

Don't let the light turn into darkness (Luke 11:29-54)

Today we will study the latter half of Luke cp. 11. Let's first review the first half of cp. 11.

Jesus teaches his disciples how to pray. As a conclusion, he said "your father in heaven will give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him." (v.13)

Then, there comes an incident of Jesus' driving out a demon. There are some people who said Jesus was driving out demons by Beelzebub, the prince of demons (v.15). Also there are some others who asked for a sign from heaven, because they thought healing of the sick and driving out demons could not prove him to be Christ (v.16).

For the first group of people, Jesus pointed out that any kingdom divided against itself will be ruined. Then he told the story of an evil spirit returning to the house he left. And he said where Jesus is driving out demons, the kingdom of God has already come. You don't have to wait for the kingdom of God to come, because it's already here. What we need to do is to receive the Holy Spirit and keep being filled with the Spirit.

And, today we will start from v.29, Jesus' answer to the second group of people, those who asked for a sign. Jesus warned, "See to it that the light within you is not darkness." Today's theme is "Don't let the light turn into darkness."

1. The light within us

29-33

²⁹ As the crowds increased, Jesus said, "This is a wicked generation. It asks for a miraculous sign, but none will be given it except the sign of Jonah. ³⁰ For as Jonah was a sign to the Ninevites, so also will the Son of Man be to this generation. ³¹ The Queen of the South will rise at the judgment with the men of this generation and condemn them; for she came from the ends of the earth to listen to Solomon's wisdom, and now one greater than Solomon is here. ³² 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 one greater than Jonah is here. ³³ "No one lights a lamp and puts it in a place where it will be hidden, or under a bowl. Instead he puts it on its stand, so that those who come in may see the light.

First, let's think about "signs". There are many signs around us. On the street, at shops, at the airport, we see many different kinds of signs. Are signs there to decorate the city? I don't think so. Signs are there for purposes. Each sign has its purpose and meaning. A sign is there so that people can understand what it means and follow the sign. That is the purpose of a sign.

But there is a problem. If people doesn't understand what the sign means, or if people ignore it, the sign will become just an awkward design, a disturbing mark, or an unpleasant decoration.

Jesus said Son of Man, that is, Jesus himself would be a sign to that generation. People heard the message of Jesus, "The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!" (Mk1:15) Jesus himself is the sign that the kingdom of God has come (v.20). The work of Jesus is the light that clearly shows the reality of the kingdom of God. Jesus didn't hide the light, but showed the light before everyone, and publicly showed the sign. When people saw the sign, they should have followed the sign.

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³⁴ Your eye is the lamp of your body. When your eyes are good, your whole body also is full of light. But when they are bad, your body also is full of darkness.

No matter how good and refreshing the weather is, and how much the sun shines, if you completely cover your eyes with thick towel or something, you are in the darkness and cannot see anything. You have to grope about fearfully.

This is figuratively speaking about the state of the eyes of our hearts or our spiritual eyes.

The shining light is Jesus, but his light comes into our life only if we open our hearts to see and accept the truth. Then we are filled with the inner "glow" of spiritual life. Healthy spiritual eyes allow the full light of Christ's presence and truth to flood into us. But sick spiritual eyes, like the Pharisees had, keep us in darkness.

We live in the society where we are flooded with information. It is important for us to choose what to listen to, what to see, what to keep in our heart, what to avoid listening. Filtering mechanisms are necessary. The real question, then, is what have we set our filters to filter out? Is our filtering system

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sound? Does it let in that which is true and good and wholesome, or is it set to admit the perverse, hateful, and obscene? What does it pick up on?

35-36

³⁵ See to it, then, that the light within you is not darkness. ³⁶ Therefore, if your whole body is full of light, and no part of it dark, it will be completely lighted, as when the light of a lamp shines on you."

We need exposure to the full strength of Jesus' Light and Spirit to change us and give us true discernment. And, the wonder of Jesus within us will come out clearly. The Pharisees saw Jesus preach and people respond in faith. They saw miracles and wonders, but they discerned them through their unhealthy, self-protecting, wicked spiritual eyes, and saw Jesus as their enemy rather than their brother.

2. The trap of "works-righteousness"

37-41

³⁷ When Jesus had finished speaking, a Pharisee invited him to eat with him; so he went in and reclined at the table. ³⁸ But the Pharisee, noticing that Jesus did not first wash before the meal, was surprised. ³⁹ 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. ⁴⁰ You foolish people! Did not the one who made the outside make the inside also? ⁴¹ But give what is inside the dish to the poor, and everything will be clean for you.

I want to tell you a story. There was a boy. He was very diligent and serious. He came to know about Jesus through his Christian friends at school. Then, he started to read Bible every day, he made it a rule to memorize one verse a day, and he also daily wrote down what seemed to be important from the portion he read. One day, he was invited by his classmate to go to a Sunday school. And he said they could join a potluck lunch after the Sunday school. He had never been to church before, so he was a little bit nervous, but he decided to go to church, with much expectation.

The following Sunday, they went to church together, and joined the

Sunday school and the potluck lunch. On the way home, his friend could hardly wait to ask him, "How was the Sunday school? Did you enjoy it? We don't have the potluck lunch every week, but we have Sunday school every week. Will you come again?" He answered, "I enjoyed Sunday school very much. It's exciting to study the Bible." Then, his friend asked in excitement, "Well then, let's go together from next week!"

But then he said with serious face, "No, I don't think I will go to this church. The pastor is no good, because he doesn't follow Jesus. Didn't you see he washed his hands before meal?"

We teach our children to wash their hands thoroughly before eating in order to prevent diseases. But the Pharisees didn't wash in order to get rid of germs. They washed as required by the "tradition of the elders" in order to avoid becoming unclean (Mark 7:3, 5). Here, when it says Jesus didn't wash his hands, that means he didn't do that kind of rituals.

Jesus said that their practice of cleansing the outside of a cup and dish is just as external. And you cannot cleanse the inside by washing the outside. Jesus uses cups and dishes as an analogy regarding the Pharisees' character. They are very concerned with outward purity and observance, but their hearts are full of greed and wickedness.

The Pharisees' understanding of religion is essentially selfish, -- performing every requirement of the law in order to justify themselves before God and receive salvation. Good works are performed not for the sake of others necessarily, but to ensure one's own salvation.

From this scene, we can learn at least three factors that can make the light within us into darkness.

- 1) Excessive fear against committing sin

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⁴² "Woe to you 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.

Tithing is the practice of returning one tenth of one's net income to God.

We usually tithe at the church where we currently worship and participate, and where we are currently involved. Some people seem to believe that tithing is the Old Testament teaching. But in this passage Jesus clearly advocates tithing.

Now, the main subject starts from here. In Jesus' observation, the Pharisees would go out into their herb gardens and pluck one leaf for the tithe for every nine leaves they used in their meals.

When a person tries to make himself righteous by his work, or tries to maintain the righteousness by his effort, he will become afraid of breaking the Law. He makes more detailed rules by himself. And he makes the hurdle higher and higher. As he continues, he will get more and more sensitive about breaking the law. And finally he might get depressed, or have a nervous breakdown.

If it is seen from another point of view, the motive of his action is for him to not break the law. His action might on the surface look like actions by mercy for others, but essentially they are different. (1 Cor. 13:3)

If we do that, the light within us will turn into darkness. The wonder of Jesus within us will not come out.

2) The vanity to seek honor from people

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⁴³ "Woe to you Pharisees, because you love the most important seats in the synagogues and greetings in the marketplaces.

Jesus also accuses the Pharisees of seeking public honor. Perhaps just a desire to be noticed and greeted as an important person. Self-seeking and self-exaggerating is one form of pride that is difficult to see clearly in oneself but easy to see in others.

If a person seeks honor from others, what will he do? He will do something that will draw attention of others, something that people praise. For example, good works, helping others, giving to others. On the surface, they look like actions by mercy for others, but essentially they are different. His motive is to receive honor for himself.

If we do that, the light within us will turn into darkness. The wonder of Jesus within us will not come out.

3) The evil locked up within will affect others

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⁴⁴ "Woe to you, because you are like unmarked graves, which men walk over without knowing it."

For Jesus to call the Pharisees unmarked graves means that they defile people with their teachings and practices. And people are unaware of Pharisees' defilement. This is a very strong condemnation.

Numbers 19:16

¹⁶ "... anyone who touches a human bone or a grave, will be unclean for seven days.

Jews concerned with ritual purity avoided touching corpses that might defile them and require them to purify themselves again. Jesus used the Old Testament teaching which the Pharisees are familiar with. He pointed out that Pharisees had evil inside and the evil would affect others.

If a person strictly observes the law, he would look fine on the surface. But excessive fear against committing sin or vanity to seek honor from others may be hidden inside him. We can't erase them, no matter what kind of ritual we do. We cannot change them into something good, by our effort. The things shut up in our heart will come out before long. For example, they may come out in the form of judging others, becoming aggressive, envying, having grudges, watching other people's mood, always being a yes-man to others. They will not only torture us, but also give bad influence to others. Then, the light within us will turn into darkness. The wonder of Jesus within us will not come out.

What is scary about the trap of "works-righteousness"? That is, it can make us believe if we try harder, and if we observe the law more strictly, more precisely, we will become better. When we are caught in it, that will keep us away from entrusting Jesus with all our issues inside, and will keep us away from surrendering ourselves to the work of the Holy Spirit.

What is the key to keep us away from the trap? That is, the love of God and justice towards humans (v.42).

We do not have them within us by birth. They will be given by God. By

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the work of the Holy Spirit, they will become our new nature.

For example, greed (v.39), or to plunder others for ourselves. We don't do that, but do justice. We want to be fair for everyone. We will not show favoritism. We will not use two scales. We will not lie, nor cheat. We will not misuse our position to fill our own pocket.

It is not just people who are in higher position in the society that could misuse their position. But those who are called the weak in the society can also misuse their position and control others by claiming their weakness.

We give tithe or share something with others, out of our love for God, not out of fear that we might break the law if we don't. No matter what kind of ministry or charitable enterprise, we do it out of love for God and justice toward others, not because it is commanded by the law, nor in order to be acknowledged nor praised by others. It is only by the work of the Holy Spirit within us. And then, the wonder of Jesus will come out from us.

3. The trap of studying the Word of God

45-46

⁴⁵ One of the experts in the law answered him, "Teacher, when you say these things, you insult us also." ⁴⁶ 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.

Jesus is speaking about the role of scribes in formulating Jewish Law. Since the Torah didn't cover every single situation that could come up in everyday life, the scribes would extend their understanding of the Law to other situations. Often their laws were a very great burden.

Now from here, we can learn at least three factors that will make us lose sight of the light of Jesus.

1) To study the Bible for intellectual satisfaction

"Theology is not just knowing about God, but knowing him. To know him

we need to be restored to friendship with him."¹ So, doing theology we suppose to have communication with God, deepen our relationship with him and experience his grace.

However, for studying the Bible itself is fascinating, we may be just satisfied with understanding it intellectually and stop there. We may not know God, deepen our relationship with him and experience His grace.

In plain words, we may finish our Bible study when we understand what the word means. But we may not apply it to our lives nor reflect over our lives. Then, of course, we will not experience dialogue with God nor experience God's words live and work in our lives.

If we do that, while we study the Bible and enjoy doing it, we will lose sight of the light of Jesus.

2) To regard our own knowledge higher than the Bible

47-49

⁴⁷ "Woe to you, because you build tombs for the prophets, and it was your forefathers who killed them. ⁴⁸ So you testify that you approve of what your forefathers did; they killed the prophets, and you build their tombs. ⁴⁹ 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.'

They were supposedly honoring the dead prophets, but in fact they were finishing off the murderous job of their own ancestors. The true way to honor the prophets would be to heed their word and to listen to the One to whom their words pointed. While they studied the Word of God, they rejected the prophets sent by God and their message, because they regarded their knowledge higher than God's Word.

It can happen to us as well. For example, when we read the Bible, we might come across something that doesn't suit our preference nor common sense. Then we might try to force the Scripture into our preference and common sense.

Or when we read the Bible, we might come across something that doesn't agree with our experiences. Then, we might come up with our own theology, and try to adjust the Bible to our experiences.

¹ Goldsworthy, Graeme, *According to Plan*, Inter-Varsity Press (1991): (47)

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If we do that, while we may study the Bible diligently, the wonder and greatness of God will be denied, and we will lose sight of the light of Jesus.

3) To hide the key to knowledge

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⁵² "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."

Imagine this. There is a large, great, beautiful garden. In the garden, there is full of joy and peace. The garden is securely surrounded with high walls, and no one can enter it. But there is a gate. That is the only entrance to the garden. And the gate is locked. There is a gate watcher, who hold the key to unlock the gate. His role is to explain how wonderful and beautiful the garden is and to pass the key to anyone who wants to enter the garden. Then the person can open the gate by himself and enter it. Very simple.

However, instead of telling about how wonderful the garden is, the gate watcher started to explain about the gate and the key. He spoke about what kind of material the gate is made from and how strong the gate is. He also spoke about how complicated the structure of the lock is, and how impossible it is to break the lock.

Before long, the gate became a popular place where people came and enjoyed listening to his talk. But there was no one who wants to enter the garden. And the gate watcher even forgot about the fact that he had the key.

I wonder if the gate watcher has ever entered the garden actually. If he has entered the garden, how did he spend his time there and how much did he actually enjoyed and experienced the beauty of the garden? And when was it?

When was the last time you spent time with God in the Holy of Holies?
(Heb. 10:19-20)

It's easy for us to forget the fact that we can enjoy close fellowship with God personally and in the community of believers. And it's easy for us to forget the God Himself is inviting us to this close fellowship. He made the way for us, and he is waiting us.

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Let us hold on to the word of life and shine like stars in the universe, in a crooked and depraved generation. (Phi. 2:15-16) Don't let the light turn into darkness.