

The Greatness of Your Savior

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If you have your Bibles, you can turn to Luke 11. I know it's been a whole month since we've been in Luke. Do you remember what the book is about or have you forgotten? As you're finding it, I want you to know that as I'm teaching through a book, I keep reading ahead to get the flow of the context and it's getting pretty serious in Luke. If you thought it's been serious so far, it gets [more] scary. We're getting into some pretty scary stuff. We [have] one more little section and a couple little verses—verses 33 through 36—[that aren't] too scary, but after that it gets scary for a long time.

What's happening [in our text in Luke 11] is [that] Jesus is reaching the end of His ministry. He has come on the scene and He has taught, He has dialogued with people, [and] He has done miracles. As the persecution increases, the opposition increases, and as people are trying to discredit Him and kill Him, He knows His time is coming. Because of that, He becomes a lot more direct—very direct, in fact. [He is] very forceful. [There's] no bantering, no little dialogues. He just goes after them.

In the weeks to come, what we're going to discover is a lot of very confrontational, very forceful statements that Jesus makes because He loves people, frankly. He wants to see them saved. He is the Messiah. He is the King. He has come to seek and save those who are lost [see Luke 19:10], and He wants to make sure they repent and believe. But the problem is

[that] they're not repenting and believing. It's kind of like parenting: when the mild rebuke doesn't work, you start amping up the rebuke and the consequences until there is some sort of change. This is what we see Jesus doing in these chapters of Luke. As we move toward His crucifixion, we see Him speaking a lot more forcefully and directly to people, especially when He is speaking to crowds of people. You'll see how that is as we go into the text.

If you remember, a month ago, as we ended in [Luke 11:]26, the first part of [Luke 11] is about prayer. We learned about the Disciples' Prayer, and Jesus taught us other things on prayer. Then Jesus heals a demon-possessed man, and this causes problems because there are groups of Jewish leaders who are following Him around for the sole purpose of trying to discredit Him. The reason is [because] Jesus has exposed their sin, made them look bad in the eyes of the people, and so they hate Jesus' guts. So, they travel around trying to accuse Him, expose Him, trick Him, deceive Him, [and] discredit Him in the eyes of the people. This is what has been going on.

This is what happened when He healed the demon-possessed man—they said He did it by the power of Satan. Jesus said, “No, that couldn't be because Satan can't be against [himself] or his kingdom wouldn't stand” [see Luke 11:17–18]. But then He tells a pretty frightening little statement, and I think this was more directed toward the man who had the demon cast out of him. He said, “Listen, if you [have] a demon cast out of you and you don't get anybody to move in [to] replace that demon, you're going to be in big trouble because that demon is going to come back with seven of his buddies more wicked than himself and he's going to make your life really miserable [see Luke 11:26]. I think what He is saying is: “Listen, I cast the demon out, [so] you had better repent and believe in Me, because if you don't do that, you're opening yourself up for more wickedness than you've ever experienced.” That is what has happened in the preceding context of our text today.

Everybody wants to know what I'm going to preach on [ahead of time], so I make what are called "guesstimated preaching schedules," which are never right. They're good for one week, and then after that, they [become] increasingly less accurate. So, I'm constantly redoing the sermon schedule because I never know what's going to happen. I was going to just preach [Luke 11:]27–28, [which is about] this woman who stands up, and says, "Blessed be the mother who bore You, and the breasts that nursed You," and Jesus then replies to her. Most Bibles, and this might be the case in your Bibles—I looked in several—have a break after [Luke 11:]28, and then it goes into another section on the sign of Jonah the prophet. [That] is how most Bibles are broken up. But after I started looking at it, especially this week, I thought, "No, that's not a good break." So, we are going to look at [Luke 11:]27–32 this morning and I think, as we go through here, you will see how they all fit together. You can follow along as I read, starting in Luke 11:27:

While Jesus was saying these things, one of the women in the crowd raised her voice and said to Him, "Blessed is the womb that bore You and the breasts at which You nursed." But He said, "On the contrary, blessed are those who hear the word of God and observe it."

As the crowds were increasing, He began to say, "This generation is a wicked generation; it seeks for a sign, and yet no sign will be given to it but the sign of Jonah. For just as Jonah became a sign to the Ninevites, so will the Son of Man be to this generation. The Queen of the South will rise up with the men of this generation at the judgment and condemn them, because 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 stand up with this generation at the judgment and condemn it, because they repented at the

preaching of Jonah; and behold, something greater than Jonah is here. [Luke 11:27–32]

From this text, Jesus wants you to learn that He is greater, more blessed, more worthy of praise and adoration than any other person or thing. He gives three examples and He wants you to know this so you won't neglect your salvation. Salvation is the undercurrent of the whole text.

The first point is: Not Mary, but Jesus. Look at [Luke 11:]27: “While Jesus was saying these things. . .” He has just talked about demon possession and the kingdom of Satan. After He has said those things, “One of the women in the crowd raised her voice and said to Him, ‘Blessed is the womb that bore You and the breasts at which You nursed.’” What’s going on here? This is what’s going on. A huge crowd of people has assembled. As a matter of fact, as we read in [Luke 11:]29, it says “the crowds were increasing,” and they keep on increasing. If you look at [Luke 11:37], you’ll notice it says that Jesus has lunch with this Pharisee, and then in [Luke 12:1], it says: “Under these circumstances, after so many thousands of people had gathered together that they were stepping on one another. . .” There [are] just *gobs* of people, thousands of people, and they’re crowding around.

Last night, we were driving on the freeway [and] there was an accident—two cars collided and smashed into the rail. Of course, there was a huge mass of people gathered to see. Every car that drove by wanted to drive by really slow[ly] to see if there [were] any dead bodies on the road. Sometimes [when that happens] I don’t even look. I look the other way just to defy the gawking problem. Anyway, these people [in our text] are kind of the same way. A little crowd gets started [as] Jesus starts teaching [and] healing [people], and word gets out. As more people gather, more people are then attracted to the more people who have gathered, and pretty soon there is a bigger crowd, and then more people want to come to see what’s going on in the bigger crowd. Pretty soon, more and more people are gathering until there are thousands of people clustered around Jesus. That’s what’s going on.

In the midst of this, some woman just shouts out, raises her voice, and says, “Blessed is the womb that bore You, and the breasts at which You nursed.” She is saying, “Blessed be Your mom.” She’s excited about Jesus. She, for sure, believes Jesus is a prophet, maybe *the* prophet, maybe the Messiah. She is excited, she sees the miracles, she hears the teaching, and she’s just ecstatic, excited. “Blessed be Your mom!” Every Jewish woman wanted to be the mother of the Messiah. Every Jewish woman would love to be the mother of a great prophet. So, this woman is thinking in her mind, “Wow! This man is great! His mother must have been really something!”

Why would she be thinking that? [It is] because at this time it was thought among the Jews, and it’s still common even among Christians in the Church today, that there is this unavoidable, rigid, inflexible, almost scientific or mathematical law that says [that] if you’re godly you will be healthy, wealthy, and wise, and if you’re ungodly, you’ll be cursed. Where did they get that idea from? They got it from some of the covenants that God made. For instance, when God made the covenant with Moses at Sinai, if you read toward the end of Deuteronomy, you will find [verses that say things like], “If you will obey My voice, if you do these things, you will be blessed, and this will happen, and this will happen, and you will prosper in the land, and all these things. Diseases will stay away from you.” It’s just blessing, blessing, blessing.

But if you disobey, then there is this huge list of curses that would come upon you—one curse after another. You’ll be devoured by the sword, and [will endure] pestilence, plague, and [drought]. This kind of thought, this blessing for obedience and cursing for disobedience led to th[is] distorted view [in later times]. [Those promises were] given to a people who were making a covenant with God to love Him. Supposedly, they would already be saved because the great commandment was “to love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength” [see Matthew 12:30]. That’s what God was after: “I want a heart commitment. Once you have that heart commitment, then you begin to obey Me because you love Me.”

The same thing is taught in the New Testament. Jesus says, “If you love Me, you will” what? “keep My commandments” [see John 14:15]. So, love is always to be the motivation for obedience, never earning God’s favor, earning God’s grace. Grace, by definition, cannot be earned because it is undeserved, unearned favor. So, God makes this covenant, and He says, “Make a covenant with Me,” and all the people said, “We will do what You say. We will obey You.” He says, “OK. Here it is. Here’s my covenant I’m making with you. You can prosper. [If] you do this, I’m going to bless you. If you, as a nation, begin to go astray, then these things will come upon you as a nation.”

The Jews took this concept and they then moved a degree away from it to what theologians call “retribution theology.” Retribution theology is when you take it upon yourself that if you ever get a raise at work, [you think], “I must be godly,” but if you hit your thumb with a hammer, [you think], “I must have sinned.” Every time something “bad” happens to you, “It’s my sin,” and every time something good [happens], “It’s my godliness.” This [attitude] really, then, moves into what theologians like to call “compensation theology,” which is, “When I’m good, God pays me with blessing, and when I’m bad, He afflicts me with pain. He withholds my ‘wages.’” Pretty soon, people get into the false mindset that the only way they can ever be blessed is if they’re good and then God gives them blessing. But we know that’s not true because we know that we are all wicked, we are all enemies, and then Christ saves us, right [see Romans 5:10]? While we were yet enemies, God loved us.

Think about Job. How does God describe Job to Satan? He was a *blameless* man, upright, fearing the Lord, turning away from evil [see Job 1:1, 8], and yet look how much he suffered. Look at his friends. They believed in retribution theology, didn’t they? What did they say? “Oh, no. You sinned! You have to have sinned. I mean, look at you! You lost everything. You lost your health [see Job 1:13–2:7]. The only thing you’re left with is that wife who is telling you to curse God and die [see Job 2:9–10]. There’s something wrong. What was it? Just come clean. Just tell us.” For chapter after

chapter they're accusing him falsely of doing evil and [saying that] that is why this has come upon him. Not true.

When you read through the psalms [and] you read the [writings of the] prophets, what is one of their common cries? "Why are the wicked prospering?" They want[ed] to pull their hair out. Why? [It is] because they believed in retribution theology, too. [They would ask, regarding the wicked], "Why is this happening? Why are their eyes bulging from fatness, and the imagination of their hearts run wild [see Psalm 73:7]? Look at them! They're flourishing like a green tree in its native soil [see Psalm 37:35]! What is going on?" [They reason this way] because they had ingrained in their thinking this idea that God only blesses godly people, and He curses ungodly ones. But the fact is, God only blesses ungodly people and the way they become godly is when God blesses them, and the way they stay godly is God blesses them. At the beginning it's His grace, in the middle it's His grace, and at the end it's His grace. It's *grace*. As soon as you begin to think that you can find favor with God, then you've bought in, really, to compensation theology. You're trying to *earn* God's grace, which, of course, you can't do.

So, what's interesting here [in Luke 11:27] is this woman. I don't think she really has bad motives or anything—she just blurts out, "Blessed is the womb! Blessed is your mother who nursed You and raised You!" Why? [It is] because [she thought that Mary] must have been super-godly. [She thought that] God looked out over all the women of the earth, and said, "OK, who's the most godly one? Who is the perfect mom? *She's* going to give birth to the Messiah." Not so. The Roman Catholic Church teach[es] the doctrine of what is called the "immaculate conception." It's not true. It's not found in the Bible. It's a doctrine [that] says that Mary was born sinless, and that's how she gave birth to sinless Jesus. Think about that. How did Mary get sinless? Were her parents sinless? Well, they'd have to be. What about their parents, and their parents' parents? Pretty soon the whole human race is sinless [if you follow that line of thinking].

When Mary prayed in her Magnificat, she rejoiced in God her what? Savior [see Luke 1:47]. Why? Because she was a sinner, [that's why]. Mary wasn't super-godly, [and therefore] God used her to be the mother of the Messiah; she was a sinner, and by grace, God saved her, and by grace God chose her to be the mother of the Messiah.

If you were to go to some master craftsman's shop, you [would] see all these different tools there. The guy makes these incredible pieces of furniture or whatever. [When] you're looking at the furniture, you don't [say], "Oh, interesting. Man, those are great tools. Blessed be those tools! I can't believe those tools made that furniture." That would be ridiculous. The tools just sit there—without the craftsman they'd just sit there and get rusty. The tools don't do anything. Well, we're just tools.

You say, "That person's a great preacher."

"OK, who saved him?"

"God did."

"Who gave him his spiritual gifts?"

"God did."

"Who gave him the opportunity to have training?"

"God did."

"Who empowers him when he preaches?"

"God [does]."

"Who empowers the Word of God when he preaches?"

"Well, God does. So, praise the preacher!" That's like saying, "Praise the tool!"

Mary was blessed because she was chosen, but never think that Mary was chosen to be the mother of the Messiah because she earned some favor with God. That is not the case at all.

[Also note that] if Jesus wanted to promote the worship of Mary, praying to Mary, this is like t-ball text here, isn't it? The woman spouts off, there are tons of people listening, and He could say, "You know? You're right! Blessed be Mary! Pray to Mary, worship Mary, bow down to Mary. She is the queen of heaven. She is co-redeemer. You have to go through Mary to

be saved.” Is that what Jesus says? Look at the text [in Luke 11]:28: “But He said, ‘On the contrary.’ ” The word [translated “contrary”] in the Greek could mean several things. It could mean something like this: “the exact opposite,” or, “no, Mary is not blessed at all, but something else is.” That’s one way of taking it. Another way of taking it is, “Mary, on the contrary, is not the *only one* who is blessed.” That’s how it is in this text: “On the contrary, Mary is not the only one who is blessed.” Well, then, who is? “Blessed are those who hear the Word of God and observe it.”

Think about this. Mary was told the word of God by the angel, [told] that she was going to give birth to the Messiah. Do you remember how she responded? She said, “May it be with me according to your word” [see Luke 1:38]. She heard the word of God, and then she responded in submission. She heard the word of God, and she observed it. Jesus isn’t denying that Mary was blessed; Jesus isn’t lowering Mary, and saying, “Well, Mary’s nothing special. My mom wasn’t that great. I mean, yeah, she did give birth while a virgin. She is pretty unique, and I am the Messiah, which is pretty unique. What other mother can sit around with the other moms, and say, ‘My son spoke the universe into existence’?” That makes “student of the month” look pretty pale, doesn’t it?

But He isn’t saying [that] Mary is nothing special, [that] Mary is average, [or] let’s bring Mary down to some sort of average plane. He’s not saying that. Yes, Mary is abundantly blessed. We know that because in Luke 1:48, when Mary is praising God, when she gives her inspired, prophetic utterance, she says: “All generations will count me blessed.” Jesus isn’t contradicting that. What’s He’s saying is this: Mary is blessed, yes, but “on the contrary,” she’s not the only one. Anyone who hears the Word of God and observes it, that person is equally blessed. That’s what He’s saying. That is just amazing. Being the mother of the Messiah is a pretty huge deal, isn’t it? Jesus just takes all believers and raises them up to the same status as Mary. That is just amazing.

Keep in mind [that] at that time, Jewish women were looked down upon. They weren’t given the rights [women] have now. Granted, according to the

Old Testament Scriptures, Jewish women were to be treated with respect, and kindness, and things like that. They weren't to be reduced to slavery. Yet, in the culture at this time, and [with] Roman influence, and Greek influence, a lot of things that were going on, a lot of women were treated in a substandard way. There were even Jewish men who, at the time, would wake up every morning, and say, "Lord, I thank You [that] I am not a Gentile, a slave, or a woman." A lot of people have really cried foul at that, but the fact is, Jewish men had privileges in that society [that] women did not. So, it wasn't like they were saying, "Women are worthless," they were just saying, "I thank God that [He] has given me these privileges."

Keep in mind that when Jesus has this woman just on her own, spontaneously, blurt out and bless Mary, Jesus is taking this opportunity to teach something very important: that it was not Mary alone who was super-blessed. She is super-blessed, but so is everyone else who hears the Word of God and observes it, not just Mary.

[Also note that] Mary had an angel speak to her. She was a young woman, and she observed, or submitted to, what the angel told her. Now get this: The crowd in front of Jesus is standing in front of the Word of God incarnate. John 1:1 [says]: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God," and [John 1:]14 [says]: "And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us." They aren't getting a message from some messenger; they're standing in front of the Message, the Word of God Himself, God the Word. Unlike Mary, who heard the message and submitted to it, they also have miracles to accompany the Word and they still aren't believing.

That is what Jesus is after here. He's trying to show the crowd, "Listen, everyone who hears and observes is blessed." What is a synonym for somebody who hears and obeys God's Word? That's a Christian, right? Isn't that what Christians are? Jesus says, "My sheep hear My voice. . . and they follow Me" [John 10:27]. There it is. That's what it means to be a Christian. [Something to keep in mind is that] when you have more revelation and you reject that revelation, it doesn't go well with you. I fear for people

who come to churches like Calvary Bible Church, where they hear teaching from the Word of God on Sunday morning, and [in] Sunday school, and [at] every single other church function. I've had people tell me, "Man, this church is amazing!"

"Why's that?"

"Well, everywhere we go there's Scripture on everything. Every little pamphlet and every little piece of paper has biblical justification for it." Well, you know what? That's great. . . unless you reject it. Do you remember what Jesus said in Luke 12:47–48, when He [was] talking about the parable of the sensible steward? He [said] this: "And that slave who knew his master's will and did not get ready or act in accord with his will, will receive many lashes" [Luke 12:47]. Notice [that the slave] knew the truth but didn't observe it. Then [Jesus] says:

But the one who did not know it, and committed deeds worthy of a flogging, will receive but few. From everyone who has been given much, much will be required; and to whom they entrusted much, of him they will ask all the more. [Luke 12:48]

Jesus is telling the crowd, "Listen, Mary's not [the only one who is] blessed—anybody who hears the Word of God and responds to it [is blessed], and that could be you right now!" The fact that [they] did not want to obey tells us something. When somebody says, "I'm a Christian, but I don't have to go to church. I don't have to read my Bible. I don't have to pray. I don't have to serve. I don't have to give. I don't have to obey God. I'm just getting out of hell, that's what I'm doing. I'm just escaping. I've got fire insurance from Jesus." That's not a Christian, that's just a deceived person. [Do you] remember what James says? "Anyone who is a hearer of the word and not a doer of the Word is" what? "self-deluded" [see James 1:23]. Do you remember what Jesus said at the end of the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 7, when He gives those two little parables? Let me remind you. [Turn to] Matthew 7:24–27 [and] listen to this—[it is] the same theme that

runs all the way through the gospels. (Man, are we going to encounter it in the next five chapters [of Luke].) ”Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them,” OK, that’s the first group—you hear the Word of God, and then you observe it,

May be compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and yet it did not fall, for it had been founded on the rock. [Matthew 7:24–25]

Do you think that’s a Christian or a non-Christian? Yeah, [it’s] the Christian. All right. Then we have another person. [Matthew 7:]26[-27 says]: “Everyone who hears these words of Mine,” just like the first group, [with] the same, identical wording except for the end, “and *does not act* on them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and it fell—and great was its fall” [emphasis added].

Jesus is really saying, “You know what? Mary was blessed, but so is every other believer. Every other believer is super-blessed, and you, crowd out there, are not believing.” That’s what He’s trying to communicate to them. “Your life is built on the sand, and so is [the life of] everybody else who thinks they can call themselves Christians.” They were Jews, they were God’s chosen people, they were children of Abraham. They were going to hell, and many of them didn’t know it. The religious leaders thought that they were great, godly, pious men. They were self-deluded because they were hearing the words of God incarnate, but they were not doing it. These things are bad. Mary is not blessed alone, but everyone who hears and obeys [is].

The second [point] is: Not Jonah, but Jesus. Jesus is now going to expand upon the same principle He just taught. This woman is the one who lit the fuse. So, Jesus is like, “OK, you want to go there? We’ll go there.” He is going to talk a little bit about Jonah. Notice that [Luke 11:]29 starts, “As

the crowds were increasing.” We’ve seen that. The crowd is already there, the crowd is increasing, and pretty soon, at the beginning of chapter 12, they’re stepping on each other [because] there are so many people. It’s like Woodstock.

Jesus is surrounded by these thousands of people, they’re all there, and you know what? He’s going to encourage them. He says: “This generation is a wicked generation” [Luke 11:29]. Just think about that. That is so non-seeker-sensitive. [When] you read church growth books today, they say, “Whatever you do, don’t talk about judgment, sin, repentance, [or] anything like that because you will kill your church. You will drive people away. They won’t tolerate that for a minute. You [have] to make them feel good.” You’d think that Jesus would stand up, and [say], “You are such a great crowd of people! Blessed be you! Blessed be you! Feel good about yourselves. Look into the mirror and tell yoursel[ves], ‘You are a great person.’”

Is that what Jesus does? No. He says, “I want you to know, the whole lot of you, you’re a wicked generation.” Why would He say that? [It is] because it was true. People don’t need a Savior until they realize they are sinners. They won’t come to Christ until they realize, “I am wicked and I need somebody to save me from my sins.” But instead, [the people in the crowd] were thinking, “We’re good; you’re bad. We’re righteous; you’re unrighteous. You [have] a demon [see Luke 11:15]. You’re a false prophet. Do another trick. Give us another trick [see Luke 11:16].”

So, [Jesus] goes for the spiritual cancer. The reason they gathered was to see Jesus perform miracles. They just wanted to have Jesus entertain them. You know [what]? Miracles never save people. They point to either the person [who] can save them—in Jesus’ case, Himself—or to the one who preaches the message. [Do you] remember [when] we talked about the purpose of signs and wonders?¹ They’re signs. “This way to Yosemite.”

¹<http://www.calvarybiblechurch.org/Sermons.aspx/audio/sermon/2006/20060604> <http://www.calvarybiblechurch.org/Sermons.aspx/audio/sermon/2006/20061203>

How many people want to camp out in front of the sign? “Man, what a cool sign!” That’s not the [big] deal! What [it] points [to] is the [big] deal. Yosemite is the [big] deal, not the sign that says, “Twenty miles this way.”

These people [say], “Give us another sign.” They weren’t getting it. They were missing the Messiah because they wanted more signs. People do that today. Some people are so into miracles, and so into signs. Do you remember what the author of Hebrews says about the people of Israel? They saw the ten plagues, right? They came out of Egypt. There was the pillar of cloud, the pillar of fire, the parting of the Red Sea. They went into the wilderness and their clothes didn’t wear out. Manna dropped from heaven every day. What does the author of Hebrews say? “The entire generation dropped dead because of” what? “unbelief. Though they had witnessed My miracles for forty years, they dropped dead” [see Hebrews 3:8–9]. There wasn’t another miracle. Jesus says, “You’re wicked. I am the Messiah. These miracles are just here to point to Me, and I’m telling you, I’m the guy.” They don’t want to believe.

One woman wanted to praise Mary because [Jesus] was able to do miracles. She missed the Messiah and thought about the Messiah’s mother instead. Jesus sees the crowd gathering because they want to see more miracles performed. Jews love miracles, just like people today [do]. This is the same problem [we saw] back in [Luke] 11:16, [where] it says, “Others, to test Him, were demanding of Him a sign from heaven.” Well, He just healed a demon-possessed guy. [They’re] just never satisfied: “Do something a little bigger. Can you do fire this time? Can you part the sea? Can you part it a little wider? Can you part it [more] quick[ly]? Can you dry out the land [more] quick[ly]? Bigger frogs, more gnats. Give us bigger and better.” They never stop to say, “Why is this guy able to do this? Who is this guy anyway? Why is He here?” It was all about them, their entertainment.

Jesus wasn’t seeking to please men or make them feel good, so He just tells them, “You’re a wicked generation.” Look at what He says in the middle of [Luke 11:]29: “This . . . wicked generation . . . seeks for a sign, and yet no sign will be given to it but the sign of Jonah.” That is very interesting.

“No sign will be given to it but the sign of Jonah.” What’s that? Well, if you remember what happened with Jonah, Jonah was a prophet in Israel, [and] God says [to him], “I want you to go preach to the Ninevites, our enemies—the ones who kill Israelites and hang up their carcasses on their wall[s] to rot. Yeah, why don’t you go preach to them?”

Jonah says, “I’m not going to go preach to them.” [Do] you know why? Well, if you read the book [of Jonah], he says, “I know that You are a compassionate God, and that You are a forgiving God, and so there’s no way I’m going to go preach to the Ninevites because if they repent, You’ll forgive them. Then You won’t destroy them, and I want them destroyed. So, I’m getting out of here” [see Jonah 1:1–3; 4:1–2]. So, he heads out. Of course, the storm comes up at sea, [and] the sailors want to know what’s going on. Finally, Jonah fesses up, “It’s me. The reason this storm is coming is me. Just throw me over.”

“We’re not throwing you over!” They try their best, [but then] they realize, “We’re going down unless we throw him over,” [so] they pitch him over. The big fish comes and swallows him up, and the sea then gets calm. Jonah is then in a dark, slimy digesting place for three days before he is spit up again by the fish [see Jonah 1:4–3:4].

He [then] has this incredible attitude change. He says, “OK. I’m going to preach to [the Ninevites].” He’s still reluctant, [though]. If you read the story, [you see that] he’s still reluctant. He preaches to them, [but] very begrudgingly. He’s like a kid who’s forced to clean his room while [his] mother is standing over him, [saying], “Pick that up! Pick that up! Pick that up!” He’s doing it just because Mom is big, but his heart isn’t in it. [Do] you remember what [Jonah] did? He just walked around the city for three days, and said, “In forty days, Nineveh will be overthrown” [see Jonah 3:4]. He’s probably thinking, “I hope they kill me.” He is so bitter. Then he goes outside the city and he plops down [see Jonah 4:5]. He’s like, “OK, Lord, I’m waiting for fire. I remember what happened to Sodom and Gomorrah. Bring it on.”

Then God grows up this little plant that gives [Jonah] some shade. Remember? [Jonah] loves that plant because it was hot out there in the sun, and he was roasting. Then, as he enjoys that plant, God sends the worm to eat the plant, and it withers [see Jonah 4:6–8]. Then [Jonah] despairs, and says, “Oh!”

[God asks], “Do you have a right to be angry?”

“Yes, I have a right to be angry!” [see Jonah 4:9].

“Oh, really?” God says, “You know, you have more compassion on that plant, which you neither sowed nor made grow, and yet you don’t have any compassion on the Ninevites who have a 120,000 [people] in that city who don’t know their right hand from their left,” [which is] a euphemism for children [see Jonah 4:9–11]. They had 120,000 kids who were so young they didn’t know their right hand from their left, which tells us that a conservative estimation is that [there were] some 600,000 to 1 million people in that city. And [yet], Jonah has more compassion for the plant! He goes through the city, [saying], “[In] forty days, Nineveh will be overthrown.”

Do you know what’s great about it? The fact that God sent Jonah tells us what about God? If God was going to just destroy Nineveh, He would have what? Destroyed Nineveh. He didn’t send anybody through [to preach to] Sodom and Gomorrah, did He? No. The fact that He sent Jonah and Jonah proclaimed the message, a message of forty days until judgment, was God’s opportunity to let the people of Nineveh repent. They did, and He didn’t judge them.

Don’t miss what’s going on here. [The] Ninevites [were the] enemies of Israel, pagans who [didn’t] know anything about God. [They] got one little fragment of the word of God through a reluctant prophet and the greatest mass revival ever recorded in the history of the world occurred. How many people have led 600,000 people to the Lord? That’s amazing, isn’t it? I mean, [even if] actually only 400,000 [repented], that’s [still] a lot of people. The whole city repented in sackcloth and ashes at the preaching of Jonah.

Do you see what Jesus is saying [in Luke 11:29]? He's saying, "Here I am, the Son of God, the Messiah who has fulfilled all prophecies, who isn't giving you a fragment. I am teaching and preaching constantly in your cities and in your towns. I am doing miracles to verify that I am the Messiah and you won't repent." Do you see the contrast there? They were getting plenty of information. That is the contrast: Jonah preached the word of God, which was given to him by God, but Jesus *was* the Word of God. The pagan Ninevites [repented] after the short judgment message of Jonah, and these people in front of Jesus had tons and tons of teaching and preaching and still weren't repentant.

Jonah himself was, in a way, a miracle. But you know what? We don't even know if the Ninevites knew anything about the fish, and [Jonah] fleeing [to Tarshish], and getting spit up on the beach. People often talk about him showing up looking all bleached out and stuff, [and] it kind of makes for good preaching, but the fact is [that] Nineveh is nowhere near an ocean. If he got spit up anywhere [in] the Mediterranean Basin there, he probably had to walk [for] six weeks [to get to] Nineveh. So, he was probably tanned up by the time he got there.

But, he probably didn't go through [the city, and say], "[Do] you know why I'm here? Because I tried to run away, I got thrown into the sea, and this fish ate me, and I was in the fish for three days, and it spit me up on the beach. I got my act cleaned up, [and] I've hiked six weeks to meet you. I want you to know..." He probably didn't do that. He was reluctant. He wasn't giving them any more information than he [needed to]: "Forty days [until] Nineveh [is destroyed]. That's all God said. That's all I'm giving you." The fragment.

You know what? If Jonah [hadn't been so reluctant to preach to the Ninevites], he probably [would have gotten] proud, [saying], "Yeah, I brought that whole city to repentance." God loves to use common people and Jonah was the most common of all prophets. If you had to rate all the prophets, he was probably the worst one. Then God uses him to lead the

greatest revival that has ever occurred in the history of the world. So, who gets the praise? God does.

Notice what Jesus says in [Luke 11:]30: “For just as Jonah became a sign to the Ninevites, so will the Son of Man be to this generation.” Some people have asked, “Well, what is the sign when it says ‘no sign but the sign of Jonah’ [see Luke 11:29], and [it] says, ‘Jonah became a sign.’ What does that mean that he was ‘a sign’? Was he a miracle?” Well, he got there by a miracle, but you know what the miracle was? Some people said it was his preaching, and other people said, “Well, it was his being spit up by the fish so that he could preach.” I think it’s both because when you think about it, how does Paul describe the Gentiles in Ephesians 2:11–12? Do you remember that? He talks about the Ephesians who were in the world, separated from the covenants and promises of God, having no hope. He says they were without “hope and without God in the world” [Ephesians 2:12]. Why? [It was] because they didn’t have the Word of God.

So, the great sign, I think, of Jonah was the fact that he, a Jew, went to [Nineveh], a Gentile nation, and preached the Word of God, even though a fragment, to them. That was a huge sign. What did they do [in response]? They repented. [Jesus] also says, “So *will*,” in the future—Jesus is speaking of Himself in the future tense—“the Son of Man be to this generation.” How is that? Well, Jonah was three days in the fish, spit up to preach; Jesus preached, would be three days in the grave and resurrected to glory. That, of course, hadn’t happened at this point. When Jesus [rose] from the dead, then the whole generation hear[d] about it, and then they [had] to decide whether they want[ed] to believe the “rumors” that Jesus rose from the dead. Maybe His disciples snuck Him away, and maybe the whole Roman guard just let Him sneak past when they were all taking a nap even though they would have been killed if that [had] happened. Jesus’ resurrection would have been a witness to them.

So, what’s happening here is Jesus is saying, “You have way more information, you have *way* more revelation than those people [of Nineveh did]. I’m doing miracles. I’m the Son of God. I’m the Messiah. I’ve done

all these things in front of you. I'm telling you who I am. I'm teaching you. I'm preaching at you and you still won't repent." He then talks about the queen of Sheba (we'll get back to her), but notice what He says in [Luke 11:]32: "The men of Nineveh will stand up with this generation at the judgment and condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah." [Do] you know what this tells us? That when we get to heaven, [do] you know who is going to be there? A lot of Ninevites [will be there]. That is cool, huh?

[You'll ask], "Hey, who are you?"

"Oh, I'm one of the Ninevites."

"Whoa! You barely escaped."

He's going to say, "So did you. You're one of those people from Burbank, huh?" Anybody who gets to heaven barely escapes. [Everybody] who is saved is blessed, exceedingly blessed because not only does God save them, He gives them the grace to obey His Word. Believing and obeying always go together because that's what salvation does. Jesus says, "Those Ninevites are going to be looking down on you Jews and they're going to condemn you on judgment day because you know all about God, you know all about the Law, you know all about the prophets, you know all about the psalms. You have seen Me do miracles, you have seen Me preach. Here I am standing in front of you, and you won't repent. [The Ninevites] just had a fragment and they did [repent]. They're going to condemn you when you go to hell on judgment day." It's pretty serious.

Then He says this. Look at [Luke 11:]32 at the end: "And behold, something greater than Jonah is here." Jonah preached the Word of God; that was incredible. Jonah led many people to the Lord; that was incredible. But [do] you know what's more incredible? Jesus [is more incredible] because He *is* the Word of God, and He *is* the Savior Himself. Jonah couldn't save anybody, and Jonah didn't do any miracles. But Jesus [did], and [the people in the crowd] weren't believing.

What do we do about this? Well, the first thing I think we need to do is to look at our own lives and ask ourselves, "Do we know the Lord or not?"

Are we saved or not?” I want you to know, this is going to keep happening. There’s a reason that Jesus puts these things in there because men are prone to either deceive themselves into thinking they can be saved, or to postpone repenting so they can enjoy their sin for a little while longer. “Oh, if I became a Christian now, I’d have to clean up my business propositions. I wouldn’t make as much money. I’d have to claim things on my taxes. I couldn’t enjoy my pornography. I couldn’t enjoy my trashy romances. I couldn’t enjoy my whatever.” And so, we begin to put up these excuses and postpone salvation.

It’s like the guy who said, “I’ll just wait until I’m on my deathbed and then I’ll repent.” When [he was on] his deathbed, his friends found him crying out, weeping, and wailing.

They said, “What’s wrong?”

He said, “I thought I would be able to repent, but I can’t.” Don’t let that be you. Look at your sin-sick soul, look at your need for a Savior, forget about the miracles, forget about history, forget about great people who accomplish great things, and listen to Jesus, who says, “Come to Me all you who are weak and heavy laden and I will give you rest” [see Matthew 11:28]. “As many as receive Me,” He says, “I will give the right to become children of God, even unto those who believe in My name” [see John 1:12]. He says, “If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved” [see Romans 10:9]. “Whoever believes in Him will not perish but have everlasting life” [see John 3:16]. Believe in Jesus: that is the message. Jesus [wanted] these people in the crowd, and Jesus wants people in *this* crowd, to receive Him as their Savior.

[Our] third [point is]: Not Solomon, but Jesus. Look at [Luke 11:]31: “The Queen of the South,” Jesus says, “will rise up with the men of this generation at the judgment and condemn them, because she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon.” Many of you might not know this story. If you want to, you can turn to 1 Kings 10. Most people know the story of Jonah—you can’t [attend] our children’s program and

escape Jonah. He is so cool. That's a whale of a tale. He slept on a "foam blubber" mattress—one of the first.

All right, look at 1 Kings 10. I'm just going to read this story, make a few quick comments so you understand this whole story about the queen of Sheba, if you don't understand the story [or] you don't remember it, or whatever. It's not super popular, but it is interesting. I'm going to read [1 Kings 10:]1–10, skip 11–12, and then read verse 13. "Now when the queen of Sheba heard about the fame of Solomon concerning the name of the LORD, she came to test him with difficult questions." Notice [that] this woman lived in a far away place. Jesus describes her as coming "from the ends of the earth" [Luke 11:31]. She's a pagan. She's a woman. Jesus is speaking to Jewish leaders mostly here, so they don't have very much respect for women. She fits the category of woman and Gentile, two [of those] things Jewish men were glad they were not.

She came to [Solomon] with difficult questions. Why? [It was] because she "heard about the fame of Solomon concerning the name of the LORD." In other words, she heard that Solomon's God had given him this incredible wisdom, and incredible riches. She heard about that, so she [came] this long distance. [1 Kings 10:]2: "So she came to Jerusalem with a very large retinue," or caravan, or entourage, "with camels carrying spices and very much gold and precious stones." Why would [she] do that? Why would [she] come with all of this wealth? Well, we'll see in a minute.

"When she came to Solomon, she spoke with him about all that was in her heart. Solomon answered all her questions; nothing was hidden from the king which he did not explain to her." It's like, "[Do] you [have] a riddle? Give it to me. Answer. [Do] you [have] a question about something? Answer. [Do] you want to know about this? Answer. [Do] you want to know how this works? Answer." [Solomon] was the answer man. He knew everything. He studied botany, zoology, sin; he studied everything. Read Ecclesiastes [and you'll see that] the guy was brilliant. There was nothing he did not explain to her. [Look at 1 Kings 10:]4[-5]:

When the queen of Sheba perceived all the wisdom of Solomon, the house that he had built, the food of his table, the seating of his servants, the attendance of his waiters and their attire, his cupbearers, and his stairway by which he went up to the house of the LORD, there was no more spirit in her.

She was humbled by it all. She lost her wind, so to speak. It's like she wilted from the magnificence of Solomon's wisdom and wealth. [1 King 10:]6[-9]:

Then she said to the king, "It was a true report which I heard in my own land about your words and your wisdom. Nevertheless I did not believe the reports, until I came and my eyes had seen it. And behold, the half was not told me. You exceed in wisdom and prosperity the report which I heard. How blessed are your men, how blessed are these your servants who stand before you continually and hear your wisdom. Blessed be the LORD your God who delighted in you to set you on the throne of Israel; because the LORD loved Israel forever, therefore He made you king, to do justice and righteousness."

[Verse 10 goes on]: "She gave the king a hundred and twenty talents of gold," that's a lot, "and a very great amount of spices and precious stones." [That's] what she brought all that wealth with her for. "Never again did such abundance of spices come in as that which the queen of Sheba gave King Solomon" [1 Kings 10:10]. Verse 13: "King Solomon gave to the queen of Sheba all her desire which she requested, besides what he gave her according to his royal bounty. Then she turned and went to her own land together with her servants."

Don't miss the contrast here either. We are talking about a Gentile woman who had very little estimation in the eyes of Jewish men. She was a foreigner, a pagan from another land. She comes to Solomon. She sees

Solomon, hears Solomon's words, and what does she do? First [of all], she is totally humbled. That's a good beginning. The next thing is: she gives. Then what does she do? She praises God. She believes and praises God: "I did not believe but then I believed." She praises God; she worships God.

[In Luke 11:31] Jesus says, "OK, remember the queen of Sheba? She went to a great expense to come from a long way to see Solomon, [hear] his wisdom, and [observe] his wealth. When she saw his wealth and heard his wisdom, how did she respond? She humbled herself, she believed, she gave, [and] she worshipped. [That's] something you're not doing." Then He says at the end of [Luke 11:31]: "And behold, something greater than Solomon is here."

What Jesus is trying to get all these Jews, and us, to come to grips with is [that] the world has a lot of riches, [and] those are fine. [It has] a lot of things. We were just in Germany [and] we saw some incredible churches that were huge and gilded with gold and polished marble and carvings [that] make your jaw drop down. People love those buildings. They are proud of their denomination, their creed, their heritage, or whatever, but I'm telling you, you're missing it if that's what you think is important. What's important is Jesus because He is greater than anything else. He is greater than Solomon. He is the King who created the heavens and the earth. Solomon got all of his riches from Jesus. Solomon got his wisdom from Jesus. Jesus knows everything; Solomon knew a lot. Jesus is all-knowing. Solomon can't save you; Jesus can. Solomon can't sanctify you; Jesus can. Solomon never did any miracles; Jesus did tons of them.

All of these [examples] point us to the same exact response, and that is: Everyone who hears the Word of God and observes it is blessed. Everyone who hears the Word of Jesus and submits to it is blessed because Jesus is greater than any prophet, any king, any response, or any event. He is the Messiah.

As you leave here today, you need to ask yourself the question, ["Am I saved?"] I know a lot of you are saved. I know a lot of you know the Lord, and love the Lord, and I praise God for that. Don't think I'm up here

trying to get you saved twice. I'm not. You can only be saved once. But I know there are some of you who don't know the Lord. I don't know what's keeping you back from that. I can't read your mind. I think some of you might think you're saved and you're not. Others of you may *know* you're not saved, and yet you don't want to be saved. You don't want to repent of your sins. You want to hang on to your pornography, your materialism, your money, your cheating, or whatever you're doing. There's some sin in your life that has you, you don't want to give that up to follow Christ, and so you [don't]. You are in far greater peril than the Ninevites, or the queen of Sheba, or even the crowd that was standing in front of Jesus, because you have all the miracles the Bible recorded and all the Word of God recorded. You didn't get a fragment—you got a whole hour. Jesus' message is: "Repent and believe and I will save you. I am the Savior." That's what He wants us to know. That's what He wants us to respond to.

If you already know Christ, then bless God, who saved you. Praise God. Serve God because He is worthy, because Jesus is the greatest, and you just love Jesus. Serve Him because you want to. Those you love you find easy to serve; those you don't love, you find it hard to serve. So, if you're finding it impossible to serve Jesus, it's because you're finding it impossible to love Jesus. If you love Jesus you will keep His commandments. Maybe you just don't know Him. Maybe this morning is the day when you need to come to know Christ. Let's pray.

Father, we thank You that we were able to look at this text. Father, I know there [are] people in here whose hearts are probably heavy within them. Maybe [they] are wondering if they are saved or not. Maybe there [are] people in here who know they are not saved. Maybe there [are] people here who *think* they are saved but are certainly not saved. Maybe there [are] a few people here who are saved and yet are confused. Father, I just pray that You would give us all assurance. That, Father, You would help us remember that You are the one who saves, You are the one who changes lives, You are the one who molds us into the image of Christ, and [that] it is a process that happens over the course of time. It happens slowly; it happens

by Your grace. Help us never to fall into the idea of retribution theology or compensation theology, where we think we can earn Your favor. You loved us while we were yet enemies [see Romans 5:10]. You save us while we are yet sinners [see Romans 5:8]. And so, Father, help us to serve You and love You. If there's anybody here who doesn't know You, who has never placed his or her faith in Christ, who has never believed, in faith, that Jesus died and rose again on his or her behalf, may he or she do that now. May he or she cry out to You, confessing his or her sins, asking for forgiveness, receiving Jesus. May You change him or her by Your grace so that he or she, too, might be exceedingly blessed like Mary. We pray this in Christ's name, Amen.

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