

Revelation and Response

Introduction

The Text

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.” (Luke 11:29–36)

Revelation and Response

- A. We mentioned this last week, but it’s worth saying up front again here: When you are confronted with Jesus there really is no option of neutrality. It throws you at once into a sort of crisis, a decision point. What am I going to do with Him?
 1. There is no middle of the road. You are either softening or hardening, opening or closing, things are either getting brighter or they are going dark. There is no option of neutrality when it comes to the person of Jesus. To choose neutrality is to choose against Him. You can’t sit on the fence. The devil owns the fence.
- B. So how are you going to respond to Him? What’s it going to be? That’s the point of this text. That’s why I titled the sermon “Revelation and Response”. He is revealing things to us—about Himself, about God, about us. What are we going to do about it? How are we going to respond?
- C. Now, before we can really dive into our text for the morning, it would be helpful to revisit the miracle that has occasioned this whole discussion Jesus is having with the crowd here. Look back at vv. 14-16: “¹⁴ Now he was casting out a demon that was mute. When the demon had gone out, the mute man spoke, and the people marveled. ¹⁵ But some of them said, ‘He casts out demons by Beelzebul, the prince of demons,’ ¹⁶ while others, to test him, kept seeking from him a sign from heaven.”
- D. So Jesus has just cast out a demon and the crowd is responding in various ways. Some, indeed, are marveling, but others (in particular, the scribes and Pharisees as Matthew and Mark tell us) are objecting, pushing back.

1. Some among these, not wanting to admit the possibility that Jesus really could be the Christ, the Son of God, who He says He is, make the illogical objection that Jesus must be doing these things by the power of Satan. It's an objection that Jesus spends vv. 17-28 dismantling.
 2. But then, in our text this morning, He begins to deal with the second objection that arises here. There were others seeking wanted yet another sign from Him, as if the casting out of this demon was not impressive enough: "If you want me to believe, I need to see more!"
- E. And it's this objection that Jesus is taking up now in vv. 29-36. As we move through these verses we shall look in particular at three things: (1) A Greater Sign (vv. 29-30); (2) A Greater Man (vv. 31-32); and (3) A Greater Light (vv. 33-36).

(1) A Greater Sign (vv. 29-30)

Just One More Sign

- A. The first thing we must say is that Jesus is not happy with this crowd's demand for yet another sign. Mark's account of this same scene records that "he sighed deeply in his spirit" (Mark 8:12). And then in v. 29 of our text, He speaks: "This generation is an evil generation. It seeks for a sign . . ."
- B. Perhaps you've been there with Jesus. Perhaps you're there with Him right now: "I need more before I'm going to believe in you. I need to hear more. I need to see more. I need another sign."
1. Now to be clear, such things are not always from evil. Sometimes these requests can have the quality of honest intention—something like: "I'm willing to believe, I want to believe, but help me with my unbelief." Jesus, as we often see throughout the gospels, is happy to oblige the honest seeker.
 2. But, often, as we see here in our text, these sorts of requests come from a hardened heart. There's really something quite deceptively evil about it. They take on the disguise of an honest seeker, when really they are pushing off the decision and, in the end, unwilling to make it altogether.
 - a. Such requests from people like this betray not an openness to the claims of Christ, but an opposition to them. That's the deception here. It looks like the opening of a door—"Show me more and I'll believe"—when truly it is a slamming of it in His face—"No matter what You show me, it will never be enough."
- C. Perhaps it would help if I took you the outermost extremity of such a thing so you can see what I mean. Later in Jesus' ministry, as His time on earth is nearing its end, He performs, you could say, yet another sign: the raising of Lazarus from the dead. It is an astounding thing. The man has been dead for four days. It's over for him. And yet, while Jesus is standing outside the tomb, with but a word from His mouth, the man is raised! And many were coming to faith because of it.
1. But then we come again to these same sorts of men as in our text here, these religious leaders, and how do they respond? Are they finally won over—they got the sign that they

were asking for? Quite the opposite, and it shows you the true state of their hearts: “⁴⁷ [T]he chief priests and the Pharisees gathered the council and said, ‘What are we to do? For this man performs many signs.^{48a} If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him . . .’” (John 11:47–48a).

- a. So what do they do? Well, we read down in v. 53 that “from that day on they made plans to put him to death.”

The Sign of Jonah

- A. So this is the sort of thing Jesus is picking up on here already back in our text. These men are not genuinely seeking. They are all but slamming the door in His face. And that’s why He says: “No more signs for you . . . except one”—what he calls “the sign of Jonah” (v. 29). Now what does that mean?
- B. You may or may not be familiar with the story of Jonah. I can only briefly recount it here.
 1. He was a prophet in OT times, sent by God actually to prophesy, not among the Jews, but among the Gentiles, among Israel’s enemies. In particular, He is sent to Nineveh, a major city in the Assyrian empire.
 2. Well, Jonah doesn’t want to go, and who would? So he boards a boat not for Nineveh but for Tarshish. He is attempting to head in the complete opposite direction.
 3. But, to make a long story short, God will not have it. A storm stirs up the Mediterranean, and the men on the boat finally come to realize it’s all God’s judgment against Jonah and that he needs to be thrown into the sea. So they cast him in, the sea is at once quiet and calm, and Jonah sinks down into the depths.
 4. But, we read in [Jonah 1:17](#) that “the Lord appointed a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.” Jonah cries out. God speaks to the fish and it hurls him out onto dry land.
 5. God calls him yet once more to head to Nineveh. This time he goes. The prophet cries out that God’s judgment is going to befall them for their wickedness. These pagans hear, believe, repent, and are shown mercy by YHWH.
- C. Now, in case we’re still unclear as to what this “sign of Jonah” may in fact be, Jesus actually spells it out for us in Matthew’s account of this same discussion: “³⁹ An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. ⁴⁰ For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth” (Matt 12:39–40).
 1. In other words: Jesus is talking about His death and resurrection here.
 - a. As Jonah was thrown into the sea to calm the raging waters of God’s wrath, so too, on the cross, it’s as if Jesus is hurled into that same sea, only that He might bring those waters to peace now for you and I.
 - b. As Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so too Jesus will lay dead and buried for the same duration in the heart of the earth.
 - c. And as Jonah was then spit out onto dry land and used of God to bring a nation to repentance and save them from judgment, so too Jesus will rise up from the dead

triumphant over Satan, sin, and death and through Him the gates of salvation will be thrown open for the world!

- D. So, with these words back in [Luke 11:29-30](#), it's as if He is saying: "Listen, I am done with the show. I am not interested in performing signs for those unwilling to follow where those signs lead. But, before I pack up my things and move on from here, I do have one more sign coming for you—a grand finale, if you will: "the sign of Jonah". I'm going to be killed. But I'm going to rise. And, in so doing, I'm going to save!"

A Greater Sign

- A. Now there's one implication in all of this that I wanted to bring out before we move on. And it's really why I worded this first heading the way I did: "A Greater Sign".
1. What I think we can draw from Jesus' logic here is that all of His other miracles and signs are intended to prepare for and lead into this one final sign. All of His other signs have only been little foretastes of the true and everlasting redemption He will accomplish only ultimately by way of His death for our sins and resurrection for our new life.
- B. Think about it with me.
1. When He heals a leper and declares Him ceremonially clean, it is a picture of the way He will ultimately heal and declare the sinner clean—a reality made possible only by way of His death and resurrection.
 2. When He restores sight to the blind, it is a picture of the way He will ultimately open the eyes of our hearts to see God again—a reality made possible only by way of His death and resurrection.
 3. When He takes a few loaves and feeds five thousand hungry bellies, it is a picture of the way He will ultimately lead us back to God who alone can satisfy our hungry souls—a reality made possible only by way of His death and resurrection.
 4. When He casts out demons, it is a picture of the way He will ultimately set us free from bondage to the devil—a reality made possible only by way of His death and resurrection.
 5. When He raises a dead man or woman, it is a picture of the way He will ultimately regenerate us by His Spirit and resurrect us on the last day—a reality made possible only by way of His death and resurrection.
- C. All of these other signs are pictures of what He will only ultimately accomplish by way of His death and resurrection. And that is a hard thing for many to swallow. Plenty of people want Jesus to come in here and now and perform a few miracles for them, make their life a little better, provide some entertainment, and so forth.
1. But when we start talking about the cross, we start talking about my sin, and repentance, and my need for forgiveness. And so many just won't go there. They want Jesus to be their Servant, their Showman perhaps. But they don't think they need Him as their Savior, and they certainly don't want Him as their Lord.

- D. And for people like this, who want all the signs but are unwilling to go where the signs are ultimately leading, Jesus says: “No more signs for you . . . ‘[except the sign of Jonah.](#)’ I’m not here to put on a show. I’m here to save your soul!”

(2) A Greater Man (vv. 31-32)

Learning from the Gentiles

- A. In [vv. 31-32](#), Jesus is really just continuing His rebuke of these men. He brings up two examples from the OT where the revelation that came from God was met with proper response.
1. What really stings about all this is the fact that these responses came not from within Israel—not from those you would expect to respond appropriately—but from Gentiles, from pagans, from those whom the Jews would consider their enemies. And Jesus is holding them out as models, as examples they can learn from.
- B. He’ll return to Jonah and the Ninevites in a moment, but the first example he gives is actually from the earlier times of King Solomon.
- C. When Solomon is being raised up as king after his father David, you might remember that God comes to him and offers to do anything for him that he might ask. And Solomon asks for wisdom. God is pleased and grants it to him in such a great measure that it would seem the whole world starts talking about it.
1. And that’s where this “[queen of the South](#)” in [v. 31](#) comes in. We know from [1 Kings 10](#) that this lady was the “[queen of Sheba](#)” ([v. 1](#))—a country far south of Israel. Most would locate it near modern day Yemen—about 1400 miles from Jerusalem, a journey that would take many weeks.
- D. And here’s the point: She hears rumor of the wisdom of Solomon and is willing to come all that way just to see it for herself. Let me read to you some of her own words: “⁶ [\[S\]he said to the king, ‘The report was true that I heard in my own land of your words and of your wisdom,⁷ but I did not believe the reports until I came and my own eyes had seen it. And behold, the half was not told me. Your wisdom and prosperity surpass the report that I heard.⁸ Happy are your men! Happy are your servants, who continually stand before you and hear your wisdom!⁹ Blessed be the Lord your God, who has delighted in you and set you on the throne of Israel! Because the Lord loved Israel forever, he has made you king, that you may execute justice and righteousness’” \(\[1 Kings 10:6–9\]\(#\)\).](#)
1. She responds in all this with adoration, ultimately, of YHWH, Solomon’s God.
- E. And then Jesus, in our text, takes this story that no doubt all these men were well familiar with, and He flips it on them: “If she, a pagan, Gentile, from over a thousand miles away, would respond to what God was revealing through Solomon, why in the world aren’t you, a Jew, responding to what God is revealing here right in front of you through Me?!”
1. “[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” (v. 31). You are closer than she ever was, you have greater revelation than she ever did, and yet nothing!

- F. And He goes on to make virtually the exact same point, again, with reference to Jonah. Let’s just read it: “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” (v. 32).
 - 1. These Assyrians, these guys were monsters. They were evil, they were wicked. They were enemies of Israel, they would dismantle the northern kingdom of Israel a few decades later. But when Jonah rolls into Nineveh with a message of coming judgment for their sin, the respond appropriately, they repent.
 - a. And Jesus is saying: “You’re the children of Abraham, the people of YHWH, and something greater than Jonah is right here in front of you, and yet nothing! You’re not repenting. You’re plotting My death. How hard is the human heart!”

A Greater Man

- A. Now, as with the first heading, there’s one implication in all of this that I wanted to bring out before we move on. And it’s really why I worded this second heading the way I did: “A Greater Man”.
- B. With Jesus’ reference to Himself as something greater than Solomon or Jonah, I think we are meant to see how the entirety of the OT has been preparing for His arrival.
 - 1. Just as all the signs Jesus performs are ultimately pointing toward and culminating in His work on the cross, so too we might say that all preceding revelation in the OT—whether it be through prophet, priest, or king, whether it be in the form of word or work, symbol or shadow—the entirety of the OT has been ultimately pointing toward and preparing us for Him.
 - a. Solomon and Jonah were pictures of Christ in many ways, but they were not the Christ. They themselves were in need of the redemption only Jesus could bring.
- C. Think of Solomon for a moment. His wisdom, His prosperity. It seemed like everything was just going up, up, up . . . until it all came crashing down. In fact, Solomon would be the last king to reign over a united Israel. After him, because of him, the kingdom splits into two.
 - 1. Immediately following the Queen of Sheba’s visit in [1 Kings 10](#), the whole thing unravels as we turn to [ch. 11](#) and read in [v. 1](#): “¹ Now King Solomon loved many foreign women . . . ⁴ [and] when Solomon was old his wives turned away his heart after other gods, and his heart was not wholly true to the Lord his God, as was the heart of David his father” (vv. 1, 4). Solomon’s wisdom would eventually spiral down into foolishness.
- D. But Jesus, from a young age we are told, was “filled with wisdom” ([Luke 2:40](#)). And as He got older, He only “increased in wisdom” ([Luke 2:52](#)). And, unlike Solomon, He remained wholly true to the Lord His God to the end, even through death. And His resurrection and ascension is His coronation. He sits down at the right hand of the Father to reign forever and ever.

1. He is the King to which Solomon merely pointed. In Him, Paul tells “are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Col 2:3). He has become for us “wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption” (1 Cor 1:30). All the things that Solomon ultimately aborted on, Jesus delivers. “Something greater than Solomon is here.”
- E. But not just Solomon. Jonah. You just do a hi-level skim of Jonah’s story and you think what a great dude with an amazing ministry. Everywhere he went, it seems, people were repenting and turning toward YHWH. But then you look a little closer and you realize his life, his heart, was a mess.
1. Jesus likens Himself to Jonah in the fish, right—“I’m going to be thrown into the water of God’s wrath and be raised for you.” Certainly there are similarities here, but there’s a massive difference in the way these things play out: Jonah was hurled into the sea on account of his own sin . . . Jesus was hurled into the sea on account of ours.
 - a. My junk is causing the waves. My rebellion has God all up in arms. And in love and mercy, Jesus throws Himself into that for me . . . and for Jonah, don’t you see?! That’s not even on the same plane. “Something greater than Jonah is here.”

(3) A Greater Light (vv. 33-36)

How Are You Going to Respond?

- A. Now, Jesus comes out from this discussion and, in vv. 33-36, He starts talking about lamps and eyes and light and darkness. And at first it seems confusing and a bit disjointed. But really it tracks right on this same line of thought.
- B. The basic sense is this: He is the lamp that God has lit. He is shining out by way of these signs, His preaching and ongoing ministry.
 1. And the question that He’s getting at, as we said at the first, is: What are you going to do with Him?
 - a. If you put Him in the cellar or set Him under a basket, your whole life will go dark. But if you receive Him, if you respond to what is being revealed in and through Him, if you set your eyes on Him, well then your whole life will be filled with light. That is the idea.
 - b. If you continue to reject and turn from Him, claiming to see, you will go blind, claiming to be wise you will become a fool. But if you turn and embrace all that He is for you, then everything in your life will start to make sense, all will come into marvelous light—admitting your own blindness, in Him, you will start to see, admitting your own foolishness, in Him, you will start to become wise.
- C. So all of our labor in this text this morning has been moving towards this one question of application, again: Are you responding to what God is revealing to you in Jesus?

1. For some of you it might just be the very beginnings of all this. Like the early disciples, you might just be following behind trying to piece together who Jesus really is. You're not sure you understand but you know you want to hear more. Keep coming, keep following, keep responding.
 2. Others of you, maybe you've been hearing it for quite some time, you get what sin and salvation and the cross are all about, and you've still been holding off, still riding the fence. Maybe today is the day. You bend a knee. You admit your sin and your need of Savior.
 3. Others of us, we've been walking with Jesus, perhaps for a long while now. Let me tell you, Jesus doesn't stop revealing Himself to you after you get saved, or born again, or whatever you want to call it. That's just the beginning. There are things right now He's revealing, things you know He's calling you towards, and you have to deal with the same question: How am I going to respond? Am I going to let Him be not just my Savior but my Lord?
- D. At the end of the day I actually think this demonized man becomes a wonderful illustration of what Jesus is describing for us here.
1. Matthew, in his account of the story, informs us that this man was not just mute, he was also blind. And when Jesus casts the demon out, he tells us, "[the man spoke and saw](#)" (Matt 12:22). Imagine that. Into the darkness, light breaks, and everything changes! That's what happens when Jesus gets ahold of a person.