

A Jesus Who Is The Greatest

Luke 11:29-32

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I. Seeking Signs

II. Seeking The Son

III. Seeking A Savior

Well, we've had a couple weeks off of it, but today we are jumping back into our tour through the Gospel of Luke as a church. The beginning of the book basically set up the story and how the story of Jesus fits into the whole scheme of the Bible and the story of mankind. Then the first major section of the book really outlined Jesus' mission and view of people...that He came to give God's love to rich people and poor people, sick people and healthy people, men and women, adults and children and people of all kinds of different races and colors of skin. That was for about four chapters and now, since we've been in about the middle of chapter 9, Luke has turned his attention to focus on the person of Jesus.

In the scene we're going to look at today, Jesus basically says He's the greatest person who has ever lived and ever will live. So I titled my sermon, "A Jesus Who Is The Greatest."

Let's go ahead and read it and then we'll jump in.

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. For as Jonah became a sign to the people of Nineveh, so will the Son of Man be to this generation. 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. 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.

-Luke 11:29-32

"A Jesus Who Is The Greatest." When you think of the greatest person who ever lived, who do you think comes to most people's minds?

I was curious to know, so I asked the all-knowing...internet and lo and behold Time magazine had a list of the 100 most significant figures of history.

Here's some from the top 20. Albert Einstein. Abe Lincoln. William Shakespeare. Julius Ceasar. Those guys are pretty significant I guess. But guess who was number one? I couldn't believe it. Jesus Christ!

So both the Bible and Time magazine actually agree...Jesus is the greatest person who has ever lived! I'm not sure what Time magazine's criteria was but in our story for today, Jesus points to three reasons why He is the greatest and why it's so good for us to believe that. So my three sermon points for today are: "Seeking Signs, Seeking The Son and Seeking A Savior."

Jim Collins in his hallmark book, "Good To Great" says, "By definition, it is not possible to everyone to be above the average...in the end, it is impossible to have a great life unless it is a meaningful life. And it is very difficult to have a meaningful life without meaningful work."

What I hope we all walk away seeing and believing, whether it's for the first time or the five-hundred millionth time, is that "Jesus is the greatest because He gives us life."

I. Seeking Signs

Let's jump into this first point today, "Seeking Signs." As Jesus was teaching and preaching and healing people and performing miracles, more and more people became fascinated with him. Whole crowds we're coming out to see Him, that's what verse 29 in our passage says, "the crowds were increasing." It was easily hundreds and likely thousands of people.

Now for most people, throughout history, whenever they start to get a following, they've thought of that as a good thing. Businesses and artists and the goal of so many people's lives is to have more and more people use your business or your product and that's primarily how we most often define success right? The bigger the numbers the more successful you are.

But Jesus didn't see it that way. He wasn't stoked that the crowds were increasing. And that wasn't because He didn't like people. He had the heart of God, who is not wanting any to perish but as many as possible come to know Him. He had the heart of God who promised Abraham spiritual children who loved God that would be as many as the sand on the seashore. So Jesus wasn't against numbers and crowds.

What He was against was what compelled the crowds, what made them come out to see Him. Earlier in our chapter in verse 16, Luke says the people "kept seeking from him a sign from heaven" and then in verse 29 of our passage today Jesus says this:

Luke 11:29 "This generation is an evil generation. It seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah."

Those are hard words. He's hard on the crowd. He says people who seek signs are evil. That's pretty serious. We'll talk about the Jonah bin our next point, for now I want to talk a bit about why we as a people tend to have a desire or a fascination with signs, with the spectacular or the supernatural if you will.

What is it you think they wanted to see? Jesus had been doing all kinds of miracles all the time up to that point. Just a few verses earlier, he cast a demon out of a dude, a couple chapters ago he miraculously fed 5,000 people, and before that he raised a little girl from the dead.

I mean it kind of seems like Jesus had been doing a bunch of signs already. But it wasn't enough. They wanted more. They were more interested in what Jesus could do or would do than Him as a person.

We fall into this trap so easily today. An ancient false teaching that sprung up in the early church within the first few hundred years after Jesus came is a belief called "gnosticism." The central tenant of gnosticism is that spirit is good and matter is evil.

And we can easily tend to start to believing that and acting that way. Julie Canlis has some good things to say about this in her book, "Theology of the Ordinary." She writes,

"If God the Son took on flesh, then our whole relation to the material world has been changed...the Spirit's mission is to put us in Christ - to unite us to Him, and let His life flow into us. Do you see what the Spirit has to work with? Physical things and physical people. This is the realm of 'spirituality.' There is no higher plane.

Some Christians wrongly associate the Spirit with prophetic words, spiritual insight, miracles, and ecstasies - things assumed to be above ordinary life. (On the contrary) it came as no surprise to the early church that He who hovered over the waters of chaos to bring forth life, that He who hovered over Mary's amniotic waters to give the Word a physical body, should also minister to us in concrete, embodied ways.

The Spirit's playing field has always been with real people in a real world. Unlike modern definitions of spirituality that highlight the individual and the interior essence of a that person, Christian spirituality is always painfully, even embarrassingly, concrete... (Today's) 'spirituality' has nothing to do with the Holy Spirit's realm but with the individual's mental state achieved away from the things of the flesh."

We can get so easily fascinated by the fantastic and think that miracles and spiritual experiences are the real things of God. What Julie Canlis is saying and what Jesus is saying is that's not the point. We're not to seek those things, those kinds of signs. We're to seek Jesus Himself. Jesus is the point because He is God in the flesh and the Spirit's main desire and goal is to connect us to His person.

Maybe you've secretly wished you could witness some supernatural act of God. Maybe you're not yet a Christian or you are one but in the back of your head you wonder... is it really all true? Is there really a God and a Jesus-- a cross and a resurrection? Is it really true? I wish there was some sort of incontrovertible proof... Have you ever thought that or wished for that?

This is most likely what the crowds were asking for. Jesus' miracles could be interpreted in several ways, and for all the people knew maybe it was some sort of magic or something. They wanted a bigger and more direct sign or proof-- most likely something from the heavens where Jesus would just let loose and unleash his power. They wanted to see Him exhibit Godlike power-- Old Testament style-- by ripping open the sky, or making angels suddenly appear to praise him, or by making wind and the weather obey his voice.

The funny thing is Jesus actually did do all that stuff, just never on command, and never in front of his opponents. In response to crowds Jesus says they are "evil and adulterous" for seeking a sign. Why is that?

Here's why: If Jesus was actually God, then as God, is it fitting for Him to dance whenever man tells Him to dance? Would it be the Godlike thing for him to do exactly as man wishes, whenever he demands it? When man says, "Jump!" is God supposed to say, "How high"? Isn't that a role reversal?

If God did respond that way, wouldn't it belittle His very God-ness? I mean, who's the boss? Wouldn't it end up seeming like man is the one in charge, and not God? Effectively, what you have here in the demanding of a sign is mere man literally stepping into the place of God and telling Him what he must do. Which is why Jesus says it is evil.

Now Jesus could've just left it at that, and He would have been fully within His rights and God. But Jesus came to reconnect people to God, so He gives grace. Right after saying He won't give them a sign He throws 'em a bone and actually gives them a sign anyway... just not the kind of sign they were looking for.

Today have you been looking for and longing for a sign from God? Beware. That's often not what we need. What we need is Jesus Himself, because Jesus is the greatest thing and Jesus is the greatest because He is God in the flesh who gives us life.

So let's transition and talk about what it means to truly seek Jesus and the one sign He does give in our next point, "Seeking The Son."

II. Seeking The Son

In this scene we're looking at today Jesus brings up three different people who have big stories and roles in the big story of the Bible. He brings up a king, King Solomon. He brings up a queen, the Queen of the South otherwise known as the Queen of Sheba. And He brings up a Prophet named Jonah.

First Solomon. At its heart, the story of the Bible is a story of God creating and gathering a people for Himself, who experience His grace and love Him. At one point in the story there are a fairly large number of people who come to believe in God and worship Him. But...they say they want a king over them, so that they can be like other the other nations of the world at the time.

God's saddened by this request and says they've rejected Him as being King over them, but goes ahead and allows it saying they will see and learn that no king could ever be as good as He is. And that starts a long line of kings in the Bible who all fail, one after another. Some of them have some good traits and redeeming qualities and some are just all out terrible, but all of them fail, which creates a longing and expectation for God to come once again and be King over them.

You can read about all the kings in the Bible in the books called 1st and 2nd Kings. Solomon is the third king. And Solomon starts out pretty good before he blows it later in life with women. But he starts off good. When King David his Dad passes off the throne to him, God appears to Solomon in a dream and says, "Ask me for whatever you want and I'll give it to you."

Solomon in a moment of great humility asks God for wisdom, to have an understanding mind to govern the people well. In response God says this,

1 Kings 3:11-13 "11 Because you have asked this, and have not asked for yourself long life or riches or the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself understanding to discern what is right, 12 behold, I now do according to your word. Behold, I give you a wise and discerning mind, so that none like you has been before you and none like you shall arise after you. 13 I give you also what you have not asked, both riches and honor, so that no other king shall compare with you, all your days."

And God's promise proved true. Numerous governing situations arose where Solomon proved his wisdom and his fame and fortune spread and grew. The nation of Israel, under Solomon became one of the richest kingdoms to ever rule on earth. People from all over the world heard of His wisdom and traveled to meet him and pay tribute.

One of those people was this black Queen, the Queen of Sheba down in Ethiopia. After journeying hundreds of miles to seek out Solomon, after she meets Him and talks to Him she becomes a believer in God and worships Him.

So now let's go back to Jesus' words in our story for today. In verse 31 He says, "The queen of the South...came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and behold, something greater than Solomon is here."

The Queen of Sheba traveled over 1,500 miles on a camel to meet the wisest person who ever lived, King Solomon. Jesus says He is greater than Solomon. If someone as lofty as this queen was willing to travel so far to meet Solomon and believe in and worship His God then there's no distance too great for any of us to get to Jesus. There's nothing we shouldn't be willing to do or give up in order to meet Jesus, believe in Him and through Him enjoy all the blessing of God.

Jesus is the greatest. Even wiser than Solomon. And even more than that He came as God in the flesh, the eternal King to win and save the hearts of His people. That's why one of the things the Bible calls is Him the "King of king and Lord of lords."

So let me ask you a question, what holds you back? Jesus' reasoning is that He is greater than Solomon and if the Queen of Sheba was willing put a lot of effort in order to know him and His God, what holds you back from seeking Jesus out and knowing Him as your God? What holds you back? What keeps you from seeking?

Is it that it's not easy, that it requires effort? Is it that you know it would cost you time, money, and maybe even changes in your life and priorities? Is it that you just like to be entertained, you like the fantastic and aren't interested in the nitty gritty stuff of life and the Son who took on human flesh to give life? What is it for you?

For me, most often, I think that it requires me to really sit and be honest with myself. And that's hard. Soul work is hard. It's easier to just do stuff, then stop to seek God and be present with Him.

In verse 30 of our text Jesus mentions the Prophet Jonah, calls Himself the Son of Man and says that's the only kind of sign He'll be. In the book of Matthew, who also recorded the life and ministry of Jesus, He remembered and wrote down some more of what Jesus said on this occasion. He writes,

An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. 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. -Matthew 12:39-40

This is Jesus showing off His greater than Solomon wisdom. First, he points back to the Bible, because it's always God's intention that we rely on His Word for truth rather than our experience. Second, He points backward in time to Jonah and what happened with him and the fish, and says that a similar thing is going to happen to him. When it does happen-- THAT will be a sign from God to them.

So what is Jesus getting at with this? The story of Jonah is a story of a prophet of God who didn't want to be a prophet of God. God tell Him to this place called Nineveh and preach and Jonah gets on a boat and goes the opposite direction. So God sends a storm after him.

The storm is raging and Jonah is thrown overboard in order to save the lives of the sailors. You figure Jonah is a goner but instead he gets swallowed whole by this great fish. Then after three days the fish spits him up on dry land and Jonah is alive and able to go preach to Nineveh, so that they might be saved. And they are.

Jesus looks forward in time to what He was going to do in dying on the cross and rising again. Then he looks backward to what happened with Jonah and compares it to what He is about to do. "I'm going to give up my life and be in darkness for three days in order to save some people, and when I come back to life on the third day, good news will be declared so that many people will repent and be spared."

The sign of Jonah is the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. And it is the royal proof, evidence, and sign of the truth of Jesus-- that He is from God and that His salvation is real. Listen to Romans 1:4 on this which says, "[Jesus] was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead."

What Jesus does here is hang all the truth of His whole life and ministry-- the whole of Christianity-- on his resurrection from the dead. This provides an opportunity for solid evidence against His truth claims, and makes Christianity different than every other religion in the world. But what is most astonishing to us-- what makes it a real sign for us and not just some fiat demonstration of divine power—is that it speaks to the deepest longing of our hearts and lives.

Beneath the surface our deepest struggle-- our deepest challenge and the reason we long for some sort of sign-- is because we doubt. And why do we doubt? We doubt because we are afraid. Afraid of the unknown. Afraid of life not turning out well. Afraid of the wrong thing happening. Afraid of darkness and death. But Jesus goes to the heart of that doubt and fear by rising from the dead. Through His resurrection He secures the promise of new life for us and says it is give to all who trust in Him.

It is the greatest sign of all. It's the greatest sign He could ever have given because it's the sign that most deeply ministers to the needs of our hearts. Life!

Sometimes I've had friends say to me, "Man, if I could just see Jesus, or if I just saw him risen, or saw some miracle or sign...then of course I'd believe." I don't think so. I don't think so because I don't think our inability to believe is primarily a head issue. Not only would it diminish the significance of what Jesus did if He had to keep dying and rising in every generation in order to prove it to everyone, but the attitude-- the heart of demanding a sign-- shows that no sign will really do. The only sign that can really get through to us is one that addresses the heart. And that's exactly what the resurrection of Jesus does for us.

So let me just ask you, where do you need the resurrecting life and power of Jesus to minister to you today? Where are there areas of deadness and darkness that need new life? Where is there fear, doubt, and distrust that you need to turn over to the trustworthy savior? In what areas of your life do you need to hear The Gospel-- that Jesus is real, He is true, He is alive, and He knows and He loves and cares for you?

The resurrection of Jesus isn't just our ticket to ride into heaven when we die, though Jesus does promise eternal life to those who believe. It's more than that. Jesus' resurrection is the life-giving power of God that He administers unto us here and now. He gives us new life! And that's why He truly is the greatest. Jesus is the greatest because He gives us life.

Well, we have one final point for today, "Seeking A Savior."

III. Seeking A Savior

In this final point I want to talk a bit about the theme of judgment in our passage today.

Jesus says the queen of the South and the men of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment and condemn generations for not recognizing the greatness of Jesus and in repentance putting faith in Him.

Romans 1:18 in the Bible tells us judgment is happening all the time-- bad stuff which is the wrath of God, meant to wake us up so that we'll turn to Him. Hebrews 12:6-7 in the Bible teaches us what may be judgment for some is simply loving discipline for others-- meant to teach them and draw them closer to God. That's judgment in general.

However, both the Old and New Testament teach that there will be one great Day of Judgment, called a last or final judgment. Bible commentator David Hubbard summarizes it well when he says that,

“Judgment at history’s end is the climax of a process by which God holds nations and persons accountable to him as Creator and Lord.” This is the judgment day Jesus is referring to.

Philippians 2:10 in the Bible talks about that day when Jesus returns and it says everyone-- believers and unbelievers alike on that day will see Jesus, bow on their knees before Him, and acknowledge Him as the King and Lord of all. So, there’s no “rapture” or people disappearing. The word “rapture” doesn’t even occur in the Bible. Everyone’s there before The Throne. Some are bowing in worship and some are bowing in fear-- about to receive their just sentence.

On that day Jesus will be here, sitting on His throne, and will execute judgment as the great judge of all. Here is Jesus describing that day in His own words.

Matthew 25:31-34,41: “When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world... Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.’”

Intense stuff. There’s a day when everyone will have to give an answer to God for there life. And Jesus will be there as the judge.

When Jesus looks back at the Book of Jonah He’s basically pointing out that all it took was one not very good sermon given by Jonah for the Ninevites to repent. On the day of judgment those same Ninevites and the queen of the south will be there affirming and praising the justice of Jesus because those who saw Him in the flesh and now have been able to hear and read His words have had so much more.

Jesus blessed the human race with the greatest sermons and the greatest demonstrations of grace. And all the generations since Jesus and until now, have heard more and have seen even more of God’s grace and glory, so it should be easier for us right?

But it isn’t, is it? We have all the benefit of Jesus’s extensive teaching and preaching recorded here in a book. We have all the evidence for Jesus’s resurrection from the dead. We have all the witness of history which has shown we cannot solve the problems of humanity. Turning to God and His Son for salvation should be obvious solution.

But it isn’t. Why? Ultimately because when it boils down to it we think we are great and that clouds our vision from seeing the greatness of Jesus. Jesus calls us to see His greatness.

So my concluding question for studying this passage is this: What makes Jesus so great? Is it that He’s God and has all power, and will judge everyone? I don’t think so.

Repeatedly throughout Luke Jesus has been saying He will die and rise again. Here, He says that’s the sign to believe. Why’s that the sign, why’s it so great? Because He dies to pay the penalty for sin, for all our faults and failures and the horrible things done to us.

God’s the judge. We deserve judgment. So what makes Jesus such a great judge? Because He gets up off His throne, climbs down from behind his judgment bench, and gives up His life to pay the penalty of justice we deserve.

There is no other judge like that. Can you imagine it? I was in court a couple years ago for a stop sign ticket. If you have ever been to court, you know that it's intimidating. There's this towering wooden bench/podium with the judge sitting behind it in a black robe... Can you imagine what it would be like if it was your turn to come up to the podium and speak into the microphone, and then the judge gets up, climbs down from his perch, pulls out his wallet and say, "I'll pay the fine for you," and hands you the money? Can you imagine that?

Jesus' call for us to look at Him-- to see who He is and embrace Him with all of our hearts and lives. We call Jesus the Savior because He saves us from judgment. Through Him we escape the ails and perils of this fallen world. That's why Jesus is so great. He is the gracious King who gives His life in order to save His people.

Jesus is greater than Jonah, greater than the queen of the South, greater than king Solomon, and greater than you or I because He's the King who uses His power to give His life away in order to save us! Jesus is truly great.

Is He great in your eyes? Are you just interested and fascinated with Jesus? When we see Jesus in all His goodness, in all His grace, we see how truly great He is because through Him we receive life.

Conclusion

Well, let's conclude and prepare to respond by coming the table of Jesus. We do this each week here at our church and one of the reasons we always do it is because with our bodies, we participate in this ceremony which says Jesus is great.

Instead of standing before a table of judgment we stand before a table with bread and wine on it which tells us Jesus died to pay for all the wrongs, so we could have grace and be saved.

We started out today by talking about some of the great men of history. None compare to Jesus.

Jesus is the most powerful person who ever lived. Jesus is the wisest person who ever lived. And Jesus is the Lord who gave His life on a cross, rose again and lives today to give you life. And for that He is truly truly great.

So let's stand and read some words of confession, spend a minute or so allowing Jesus' Spirit to speak to us and then read some words of pardon and assurance.

Confession

Lord, we confess we have been great in our own eyes and because of it failed to see how good and great You are. Open our eyes to see the sign of your greatness Jesus.

Assurance

Jesus is our savior. He was judged for us so that we might be saved. Jesus, you are our King of Kings and Lord of Lords.