’m not saying that you need to go throw some ash on your head and dress in sackcloth. But the word of God blesses us when it produces a hatred of sin and a love of God. The actual word for repentance in Greek literally means to change direction. Where we once loved our sin, we loved to do things that were contrary to God’s commands; repentance means that our heart turns around and fixates on God on and desires to be more like him.

Maybe you are not a Christian with us, and the reason you’re here is because, as one gentleman sharing his testimony with me with this week put it, you’re tired of living the way you are. You’re ready to leave behind you a life that is always chasing after short term pleasures that are fleeting and fade. I’ve got good news! Jesus is for you. He is what your heart

is truly seeking. You can leave the old life behind because Jesus gives us a new life, makes us a new creation (2 Cor 5:17). Repentance for you looks like trading that old life for Christ knowing he forgives you, he cleanses you, he makes new you, and he begins to reshape your desires, so they look more like what he desires.

For those of you here who are already Christians, already trusting in the promise of God for forgiveness of sin, repentance isn't something we outgrow. Martin Luther wrote as the first of his Ninety-Five Thesis that "When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said "Repent," he intended that the entire life of believers should be repentance." Every time we see Jesus or elsewhere in the Word of God command us to repent as believers, we are to judge our lives against the Holy Word of God. Our lives should conform to the word of God, and where we fall short, we can by the power and grace of God turn away from our sin. Sometimes, that's a process and sometimes a painful one, but because of God's faithfulness and goodness which he shows us in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the Sign of Jonah, we can experience victory over sin and as we repent, keep asking God for forgiveness, knowing that he doesn't close the door on us. We can repent from sin in accordance with the Word of God because the Word of God tells us about Jesus's death and resurrection.

So Redeemer, let's be a people who are blessed. Not because some material x-factor, but we hear, and we keep the Word of God. We take it seriously. We know that it has power. It tells us how God saves us. And it tells us what a life that God has saved look like.

- 1. Do you trust the God or his Word or are you looking for some outside sign to validate it? In what ways might you struggle to trust the word of God?**

2. Do you have a plan to seek the wisdom in the Word of God? Talk with your group about how you can encourage one another to read the Bible and memorize Scripture.
3. As God reveals areas in your life where you need to repent, what does that process look like for you? Do you remember the cross and resurrection of Jesus that gives you the power to combat sin?