

*There's an old Steve Martin comedy (The Man with 2 Brains). He's a famous neurosurgeon, who's recently widowed, and there's a gold-digger out for his money, and he's wanting an assurance that it's OK to go out with her:*

*And he stands in front of a portrait of his deceased wife, and he says:*

*"If there's anything wrong with my feelings for Deloris, just give me a sign."*

*And instantly, a ghostly voice goes "Nooooooooo".*

*And the house starts shaking.*

*And the portrait starts spinning on the wall;*

*And lights pop;*

*And thunder crashes;*

*And the wall cracks...*

*And the wind blows and howls...*

*Noooooooo!*

*And when the tempest dies down, he continues:*

*"Just any kind of sign. I'll keep on the look-out for it...."*

*And he takes the portrait off the wall:*

*"Meanwhile, I'll just put you in the closet."*

I don't know why I remember that scene – I reckon it would be nearly 40 years ago, that I saw that movie,,,, But as soon as I read the Bible reading, that's the picture that came to my mind...

**God** gets asked for a sign. And the sign that God has already given, is glaringly obvious, but to a person who is spiritually blind, it's not what they want to hear, and so God gets pushed out-of-sight; out-of-mind.

And the Bible reading today, is about faith in Jesus Christ...

When Jesus came to town, the crowds were getting bigger and bigger. Why??? They were amazed at the signs and wonders.

He:

- healed the sick;
- made the blind to see;
- cast out demons;
- fed the 5000...

Who wouldn't want to see that???

But seeing signs and wonders – that's not what's important.

V28 leads in to what today's reading is about: "**Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it!**"

**Seeing** signs and wonders / even hearing the Word of God, is of no benefit, unless it does something in our hearts...

**"Blessed ... are those who hear the word of God and keep it!"** – That sets the scene for the section of Luke we're in today.

Now, some Christians and some church models, focus their ministry on "Signs and Wonders" – they're always praying for:

- a sign;
- a miracle;

- a healing;

And the motivation for this is:

- a) We'll know that God's turned up, and We'll be inspired because with our own eyes, we've seen the impossible done by our mighty God... In other words, if God turns up today and does a miracle, we're going to get excited...

In reality, that's not walking by "faith". That's walking by "sight". Those who are walking by faith, don't need a sign or a wonder to get them excited  
; and

- b) If unbelievers see these miracles and signs and wonders, then **they'll** be cut to the heart, and they'll become Christians too...

And that motivation, it's a noble motivation, but is it true???

Well, according to Jesus, "Not so much."

You see, to become a Disciple of Jesus, is a step of faith... It's "Hearing the Word of God, and doing it/keeping it". It's to hear God's call to repentance – and in faith, to turn to The Lord Jesus Christ; to repent of sin; and to follow Him and keep Him...

So: when the crowds started flocking to Jesus, did Jesus go "Woo Hoo! Look how good these signs and wonders are, at drawing the crowds – that's the key – let's keep this up!!!"... Is that what He said? Far from it.

## This generation is an evil generation.

Sure, but the signs and the wonders will turn them around, won't it???

No. It's an evil generation that chases after signs **but no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah.**

Let me tell you about Jonah.

Most of you will know the story of Jonah, the reluctant prophet. God said, "Nineveh are very wicked; Go to Nineveh, and tell them to repent."

Now the thing is, Nineveh were the enemy – they were a pagan country (worshipped other Gods – not the one true God), and they were enemies of God's people... And we learn, towards the end of the book of Jonah, that Jonah didn't **want** Nineveh to repent, because he knew that if they did, God is merciful, and they would be saved. And he didn't want that – they were the enemy...

Anyway, Jonah is fleeing the call of God – he jumps onto a ship going the opposite direction; God sends a big storm; Jonah gets thrown overboard; swallowed by a big fish; and 3 days later, gets vomited up onto the beach near Nineveh...

Nineveh is an enormous city. It would take Jonah 3 days of preaching, as he walked through that city, to get to the other side. The message: "If you do not repent, God is going to over-throw this city in 40 days."...

It was going to take him 3 days to get across the city, but on day 1, the message spread like wild-fire, and it came to the

ears of the king, and the King and the whole city repented (in one day of preaching)...

Don't you love it when the Word of God is proclaimed, and it does what it's sent for: **"Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it!"**

And that's what happened. They heard the word of God, and they kept it.

Great story. **True** story. God did an amazing work through Jonah... But not only is it a testimony of the Mercy of God, shown to the wicked when they repent – it was also a lesson for Israel...

But it's sorta like the political cartoons in the News Paper... So, for instance, this week, the Australian Newspaper had this cartoon...



And some of you are going to think that's hilarious, but others will need it to be explained because you don't really know what's been going on behind the scenes... And I'm pretty sure that 50 years from now, if someone was to see that cartoon, they'd go "Huh??? Why's that funny."

And that's what the story of Jonah is – not only is it a real event – It's God poking fun at Israel – it's satire (on a God-sized scale). But if we don't know what's been going on behind the scenes, we're not going to get it.

So, what **was** going on behind the scenes?

Israel (God's chosen people) had turned to the worship of idols, and stopped listening to the voice of God, and they were doing evil...

And God (for hundreds of years) sent prophet after prophet after prophet, with the message to repent, otherwise God was going to punish them. And they would not listen. And so God would send another prophet, and they wouldn't listen to him either.

And then Jonah, (a reluctant prophet), begins a 3-day preaching mission in evil, godless Nineveh "Repent, otherwise God's going to destroy your city", and on **Day 1**, the whole city (including the king) repented in sackcloth and ashes... That means they were so sorry, to demonstrate their repentance, they changed out of their normal clothes and put on scratchy old sackcloth, and sat in ashes (covered in filth) – it's a letting go of all pride, recognising "I'm at fault", and humbling one's self before people, and before God...

Do you get this???

Hundreds of years of preaching to God's people, and no repentance.

One day of preaching to godless Nineveh, and the whole city repented...

So, Jesus said:

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

What's the sign of Jonah? Well, it's actually 2-fold.

Firstly, it was a sign for Israel/God's people. Hear the word of God, and do it... God had been warning them for years, "Repent". But they didn't listen to Him. If they did, they would've been saved, and God, in His great mercy, would have relented. But because they did **not** listen to God, eventually the judgment of God, poured out on them.

And so, the first way that "Jonah is a sign", is "God has already spoken – take notice of what God has said.". God has sent His only Son, Jesus Christ, – listen to him – turn to Him...

And so, we don't need another sign. God has already spoken. Listen to Him.

But you might say to me, "Hang on a minute Michael, the people of Nineveh **were** given a sign – a dirty great big fish, vomited a bloke up, on their beach, and Jonah (in his half-digested clothes) brought the message. That doesn't happen every day – that **was** a sign..."

How many people do you think actually saw that with their own eyes??? Maybe a few... Certainly not the whole city

Jesus said:

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

It wasn't only the message – there was something about the prophet himself (Jonah became the sign). And in Matthew 12, Jesus joins the dots up for us:

Just as Jonah was in the belly of the big fish for 3 days and 3 nights, so will Jesus be in the ground for 3 days and 3 nights...

The sign that God has given (for us), is the death and the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

If Jesus (who claimed to be the Son of God), has risen from the dead, what further sign could we possibly need??? It all hinges on the resurrection.

God **has** given us the sign, *and like Steve Martin, most are completely oblivious to it.* Why? Because what God is saying, is not what they want to hear.

And some folk might get their knickers all in a knot if the preacher dares to talk about “judgment”, but if **don't** talk about “judgment” today, I've failed to share the word that Jesus gave....



And basically, what Jesus is saying, is “On the Day of Judgment, there is no excuse.” And He gives the image of a courtroom, and he names 2 witnesses who will get up, and agree with the Judge, “That there are no mitigating circumstances here – there is no excuse”.

The first witness, is **The queen of the South** (the Queen of Sheba). (That’s the southern part of Arabia [ Yemen ] ). The Queen of Sheba (almost certainly a heathen {they worshipped other gods in that part of the world}). And yet, the Queen of Sheba heard about the wisdom of Solomon, and travelled a very long way to hear him in person.

And she was really impressed with the wisdom that God had given Solomon, and she praised God because she recognised that YHWH God loves Israel (with an eternal love), and that’s why He blessed Israel with a king of justice and righteousness...

And Jesus says: **she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon** but look: Can you not see, that something **greater** than Solomon is here, and you’re missing it. (“**greater**”, is a key word)

And some folk will look to the Scriptures today, and some even recognise the wisdom in Scripture. And some may look to the teachings of Jesus for good moral guidance... But they’re missing what’s truly important:

- the **greatness** of Jesus, and
- the **message** of Jesus – to repent and bow before Him, for He is Lord...

The Bible is **not** merely a collection of life-helps... The Scriptures reveal the **greatness** of Jesus, and the word of God,, not to be assessed and pick and choose which bits we like – .. The Scriptures reveal:

- the greatness of Jesus; and
- the word of God to be obeyed (**because** He is great)...

And the 2<sup>nd</sup> of the witnesses who will rise up on the Day of Judgment, are the men of Nineveh. **They** will rise up at the Day of Judgment and condemn this generation... Why???

Because they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and Jesus is far **greater** than Jonah...

Jonah just squelched around in the belly of a fish for 3 days... And then got vomited up on a beach... But our Lord Jesus Christ, broke the power of sin and death, and was raised from the grave...

Jonah was merely a reluctant prophet... Jesus, is Lord...

So, what's Jesus getting at? Repentance. Recognise who Jesus is – Know the **greatness** of Jesus. Listen to Him. And **"Blessed .... are those who hear the word of God and keep it!"**

You see,

It's quite common for a person to say, "I'll believe in God, just as soon as He gives me a sign."

- speak to me from a cloud;
- help me win the lotto;
- turn the sky purple with yellow spots...
- (choose your own sign)

But the thing is, God has already given the sign. The sign was the coming of His Son (and the greatness of Jesus). Prophecy after prophecy after prophecy, were all fulfilled at:

- the birth of Jesus;
- through the life of Jesus;
- through the ministry of Jesus;
- the arrest of Jesus;
- and His trial;
- and His torture;
- and His crucifixion...

Multitudes of prophecies were all fulfilled in Jesus... is that not yet, enough of a sign???

And Jesus was murdered (also a prophecy fulfilled) – He was dead... And on the third day, He came back to life. And there were many eye-witnesses. At one time, He appeared to more than 500<sup>i</sup> of His Disciples (all at once).

*Now, we've all heard stories of someone who's flat-lined and then they've managed to revive them.. This isn't any 10 or 15 minute flat-line – this is dead and buried; This is speared in the side, and not only blood, but water (clear fluids) poured out...*

Roman Soldiers were very skilled at one thing in particular, and that was killing people, and they had no doubt that He was dead.

And on the 3<sup>rd</sup> day, He rose.

The sign of Jonah. (Jonah in the belly for 3 days; Jesus in the ground for 3 days)

The men of Nineveh repented at the preaching of Jonah...

An evil generation, seeks for a sign. What are you seeking/waiting for???

Those who truly seek God, have already been given the sign.

So, what do we do with that?

Have you been seeking some kind of sign so you don't have to act in faith??? Well, you'll never be saved, because we're saved by faith. Repent and put your faith in Jesus. And this involves a whole change of life. Jesus will become your No.1 priority.

But what about those of us who already are saved? What do we learn from this? Well, it's a hard lesson, but it's also a very freeing word...

Sometimes we Christians beat ourselves up. If only:

- I was more spiritual;
- I was a better preacher;
- I was more gifted;

- I could do some signs and wonders

Then people would believe...

No, they won't. It's not about you/me. It's about the one who is great.

Our job is to point others to the resurrected Lord Jesus Christ... Our job is to proclaim the **greatness** of God, and the **greatness** of His Son... We mightn't know much, but we **do** know that God is Great, don't we???

And next week, we're going to be talking about taking our lamp, and not hiding it, but putting it on a stand for others to see.

And that's what the lamp is – our faith. We know the greatness of God/Jesus, and the resurrection of Jesus.. And that's what we let people know.

Questions?

---

<sup>1</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:3-8