

“Willful Ignorance”

August 2, 2020

Luke 11:29-36

I. Introduction

You almost have to feel sorry for the Pharisees. They tried their best to live by all the traditions and regulations that had come down through the years along with all those that they added to this enormous list. Because they were so upright and so religious all the people looked up to them and tried to live like them—that is, until John the Baptist, a lone, rather weird prophet came in from the desert, and then Jesus, a man from the backwoods village of Nazareth, came along. From then on, things seemed to go downhill.

For over 2 years, Jesus had been active in Galilee and Judea and, by now, He was really getting under their spiritual skin. Many of the leaders had reached the conclusion that the only way for peace and quiet was to get rid of this Thorn; this Jesus of Nazareth. Their false and distorted view of the Messiah didn't allow them to see who Jesus really was. They were so offended by Jesus saying that their religion and their works, as well as their hearts, were unacceptable to God that they refused to accept Him as the Messiah. As we saw last week, some went as far as to say that “by Beelzebub, the prince of demons, he is driving out demons. Others tested him by asking for a sign from heaven” (Luke 11:15-16). They had seen His miracles and that should have been enough. But now they demanded something more—a celestial sign like stopping the sun or moving the stars or turning the moon to blood like the prophet Joel had prophesied in Joel 2:31.

But regardless of the leaders' animosity toward Jesus, “the crowds increased.” Some may have come, like Mary and Martha, to listen and grow from the words of the Lord. Some came, like the Pharisees and Sadducees, to find some “chink” or “hole” in Jesus' teachings or life. But I suspect that the majority came to be entertained by this Jesus of Nazareth. For a variety of reasons, they all asked “for a miraculous sign.”

Jesus called them “a wicked generation,” not because they were seeking, but because they continually asked for more miracles. By demanding more and more signs, they were claiming that Jesus was to blame for their rejection of Him; He supposedly had not given them enough evidence. But the issue wasn't lack of

evidence, but their self-righteous moralism. Their first-hand knowledge, which other generations were not privileged to see, marked this Jewish generation as particularly wicked for rejecting Jesus. Jesus used three illustrations to show the seriousness of willful ignorance.

II. 3 Illustrations of Willful Ignorance

A. Jonah Jesus' first illustration was Jonah. Jonah had been a sign to the Gentiles of Nineveh. He had experienced a type of death, burial, and resurrection in the great fish. Jesus said that He would give the same sign to the nation of Israel—His own death, burial, and resurrection as well as His insightful teaching. Earlier, while He was still in Galilee, Jesus had described this sign in more detail—**turn to Matthew 12:39-41**. Unlike the Ninevites who believed Jonah and repented, the Jewish leaders and most of the Jewish people would not believe even that sign. They would not repent. As Abraham and the poor man, Lazarus, replied in **Luke 16:31** to the rich man who was in hell and asked for a sign to be sent to his five brothers, **“If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.”** After Jesus' resurrection, the leaders went so far as to pay the soldiers to spread the rumor that Jesus' disciples had stolen His body (**Matthew 28:11-15**).

Unlike Jesus, Jonah performed no miracles, he didn't promise protection from destruction, and he preached only one message, **“Forty more days and Nineveh will be overturned.”** In spite of Jonah's great reluctance to preach God's message, **Jonah 3:5** says, **“The Ninevites believed God. A fast was proclaimed, and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth.”** The whole nation repented—**Jonah 3:10** concludes: **“When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he relented and did not bring on them the destruction he had threatened.”**

Now Someone greater than Jonah has come to Israel with thousands of miracles, hundreds of sermons preached with love, humility, and forgiveness of sins and the response is—**they want nothing to do with Jesus**; *“we want to see more miracles.”* Regardless of all they had seen or heard, they hadn't repented. Because of this, Jesus said that at the judgment, they will be condemned by these same pagan Ninevites who had believed Jonah and repented.

B. Solomon Jesus 2nd example was also from Jewish history—the story of Solomon and the pagan Queen of the South—the Queen of Sheba found in [1 Kings 10:1-10](#). This time the emphasis was on the wisdom of a king, not the works of a prophet. The Queen of Sheba had to travel over 1000 miles across the Arabian Desert to listen to the Wisdom of Solomon, a man of God. She came without an invitation to learn God’s truths from Solomon and to bring him gifts. The scribes and the Pharisees and the people gathered there in Israel had seen and heard one greater than Solomon—God’s own Son. He came to **them** and **invited** them to come to Him and receive **His** gift. But they refused to believe His words and were content with their man-made religious traditions.

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. Jesus warned, that if, with all their privileges, the Jews did not repent, then the people of Nineveh and the Queen of Sheba **“would stand up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it.”** The Lord gave Israel so many opportunities, yet they would not believe—[John 12:37](#) says, **“Even after Jesus had performed so many signs in their presence, they still would not believe in him.”** Their rejection proved that they deserved the sentence to eternal punishment that awaits them at the Great White Thorne judgment.

C. Light The 3rd illustration was from daily life and was one Jesus used in the Sermon in the Mount in [Matthew 6:22-23](#)—Light. God’s Word, Jesus’ teaching is a lamp or light that shines in the darkness—[Psalm 119:105](#) says, **“Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path.”** Writing of Jesus, [John 1:9](#) says, **“The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world.”** Jesus wasn’t withholding any proof or evidence. In fact, they had plenty of light, far more than what had been available to either the Queen of Sheba, who believed, or the people of Nineveh, who repented. They had plenty of evidence—[2 Corinthians 4:6](#) goes so far as to say, **“For God, who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God’s glory displayed in the face of Christ.”**

The problem wasn’t the lack of light, but the lack of sight. The light of the truth was everywhere but the spiritually blind refused to see it. Jesus had filled Israel with the truth of His deity and messiahship

through teachings and miracles. Describing His teachings, [Luke 4:32](#) says, “**They, i.e., the people in the synagogue in Capernaum, were amazed at his teaching, because his words had authority.**” Jesus’ miracles also demonstrated His divine mastery over death, the forces of hell, and the physical world—in [John 14:11](#) Jesus said, “**Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the works themselves.**” But in spite of all they saw, the religious leaders along with the majority of the Jewish people rejected Him. They stubbornly hung on to their self-righteousness and tried to explain Jesus’ miracles by attributing them to the power of Satan rather than God. [Turn to John 3:19-20.](#)

Jesus said, “**The eye is the lamp of ~~you~~ the body.**” The ability to see depends on the condition of one’s eye. When the eye is good, or healthy or clear, the “**whole body also is full of light,**” i.e., people see everything. But when the eye is bad or unhealthy or evil, the “**body is full of darkness,**” i.e., people cannot see the light of the truth. Jesus went on to warn, “**See to it, then, that the light within you is not darkness.**”

This was a call to everyone for careful self-examination. Sadly, many who feel that they are enlightened are actually lost in the darkness of man-made philosophies. They think they are walking in light, but they are mistaken—[turn to Romans 1:21-23 \(25\)](#). For those willing to repent and turn from the sin that blinds them, the gift of sight is unlimited—Jesus said, “**Therefore, if your whole body is full of light, and no part of it dark, it will be completely lighted, as when the light of a lamp shines on you.**” [Psalm 119:18](#) says, “**Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your Law.**” Peter wrote in [1 Peter 2:9](#) that those who repent are called “**out of darkness into his wonderful light.**” Scripture says that believers, Christians, those with good eyes walk in the light ([1 John 1:5-7](#)), are children of light ([Ephesians 5:8](#)) and enjoy fellowship with the light of the world ([John 8:12](#)).

III. Applications

A. There are a couple of applications for us from Jesus’ teachings. First, **the greater the opportunity, the greater the judgment.** Jesus put it this way in [Luke 12:48](#) “**From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked.**”

It’s easy to point a finger at the Pharisees and wonder why they didn’t recognize that Jesus was the Messiah

and accept the gift of eternal life that He offered them. Jesus told them that because of what they had seen and heard, they would be judged more severely.

In our day and age, we can see the complexity of God's creation all around us and recognize the fingerprints of a Creator. We have the Bible which records Jesus' miracles and teachings. We see answers to prayer in people's lives; including the change in people when they accept Jesus as their Lord and Savior. But some still resist the Gospel, the good news that **"Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved"** (Acts 4:12). Anyone who sees the miracles of Christ and knows the way of salvation but, yet rejects it, they, like the Pharisees, will be judged more harshly. The greater the opportunity, the greater the judgment.

B. Second: Check your eyes. When we trust Jesus, our eyes are opened, the light shines in, and we become children of light. The important thing is that we keep our eyes on Jesus Christ. But if we keep one eye on the things of God and the other eye on the world, the light will turn into darkness—addressed to Christians, 1 John 2:15 says, **"Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them."** God demands total submission and obedience—Luke 11:23 says, **"Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters."** The Bible is filled with examples of those who began in the light and ended up in the darkness because they took their eyes off of God and looked to the world—there's Lot, Samson, King Saul, Ananias and Sapphira, just to name a few.

Each of us is controlled by either light or by darkness. The sad and even frightening thing is that in their willful ignorance, some people have so hardened themselves against the Lord that they can't tell the difference. They think they are following the light when, in reality, they are following the darkness. As we have seen earlier, the reality is that those who rely on their self-righteousness, external morality, legalism, and religious rituals merely make comfortable homes for demons in their hearts. So, the question is how are your eyes? Paraphrasing a credit card ad: What's in your heart?