

Luke 11:29-54 // Light Outside, Darkness Within

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[0 : 00] Our lesson today is from the Gospel according to Luke, chapter 11, starting at verse 29, which! is on page 1043 of the Church Bibles.

! Page 1043, Luke 11, 29. As the crowds increased, Jesus said, This is a wicked generation. It asks for a sign, but none will be given it except the sign of Jonah.

For as Jonah was a sign to the Ninevites, so also will the Son of Man be to this generation. The Queen of the South will rise at the judgment with the people of this generation and condemn them. For she came from the ends of the earth to listen to Solomon's wisdom, and now something greater than Solomon is here. The men of Nineveh will stand up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it.

For they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and now something greater than Jonah is here. No one lights a lamp and puts it in a place where it can be hidden or under a bowl.

[1 : 33] Instead, they put it on its stand so that those who come in may see the light. Your eye is the lamp of your body. When your eyes are healthy, your whole body also is full of light.

But when they are unhealthy, your body also is full of darkness. See to it then that the light within you is not darkness. Therefore, if your whole body is full of light, and no part of it dark, it will be just as full of light as when a lamp shines its light upon you.

When Jesus had finished speaking, a Pharisee invited him to eat with him. So he went in and reclined at the table.

But the Pharisee was surprised when he noticed that Jesus did not first wash before the meal. Then the Lord said to him, Now then, you Pharisees clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside you are full of greed and wickedness.

You foolish people! Did not the one who made the outside make the inside also? But now, as for what is inside you, be generous to the poor, and everything will be clean for you.

[2 : 54] Woe to the Pharisees, because you give God a tenth of your mint, rue, and all other kinds of garden herbs, but you neglect justice and the love of God.

You should have practiced the latter without leaving the former undone. Woe to you, Pharisees, because you love the most important seats in the synagogues and respectful greetings in the marketplaces.

Woe to you, because you are like unmarked graves, which people walk over without knowing it. One of the experts in the law answered him, Teacher, when you say these things, you insult us also.

Jesus replied, And you experts in the law, woe to you, because you load people down with burdens they can hardly carry, and you yourselves will not lift one finger to help them.

Woe to you, because you build tombs for the prophets, and it was your ancestors who killed them. So you testify that you approve of what your ancestors did.

[4 : 01] They killed the prophets, and you built their tombs. Because of this, God in his wisdom said, I will send them prophets and apostles, some of whom they will kill, and others they will persecute.

Therefore, this generation will be held responsible for the blood of all the prophets that has been shed since the beginning of the world, from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, who was killed between the altar and the sanctuary.

Yes, I tell you, this generation will be held responsible for it all. Woe to you, experts in the law, because you have taken away the key to knowledge.

You yourselves have not entered, and you have hindered those who were entering. When Jesus went outside, the Pharisees and the teachers of the law began to oppose him fiercely and to

besiege him with questions, waiting to catch him in something he might say.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks. Thanks. Well, thanks, Innes, very much for reading.

[5 : 13] Please keep your Bibles open, excuse me, at that passage. We've had a lot of people in church here for the last little while, haven't we?

This is a very full room this morning. It's always quite a buzz to see people piling into a church building, isn't it? And it's certainly something to be glad about.

How would it be if next week, the person leading, instead of saying, hello, how good it is to see so many people here this morning, a particular welcome to you if you're here the first time, we're so glad to have you with us.

How would it be if instead of that, the leader looked around and said, this is a wicked generation. How would that go?

I wonder if you've been to Dizna with anyone recently in their home. Has it ever crossed your mind to say to your host, what a lovely house you have. Everything's just beautiful.

[6 : 15] What a shame that you yourself are so full of greed and wickedness. Jesus is exceptionally confronting in this passage. It's not at all gentle.

But my guess is that that is not because he's basically rude or having a bad day, but because there are things that need to be said that can only be said in this way if they're going to get through.

So wouldn't it be good to pray to God at the beginning that he would give us very soft hearts so that we will not want to avoid the things that Jesus says.

Let's pray together. Father in heaven, gracious God, please may the work of your spirit today give to us clear vision and soft hearts so that your word will shine light into us and produce in us a true response to Jesus and his teaching.

Please give us your help for we need it. And we ask this for the sake of your son. Amen. The title of this sermon this morning, Light Outside, Darkness Within.

[7 : 39] Because all the way through this passage, it seems to move from outside to inside in various ways. Jesus confronts a huge crowd outside, then people inside at a dinner party.

He warns his generation in verse 29. Then at the start of chapter 12, just after this passage, he warns his own disciples, his inside group.

And all the way through this passage, he repeatedly looks at the externals of human behavior and draws conclusions about what's going on inside.

We're dropping into Luke's account in chapter 11. Jesus is on the way to Jerusalem. And we find that his popularity is growing all the time.

Look at verse 29. The crowds are increasing. If you flip over to chapter 12, verse 1, we find there are many thousands trampling on one another to be close to him.

[8 : 48] He's so popular looking. But things are not as they seem. Under the surface, there's a spiritual disease. Now we're going to look at this passage under three headings because we meet in this passage Jesus relating to three different groups of people.

And these three encounters give us different angles on the spiritual disease that Jesus addresses. Here's the first group of people. An eager-looking generation that faces judgment.

This is a wicked generation, says Jesus. It asks for a sign, but none will be given it except the sign of Jonah. Over the last few chapters, the crowds have been growing and for obvious reasons, there have been big miracles.

Healing the sick, raising the dead, casting out demons, feeding 5,000. You'd want to go and see if you had the opportunity, wouldn't you? But seeing has not, on the whole, led to people hearing and doing.

And from some, there's been overt hostility and a stubborn demand for more signs, more miracles, more evidence. Prove who you are.

[10 : 16] And says Jesus, the only sign they're going to get is the sign of Jonah. Well, what does that mean? You're probably familiar with the story of Jonah, the prophet, sent to warn a foreign city about coming judgment.

He doesn't want to go. He ends up in the sea, close to death, swallowed by a large fish, coughed up on the shore. He goes to the foreign city.

He preaches that judgment is coming. And lo and behold, the men of Nineveh turn from their wickedness and repent at that message. The sign of Jonah, what is that?

Well, I think it's a back from the dead preacher. Here is a generation that longs for signs. It's going to get words and it will kill Jesus, but that's not going to stop him speaking to them by his spirit through his disciples.

Words about coming judgment. And Jesus picks two examples here from Israel's history to show that words, even words about coming judgment, are quite enough to make people respond in the right way to him.

[11 : 36] Two examples then. Verse 31, the queen of the south, the queen of Sheba. What did she do? Well, she came a long, long way to listen to Solomon's wisdom.

And, by the way, this is a shockingly bold statement, isn't it? Something greater than Solomon is here, says Jesus. Greater than the wisest man ever.

But people are not flocking to Jesus to listen to his words at this stage. They want signs. And the queen of the south, what will she do?

Well, she's going to stand up at the last judgment, which Jesus says is coming, and condemn this generation. She had so much less and responded so much better.

Second example is the men of Nineveh. They heard the message of the foreign preacher saying that judgment was coming soon, and they dramatically turned from their sins and sought God's mercy.

[12 : 47] But one greater than Jonah is here now, and his people have not repented. What will the men of Nineveh do? Well, says Jesus, they will stand up at the last judgment, which is coming, and condemn this generation, which has had so much more than they've had, but done nothing with it.

You see, the problem with Jesus' generation is not lack of information. Look at verse 33. No one lights a lamp and puts it in a place where it will be hidden or under a bowl.

Jesus is talking about himself here, I think. Nothing I've done has been done in secret, in quiet, in the dark. It's been out in the open. Now, the problem with this generation is not lack of light out there.

The problem is with perception, with vision. Your eye is the lamp of the body, says Jesus. When your eyes are healthy, your whole body is full of light, but when they are unhealthy, your body also is full of darkness.

I think this is probably an archaic view of how eyes work. We don't quite view it this way now, but here, eyes are being pictured as things that shine light out into the world, that seek out, almost like spotlights.

[14 : 24] And I think the point that's being made here is not that your eyes let light in and the light changes your body, but rather that the perceptions of the eyes are conditioned by what's inside.

you'll see in the footnote of your Bible that there may be a contrast here between generous eyes and greedy eyes.

And it's very interesting that the first thing that's brought up at the dinner party in verse 39 is greed. I think what's going on here is this.

Jesus' generation does not lack information. It doesn't lack light about who Jesus is or how to respond to him.

The problem is the perception of that light is interfered with by desires. we see what our inward attitudes allow us to see.

[15 : 32] Our inner motivations kind of act like spectacles, filters, that filter the truth about God that comes to us. And so Jesus says verse 35, take care.

Take care about what's inside, about what's really driving your thoughts about me and your response to me. Jesus' generation had him in person in their towns, in their streets, in their houses, accompanying him to Jerusalem at Passover and yet didn't respond to his urgent message.

It might look like an eager generation, but it's facing judgment. You see, being close to the truth doesn't guarantee response to the truth.

That was true back then. It's true now. You can be close but not listening. In church but filtering information out all the time.

Glancing at but not absorbing the truth. Agreeing with it but not repenting at it. It's so says Jesus. This is an eager looking generation but it's facing judgment.

[17 : 00] And now the drama moves from the crowd to the dinner party. The dinner party is more intimate. The people in the room are closer to Jesus than the people in the crowd.

And as the story moves from outside to inside, we begin to see inside some of the reasons that Jesus' generation have not repented.

We meet two groups of people and they're absolutely key to the mindset of that generation. Let's look first at the Pharisees. We've already met an eager looking generation that faces judgment. In the Pharisees we meet a rigorous looking piety that loves itself. Look at verse 37. When Jesus had finished speaking, a Pharisee invited him to eat with him.

So he went in and reclined at the table. But the Pharisee was surprised when he noticed, the word is astonished, when he noticed that Jesus did not first wash before the meal.

[18 : 05] The Pharisees were a popular movement, a movement of the people, probably the main ethical opinion formers of their day. And they were convinced that lack of attention to religious norms had been one of the reasons why the nation was in such trouble.

Why did they wash before meals? Because they're convinced that contamination comes from outside, out there in the world where they might meet unclean things or meet dodgy people. You have to wash to keep the contamination out. And Jesus does not conform to that ethical norm. It's absolutely astonishing to the Pharisee that he doesn't wash.

They're shocked. Shocked enough to bring it up in conversation. Why don't you wash? Every culture has its religious norms and its ruling religious elite, which governs the behavior of the religious norms.

Whether it's Pharisees back then, or Islam in other parts of the world now, or in this country just secularism, we have our religious sorts of norms.

[19 : 23] And Jesus deliberately doesn't conform, because he will not play along with the pretense that corruption is a problem you can keep out.

you cannot avoid contamination by washing things off you. A culture can look morally rigorous, but be inwardly corrupt and desperately hostile to God.

What does he say about the Pharisees? Look at verse 39. You clean the outside of the cup and the dish, but inside you're full of greed and wickedness.

you foolish people. Did not the one who made the outside make the inside also? But now as for what's inside, you be generous to the poor and everything will be clean to you.

They have behavioral rigor, but it cloaks inward greed. Though, of course, God sees through all of that.

[20 : 26] And three times in response, Jesus says, woe to you people. The first woe deals with what they don't love.

Woe to you Pharisees, because you give God a tenth of your mint and rue and other kinds of garden herbs, but you neglect justice and the love of God.

You piously set aside a tenth of the herbs in your herb garden every week, but you don't love people and you don't love God.

in our road, the road in which I live, the bins go out on a Tuesday. I don't know when your bins go out. All our bins go out on a Tuesday.

And everyone is very good at putting their bins out. one week it's general rubbish and garden waste. The other week it's glass and plastic and paper and cardboard in two separate bins.

[21 : 25] Everyone does it because ideologically as a culture, we are seriously bought in to saving the planet. Everything must be done and seen to be done to be saving the planet, reducing the carbon footprint, minimizing the landfill, being environmentally sound.

And so in our road, and I guess in your road too, we do the bottles and the glass and the cardboard and the waste food and the garden waste and that's all fine, it's all good, it's okay, but it is quite seriously not what really matters for all around our streets, my street and yours, where the bins are neatly arranged outside every week, where the cardboard and paper are carefully separated out from the glass and the cans.

Inside those houses, there are families increasing in number every week, destroyed by greed and selfishness.

And in every house, there are screens giving us windows into a world out there which is heaving with conflict that sorting our plastic out from our cardboard is going to do absolutely nothing for.

And without exception, everyone in every house, in every street is going to die, not because of the warming of the world, but because of the world's sin problem.

[23 : 04] tithing herbs, sorting out your recycling, they look impressive. Paying attention even to the small stuff, it looks impressive, but says Jesus, it's just a smoke screen, camouflage, window dressing, a pretense, self-love in religious clothes.

Makes you feel good about yourself to put your bins out neatly, but it avoids sometimes what really matters, love for God and love for people.

What they don't love. The next woe deals with what they do love. Look at verse 43. Woe to you Pharisees, you love the most important seats.

in the synagogues and respectful greetings in the marketplaces. What do they love? Well, they love approval, recognition in public, climbing the social ladder, being in the in crowd, seen to be with the cool kids, being approved of by the people that it's really good to be approved of.

That's what they love. It doesn't matter what the dominant form of religion is in our area. Whether it's first century Judaism, or Islam, or modern secularism, or Christian nationalism, it doesn't matter what group we belong to, the professional body, or the golf club, or the gang, or the bowling club, or the academic institution.

[24 : 44] What's mentioned in verse 43 is what really drives the behavior of the controlling elite in every culture, namely, being recognized by the people it's cool to be recognized by.

That's what they love. The third woe deals with how dangerous they are. Verse 44, woe to you.

You're like unmarked graves which people walk over without knowing it. We've already learned that this is a culture obsessed with religious cleanness, and the worst sort of religious uncleanness you can bump into in that culture is to be associated, bump into dead bodies.

Well, Jesus likens these people to unmarked graves. You come, you don't know the contamination that you're picking up from these people.

Contact with these people is dangerous. They are so concerned with uncleanness, but you step on them, and without knowing, it'll do bad things for you.

[26 : 02] Let me illustrate. You go to see your doctor, you have a bit of a cold. The doctor tells you as so often not to worry it'll get better in a few days. He himself has a bit of a cough. It doesn't sound too bad, but unknown to you, you walked in with a cold.

You walk out having picked up his drug resistant tuberculosis. You didn't know you were getting it, but you got it.

What's Jesus' point here? The mindset of these people is a dangerous mindset. It's one of the things that makes this generation, his generation, a generation that faces judgment.

In the Pharisees, then, we meet a rigorous piety that really loves itself. We're about to meet another group, and from them we meet a burdensome teaching that silences the truth.

You see, there's a second group in the room, and what they do, they do with the Bible, and what they do with the Bible is very closely related to what the Pharisees do at the behavioral level.

[27 : 23] Verse 45, one of the experts in the law answered him, teacher, when you say these things, you insult us also. To which the response is functionally too right, I do.

He doesn't say that, does he? But we're straight into three more woes. Woe number one, they burden people with commands rather than loving them.

Verse 46, you experts in the law, woe to you, because you load people down with burdens they can hardly carry, and you yourselves will not lift one finger to help them.

He's describing their teaching, and he pictures their teaching as a teaching that lays heavy burdens on people, gives them an enormous weight of things to do and laws to keep without any accompanying help in keeping those laws.

I mean, we know they give them laws about avoiding uncleanness, watching when you come in from being outside, and so on. Secondly, these people honor the prophets who taught the truth before, but actually belong with those who killed them.

[28 : 42] Look at verse 47, woe to you, you build tombs for your prophets, and it was your ancestors who killed them. So you testify that you approve of what your ancestors did.

They killed the prophets, and you build their tombs. Because of this, God in his wisdom said, I'll send them prophets and apostles, some of whom they'll kill, and others they'll persecute.

Therefore, this generation will be held responsible for the blood of all the prophets that's been shed since the beginning of the world, from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah.

Yes, I tell you, this generation will be held responsible for it all. Now, we don't know exactly what these people were doing with the prophets. Were they adorning their tombs, building monuments

by their tombs, building fancier tombs?

It looks like honoring the prophets, doesn't it, to do that? But, says Jesus, there's another way of thinking about it. It isn't really respect.

[29 : 46] It's just saying, the job our ancestors did of killing them, that was a good job to do. Your fathers were in the prophet murdering business, you're in the tomb decorating business.

You and your fathers, you're all in the killing trade when it comes to the truth. Now, folks, observably, it's very common for this to happen. Religious people often honor when they are dead people they would absolutely have hated when they were alive.

I used to work in a hospital in East London. Outside the hospital was a statue of William Booth, the founder of the Salvation Army. They absolutely hated him when he was alive.

They built a statue to him when he was dead. Who hated him most when he was alive? The religious establishment. Who is most interested in his history now he's dead?

The religious establishment. It's always that way, and it was always that way with Israel. They repeatedly rejected God's messengers when they were alive.

[30 : 59] They honor them now they're dead. But, verse 50, God's patience has run out. For generation after generation after generation, God patiently sent them more prophets whom they rejected.

But now, the game's over. Finally, this generation is a generation facing a terminal judgment. And these teachers are at the heart of it. Third woe, verse 52, woe to you experts in the law, because you've taken away the key to knowledge.

You yourselves have not entered, and you've hindered those who were entering. Not only have you misrepresented what God has said, you have actively stopped other people from responding to what God has said.

So then, we have in this chapter three groups. An eager-looking generation that faces judgment, a rigorous-looking piety that actually loves itself, and a burdensome teaching, which is the enemy of truth.

[32 : 24] Let me ask two questions as we conclude. Why is Jesus so confrontational here? I mean, he's exceptionally confrontational.

Over dinner? Well, because Jesus himself has come through his life, and especially his sacrificial death, he has come to deal with human sin and corruption and uncleanness.

He is the only one who's able to do that. But these people are preventing their culture from coming to him for the forgiveness and life he offers, and he alone offers.

You'd be confrontational, wouldn't you, if that was happening? This attitude, this superficial piety, and this way of teaching is at the heart of what's killing Jesus' generation.

Second question, why has Luke put it here in his book, this grim section? It is grim, isn't it? Well, I think there are two reasons.

[33 : 47] One is for encouragement, and one is for warning. First, the encouragement. If you look right back to the beginning of Luke's gospel, he's writing to somebody called Theophilus, and he's writing so that Theophilus will have confidence in the things he's heard about Jesus.

Think for a moment how discouraging it must have been for a first century believer to look out there at the world and think about the message about Jesus that you've received, but to know that God's ancient people, the people of Israel, have on the whole rejected the one who God has sent to his people.

That would be worrying for you, wouldn't it? Is Jesus really who he says he is? Well, if he is, why on earth have God's people rejected him?

That would be a big problem to you. What this chapter does is it takes the lid off why it is that Israel has so firmly rejected Jesus because he alone is the answer to human uncleanness, and what there is in Israel is a self-righteous attitude that fundamentally rejects Jesus as the only answer.

So this is here to help explain why that rejection's happened. Very important for first century believers. Why else is it here?

[35 : 24] Well, I think it's here for warning. Just flip over to chapter 12, verse 1. Second half of the verse. Jesus speaks to his disciples.

Be on your guard against the attitude of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy. Watch out for it. Watch out that you don't get taken in by it, captured by it. You see, religious-looking piety, rigorous-looking piety, is superficially attractive to human beings.

This is a very rigorous person. Maybe they're serious. Maybe I ought to listen to them. If only I work a bit harder, I can be more spiritual like them.

And that kind of thing is attractive to our sort of built-in self-righteousness, isn't it? Maybe if I work a bit harder, I won't have to depend solely on Jesus as the only answer to my inner corruption.

[36 : 31] perhaps it's especially important for people who are going to be in positions of responsibility, as Jesus' first disciples were going to be, responsible for passing on the message about him, perhaps also for teachers today.

If you're a person in church or in your Christian union with responsibility for teaching, it's a dangerous position to be in. You handle the truth very regularly.

it's very easy to develop ways of deflecting the truth from getting into you. You have a public role, access to people.

Your small group looks up to you, or your church looks up to you. You have a platform from which to gain recognition for yourself.

And as we've learned in this passage, people like that. You have opportunity to give people things to do, to rule over them, to lay burdens upon them so that they obey you and trust you and depend on you, rather than obeying Jesus and trusting him and depending on him only.

[37 : 44] Dangerous thing to be in a position of being a teacher or leader. So it's here for encouragement, but it's also here as a warning.

We have here then an eager looking generation facing judgment, a rigorous looking piety that actually loves itself, and a burdensome teaching which is the enemy of truth.

The truth, of course, is that Jesus is the only answer to our innate corruption, that his death in Jerusalem is the only means of our forgiveness from our deepest sins, and that anyone who abandons hope in themselves and comes to him will be forgiven and cleansed forever.

He is the answer. Let's pray. Father in heaven, we thank you so much for sending your son into the world to save us from our sins.

We pray please that you will help us today and every day to abandon hope in our own righteousness and to trust him only.

[39 : 19] And we pray please that you will help us not to direct attention to ourselves and seek to be approved of by others, but rather live to direct others to Jesus so that they will approve of and love him.

We ask this in his name. Amen.