

Title: When the Bible is a curse
Text: Luke 11.27-32
Theme: Responding to God's Word
Series: Luke
Prop Stmtnt: The rejection of God's Word causes a greater judgment.

Read Text:

Hearing the testimonies of these people who were baptized is so encouraging. Jesus does not say that when someone gets baptized they have to give their story of how they came to faith in Christ because getting baptized is a re-enactment of the story. We ask people to use the occasion to share their story and while people are glad to talk about Jesus, the idea of talking in front of so many people is scary. Glossophobia is the fear of public speaking and is believed to be the most common phobia among people. 75 to 85% of people experience some level of anxiety when talking in front of people. More people are afraid of public speaking than are afraid of spiders, heights or even death. That is another reason to show appreciation to your Adult Class teachers.

One source of anxiety is that you don't know what is going to happen when you are speaking. Someone could have a medical condition, make a scene and storm out, or blurt out something that may come out a bit odd. Look at the beginning of v.27. "*As he said these things...*" Jesus is speaking, publicly when "*a woman in the crowd raised her voice...*" It would have been rather bold or brave for a woman in a mixed audience in that culture, to speak out like this. But I think we can understand why she did. Jesus has just been publicly rebuked and denounced in some of the worst terms imaginable. He was accused of employing the power of Satan in order to cast out an evil spirit. Jesus responds pointedly and seriously. He issues a challenge and then a warning. The challenge is: "*whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters.*" Then comes the warning about the man (and others) who was exposed to the benefits of Jesus, but who did not take it to heart. Because we are no match for sin, Jesus warns that, "*the last state of that person is worse than the first.*" Now what? Jesus has just issued this challenge and warning. The tension is thick. Then Luke says, "*As he said these things....*" This is when this woman raises her voice and says what she says, which is a bit raw, isn't it? But she is clearly trying to express her admiration for Jesus. It may sound a bit awkward, but she has made a discerning observation even if she comes to a slightly wrong conclusion.

1. **A Discerning Observation but Wrong Conclusion** (27-28)

What is her observation and her conclusion?

A. **Jesus is amazing; therefore, his mom must be amazing.** (27) (observation)

This lady has been impacted with the words of Jesus and it really seems to me that she wants Jesus to know that the Pharisees who have been so dismissive of Jesus do not speak for everyone. She believes him and she is pronouncing a blessing on his mom. There are probably a

number of related ideas here such as: “Your mom has to be so proud to have such an amazing son. You are so right and good, your mom must have been amazing to raise such an incredible son.” Perhaps there’s a little bit of, “I wish I had a son like you.” This woman is expressing deep appreciation for Jesus but she is revealing a deep-seated, but wrong belief.

What is right about her response? She is right to be moved to appreciation and right to want to state a blessing because of the truthfulness, power and impact of the words of Jesus. She is also right, to a point, that Mary, the mother of Jesus is blessed to have a son like Jesus. When Mary was told that she will be the mother of the Messiah, she said, in her prayer/song (Luke 1.48) *“For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed.”* Here is a partial fulfillment of that. Mary was blessed, but not quite in the way that most people understand.

What exactly does it mean to be blessed? Is good health a blessing? Yes. Is good health the ultimate definition of a blessed life? No. Is financial stability a blessing? Yes. Is financial stability the ultimate definition of a blessed life? No. Is being in a solid marriage, having children, having healthy, talented, successful children a blessing? Yes. Are all those things the ultimate definition of the blessed life? No. The heart and essence of the blessed life is being loved by God and loving him back. Another way to put it is being known by God, knowing God, walking with and delighting in him. Does that mean that I have health, money, family tranquility, esteem, and cool vacations? In fact, often times, those things get in the way because I worship them and pursue them above God. The blessed life is walking with and delighting in God. Walking with and delighting in God is the deepest internal itch (need). Nothing, other than God will scratch that or fill that. Nothing. Everything that I pursue (think Ecclesiastes) in order to scratch that itch, apart from God, will not last and will only set you up for disillusionment.

We want to be successful and we want our kids to be successful because we want them to be comfortable and significant. If they are comfortable and significant, we look good, too. But when are we actually comfortable and significant enough? You never get there. The morning after you get the Super Bowl ring, the college scholarship, the new job, the new truck, or the new promotion, you want more, but more never comes. And whenever you get what everyone thinks is the top, (if you happen to get there), you say to yourself, “is this it?” Is this all there is? Life in these shadowlands is a perpetual struggle for peace in the midst of conflict, significance and meaning in the midst of emptiness and futility. Reality is hard. There are moments of delight and pleasure, but most of life is a struggle. It is like my golf game. I may have one good shot out of 15. Think about all of the stages of parenting. There is a lot of struggle. Your own job and close relationships demand a lot of effort. If the blessed life was having it all, no one would be blessed, because no one has it all. It’s a mirage. That is why Jesus responds this way.

B. Jesus is amazing; therefore, his Word must be obeyed. (28) (correction)

The woman is not completely wrong, but she needs to be a little redirected. Yes, Mary is blessed, but not in the way that many think. The blessing of Mary is what? She knew God. She literally lived with God. She was an instrument in the plan of God. Did she have money? No. Did she have circumstantial ease? No. Joseph likely died very young. Did she have it all as the world

sees it? No. Her oldest Son was hated and crucified. But because she knew God, and obviously knew his Word (Magnificat) she knew that she was part of something that was so much bigger than this world. She heard the word of God and she kept it. That is the same blessing available to you. (read v.28)

The blessed life is walking with and delighting in God in the midst of this disappointing (sin-cursed) world. How do we do that? We know God through his Word and we delight in God by obeying him. We could also say, we obey his Word because we delight in him. Our delight drives us to his word and his word drives us to delight in him. There are a few things we need to drill down on:

- 1) We are not blessed (given points or favor from God) because our kids do good things. In the RC tradition, if your son became a priest or your daughter a nun, then you would look good and would get some points. If your son went up through the ranks and became, bishop, arch-bishop, cardinal, etc. then you were really impressive and you would think, no purgatory for you. Jesus blows that up. We are not intrinsically better or righteous or deserving of favor from God because of the achievements of our kids. Oh no! Our righteousness is not sourced from our works or from family members. We are not significant or justified because of their moral or religious achievements. We are significant because we have been made by God and we are loved by God. We are justified only through Christ. That justification is available to every one of you, through faith in Christ. The "saint" system is a scam. They do not have extra merit that you can get. The only merit that justifies us is the perfect merit of Christ that are credited with by our faith in Christ. (Ephesians 2.1-10)
- 2) We study God's Word, NOT to know things in order to impress others with our knowledge, but to know God. This is critical.
- 3) The Pharisees knew things. They knew their OT Bibles better than most of us, if not all of us and they missed the entire point. How can you study the Bible your entire life and hate God so much that you crucify his Son? If they could do that, so can you and me.

Is my knowledge of God's Word causing me to be humble, loving, merciful, godly, convictional, generous, genuine, sacrificial, and tender? If not, then God's Word is a curse in the sense that it is creating hardness. If I hear God's Word but fail to keep it, it will cause me to be dull to it, then hardened to it, just like Pharaoh. That is when the Bible is a curse. To be blessed is not knowing God's Word and being revered by others because of your impressive knowledge. To be blessed is to know God's Word so that you lean into him, trust him, walk with him and rest in him. Jesus is amazing. Therefore, his Word is to be heard and obeyed. Is this what you desire? Is this your goal? Does this frame the pursuit and aim of your life? God's dream life for you is for you to walk with him and delight in him. Are you in harmony with him? There is no greater joy than to hear God's Word with your heart and then in turn love God, walk with him and follow him with your heart. But this means that there is no greater judgment than to hear God's Word and to reject it. This is what the next text speaks to. In the next scene, Luke says that the crowds were increasing. They wanted some signs and wonders. Jesus wasn't a booth in a circus.

2. A Wrong Observation but Discerning Conclusion (29-32)

The woman made a good observation but needed a little correction, but there was genuineness in her faith. In contrast are the Pharisees and others who are demanding a sign. Their observation of Christ has not led to humble belief but arrogant judgement. Jesus is not good enough (and never will be) because he exposes their need.

God does not expect blind faith. That is why God directed Luke to write this gospel. Luke says so at the very beginning of this book. Here is the evidence. It is solid and compelling, like the ministry of Christ was. But for those who do not want to believe, it is not “good enough.”

A. We want more evidence.

The demand for a sign (see back in v.16), is not genuine. They just saw a sign and a convincing one at that. If they do not believe this, they will not believe. Their desire for a sign is wrong and Jesus is right to not give them what they want. No sign or wonder will convince someone to believe who doesn't want to believe. They are asking Jesus to basically do the same thing that Satan challenged Jesus to do back in Luke 4.3. “Do a trick for me. Show me what you've got.” We will let you know if it passes muster. They treat him as if they would be doing him a huge favor if they would actually believe in him. You perform one of your tricks for us, and we will set up a court and be the judge and jury and evaluate whether or not your trick measures up to our standard. The bottom line is this: They arrogantly and falsely believe they are the judges of Christ. They assume that Jesus would be really lucky to get them on his side. They are so blind and stupid to believe that their approval would be valuable to Jesus, that he needs or wants their endorsement. In their minds, Jesus needs them. Jesus is dependent on them. Jesus needs their help and they hold the power of their approval as leverage. So, show us a sign and we will let you know if we think you measure up to our standards. Notice the pattern: Sign brought disbelief which brings condemnation. More signs would bring more disbelief which would only bring more condemnation. Therefore, Jesus is being merciful by saying, “no.”

Jesus performed signs so that his word would be authenticated. He never did them to wow the crowds. It was always as a means to hearing the word so that people would believe. For the humble, it authenticated his message. For the proud his power and words became a curse.

A true church is not built on signs and wonders. You can see how unwise it is for a church to shape its message and appeal based on what will be attractive to people. If we surveyed the people in our community about what they would like in a church, do you think that anyone would say that they would like to find a church that faithfully exposes our sin, preaches the glories of Christ and the reality of hell? We think we know what we want and what is good for us. We think we can sit in judgment on God's Word and pick the parts we like and discard the rest. Jesus won't play that game and he gives two examples from OT history to prove his point.

B. Two examples:

1) Jonah/Nineveh

Jesus is answering their demand for a sign by telling them that they already have one in Jonah which will be fulfilled by him. Jonah was a prophet to the northern kingdom of Israel. His ministry took place about 30-40 years before the northern kingdom was wiped out by the Assyrians. God told Jonah to go to Nineveh and preach to them. The pagan Ninevites responded to the preaching of Jonah with repentance and faith and the Queen of Sheba responded to the Word of God that she heard with a faith that sought more understanding. These non-Jews believed the limited information they had. Their example condemns the Jews who had SO much more revelation (Jesus) and refused to believe.

If Jonah's preaching could produce repentance among the Ninevites, what would the preaching of Jesus produce? If the Ninevites who had very limited access to the Word of God would repent what would happen to children who were raised in a home and church where they heard God's Word every week and even had their copy?! You see it now, don't you? Being raised by parents who took you to church so that you could hear the gospel is an enormous blessing, if you accept it. If you reject it, it is an enormous curse. But the fault is not with your parents. You cannot blame them for exposing you to the truth. Just because you heard the truth and for many of you, you have heard it well; exposure to the gospel does not save you. You must respond to the truth that you hear with repentance and belief.

But wait. Why did God send Jonah to preach to the Assyrians? Jonah was a prophet to Israel but Israel refused the word of the Lord. So God sent his word to their enemies. 750 years later, the Jews refused the Word, incarnate, so God sent his word to the Gentiles. We risk making the same fatal mistake that the scribes and Pharisees did. We can presume upon the fact that we have been the gracious recipients of God's Word. We have a history. We have churches, colleges, seminaries, mission agencies, associations and relief ministries. Look at all that we are doing for God. Beloved, do you realize that God used the occasion of Israel's unbelief to open the door for us? God does not owe us a thing. He has been merciful to us. We dare not presume upon that and treat his truth as it we are the ones who can sit in judgment on it. After all, one greater than Jonah has come.

2) Solomon/the Queen of the South (Sheba)

Jesus refers to the Queen of Sheba who heard about Solomon's amazing wisdom and wealth. She came interested. She came asking questions. She came looking for answers and wisdom. She, a queen, a queen of a powerful African empire came in humility to Solomon. She did not have the Temple, nor the prophets or the Pentateuch. She heard rumors of God and she acted upon them. She was moved to search for the truth and she did. Her faith-driven quest resulted in her heart being captured by God.

And now, Solomon's Creator has come. They did not have to search for him; the Creator came to them. His wisdom is irrefutable. His power is undeniable. And yet, he is rejected. It is astounding. It is grievous. They, who had so much to gain, now have so much to lose. And they

will lose it all. In less than 40 years, the nation will be wiped out by the Romans. Jerusalem will be destroyed, again. The last holdouts will die at Masada by killing themselves. It will not end well. And all of it was completely unnecessary. Christ is called the “man of sorrows” and we can see why. He lives with the weight of rejection upon his shoulders and with the knowledge of what that will bring to these people. But there are others who hear and believe. If you really believe then you obey it.

Where are you? Do you believe, lean in and have a heart for obedience?

Do you have a low level curiosity, but hold on the levers of power for yourself?

What kind of a church do you want? Enough gospel to get out of hell, but not too much to be sacrificial and inconvenient? “Blessed ... are those who hear the word of God and keep it.”