



CAPITOL COMMISSION

Behold, Something Greater is Here (Luke 11:29-41)

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There were various responses to the casting out of the mute demon in the previous account. The crowds were amazed at this demonstration of power while others made the charge that Jesus was in league with the Devil. For those who made this accusation it was the only way to explain what they had witnessed. Jesus addressed this charge head on and in dismantling their argument he reveals that they are on the wrong side of this clash of kingdoms. It has become clear that Jesus and his kingdom agenda is not aligning with those who had hoped he would simply underwrite the Jewish aspiration. He was not a great monarch like King Solomon of old who sat on an ivory throne, nor was he a warrior-king who leads the people into open conflict with the foreign occupier. He was like no king they had ever seen before.

This confusion about Jesus and his ministry should not be a surprise, violent opposition has marked his work from the very beginning. When announcing the fulfillment of Isaiah 61:1-2 in which the Messiah would bring release for the captives, and the year of the Lord's favor, those in his hometown of Nazareth quickly turned on him. They understood from his teaching that those who would benefit are those on the outside of the covenant community, the foreigners - even, perhaps, the commander of a foreign army like Naaman (Luke 4:27). He was a commander of the Syrian army whom Elisha had healed, but was also responsible for carrying out attacks against the nation of Israel. The people responded by driving Jesus to the edge of a cliff but were unsuccessful in carrying out their desire to throw him off. In our account Jesus utilizes the same rhetorical approach to those who are seeking for a sign. He points back to multiple times in Israel's history when God had used his chosen people to be a blessing to the nations, both through a willing and unwilling participation on their part.

As Luke's narrative continues the third reaction to Jesus' exorcism is brought to center stage. There were those who witnessed all Jesus had said and done but still pressed him for a sign from heaven. This may seem somewhat innocuous to a modern audience, but Jesus lays bare his view of those who continued to test him after the word has been preached. As in the previous account, Jesus seeks to address the corporate response of Israel to the announcement of his kingdom, and by implication, his claim to the throne. His arrival marked the lighting of the lamp so that Israel as a nation might fulfill God's intention for them to be a light for all nations (Isaiah 49:6). This highlights the true problem and the true enemy that must be defeated, so that the corruption that resides in the human heart might be cleansed. In pride and selfishness Israel has turned their vocation inward; those who were to redeem the world needed saving themselves. While Israel is blind to its need and fails to recognize the sign given them, Jesus reveals that an individual is incapable of fulfilling God's purposes until the idols that darken the human heart are destroyed.

Luke 11:29-42 – (29) When the crowds were increasing, he began to say, “This generation is an evil generation. It seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah. (30) For as Jonah became a sign to the people of Nineveh, so will the Son of Man be to this generation. (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. (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.

(33) “No one after lighting a lamp puts it in a cellar or under a basket, but on a stand, so that those who enter may see the light. (34) Your eye is the lamp of your body. When your eye is healthy, your whole body is full of light, but when it is bad, your body is full of darkness. (35) Therefore be careful lest the light in you be darkness. (36) If then your whole body is full of light, having no part dark, it will be wholly bright, as when a lamp with its rays gives you light.”

(37) While Jesus was speaking, a Pharisee asked him to dine with him, so he went in and reclined at table. (38) The Pharisee was astonished to see that he did not first wash before dinner. (39) And the Lord said to him, “Now you Pharisees cleanse the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside you are full of greed and wickedness. (40) You fools! Did not he who made the outside make the inside also? (41) But give as alms those things that are within, and behold, everything is clean for you.

THE UNRECOGNIZED SIGN

This generation is an evil generation. It seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given – In this concise statement Jesus exposes what is at issue. It is not for lack of clarity this people seeks a sign, but a corruption of the heart. There has been many convincing proofs that Jesus, is indeed, the promise king of Israel. It is not a lack of miraculous work that produces confusion in their minds. This is why “others” sought to explain the driving out of a demon, as Jesus utilizing power from the Prince of Demons. At issue was not the work of Jesus, but the message that he and his disciples were proclaiming. In the first century proclamations were used to announce a new ruler. When the old emperor dies, the power brokers made sure that, before the bad news was released, the good news of a successor was firmly in place. This was not a take-it-or-leave-it affair. It meant the new emperor was in charge, he had to be obeyed, or else! It is for this very reason that this generation was an

BIBLE STUDIES

LEGISLATORS: TUESDAYS (SESSION WEEKS) AT 8:00AM, ROOM 100 RYAN BUILDING

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Pennsylvania

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evil generation. Jesus had launched his kingdom campaign and they wanted nothing to do with the implications of what he was teaching and proclaiming. Jesus' message became a warning that all may not be alright after all. Their God wasn't simply going to endorse their national ambitions. He was doing what he promised, but in the end, it would not work out the way they thought it would, and this was a troubling development for that generation.

And behold, something greater than Jonah is here - Jesus begins speaking about others signs that should have come rushing to the Jewish mind as they reflected upon their past. Both signs speak to the blessing granted those who are outsiders of the covenant community. The first is the pagan nation of Assyria that repented at the preaching of the reluctant prophet Jonah. They responded to the message they received and God was merciful and withheld his judgment. The second sign is seen in the resolve and gratitude demonstrated by the Queen of Sheba to seek wisdom from Solomon for the benefit of her nation. The sign of Jonah was a marker that pointed forward to impending judgment. The axe is laid to the root, and every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire (Matthew 3:10). Jesus' message, like that of Jonah's, was one of turning from the course of judgment in which they seem determined to hurl themselves. Jesus was nothing like the almost comical OT prophet Jonah, who gets swallowed by a whale, and laments a withered fig branch. Nor is he the wise, but morally flawed and self-consumed leader of God's people. This Jesus was the way that God was becoming king. He is now in charge. The healings, miracles, exorcisms, and celebrations that filled the land spoke to this truth. Something greater was here, their king was front and center, but his "evil generation" was blind to the truth because Jesus did not fit into their paradigm.

THE DARKNESS WITHIN

No one after lighting a lamp puts it in a cellar or under a basket,— Jesus uses an illustration from everyday life to illuminate the current condition of those seeking a sign. Lamps were valuable in Jesus day. They would place the clay lamp in the middle of the room and let its rays shine out into the darkness. No sensible person would hide the lamp in a corner. When the light comes, it scatters the darkness; but what if, you rather enjoyed the darkness, and desired to continue with your evil practices? This is what Jesus finds with the people of his generation. They were those who had the outward form of religion, but inside, they were full of dead men's bones (Matthew 23:27). The light was doing its work, it was exposing those who were quite satisfied with the condition of their heart. The problem was, the special privilege of being in a covenant relationship with God which brought increased expectations (Amos 3:2). The ones who were to be a kingdom of priests and a holy

nation (Exodus 19:6), these very people needed to first be confronted with their own darkness. Unless one seeks for Jesus to fill every recess his corrupt heart with his presence, he is a person who has an appearance of godliness but lacks its power, and is unfit for kingdom service.

Therefore be careful lest the light in you be darkness. — The religious Jews who were unwilling to admit the darkness within their hearts were traveling a very dangerous path. Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem. God's light is journeying to the center of the ancient world to expose the darkness that has taken hold in the hearts and minds of his contemporaries. At one point, before his death, Jesus warns the disciples that the time was fast approaching when whoever kills them will think they are offering service to God (John 16:2). This is the essence of the danger. The religious can become twisted when they fail to acknowledge their own corruption and think God's purpose simply underwrites their expectations. The antithesis of this is found in the Apostle Paul. Late in life, after years of sacrifice and service to the Lord he makes this earth-shattering statement. "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost." He is not saying that he was the worst of sinners as he reflects back upon being a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent. He is saying this statement was true, right then, in that moment. As he considers the weight of his past actions, an increased awareness of his continuing sinful condition has developed, and with it the necessity of God's redemption.

CLEANSING THE INSIDE

But inside you are full of greed and wickedness — The narrative now provides a living example of this wicked generation: those who demand a sign and are darkened on the inside. Jesus is invited into the home of a Pharisee, and under the watchful eye of his host he decides against the practice of ceremonially washing his hands. This is a slap in the face to the Pharisee, he is astounded that this teacher would act with such blatant disregard to these sacred rituals. Jesus responds sharply, it is utter folly to be concerned about the external forms of religion, but to pay no attention to the greed and wickedness that have utterly darkened ones heart. God does not want lip service, he wants people who reflect his heart and character, people who recognize the light, see the darkness within, and desire cleansing.

Give as alms those things that are within — How does one receive this cleansing? Jesus seems to give a cryptic answer about the need to "give alms" at the conclusion of this interaction. If Jesus meant by "give as alms" something like "give over to God for his use," the sentence becomes clear. True kingdom service takes as much care about giving God the thoughts, intentions, and motivations of the heart as about external forms. If you embrace the light, it must influence every part of your life.