

Last week we looked at the Lord's Prayer as model for our prayers in Luke's gospel. Following this teaching Jesus exorcizes a mute demon out of a person who had come for healing and is accused of exorcising demons with the power of Beelzebub rather than of God. Jesus again teaches them that Satan will not fight against himself as a kingdom divided will not stand and therefore it was indeed the power of God by which he was performing these exorcisms. It is in this context of the power that was exercised by Jesus that a woman in the crowd calls out, "Blessed is the mother who gave you birth and nursed you." Jesus replied, "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it." God reveals his saving purpose through the signs which he sends.

The emotions expressed are truly that of a mother. She was thinking to herself as to how proud the mother of Jesus would be hearing all the wonderful teaching that Jesus taught. She almost envies the mother of such a wonderful teacher. Jesus was teaching the woman that more than a mother-son relationship that Jesus had with Mary, what was important and of eternal consequence was to have a relationship with him and be obedient to his words. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus says that miracles and prophecy in his name would be of no use if they were not obedient to his words. He compares the obedient to the people who build their house upon the rock and the disobedient as those who build their house upon sand which would crash in the time of trial.

The Pharisees and teachers constantly wanted signs to know that Jesus was indeed from God and was indeed the promised Messiah. They had their scriptures with them but they were not willing to believe what the scriptures said about him but were seeking signs. The people were gathering around him to see the signs but there was no genuine turning towards him. Jesus tells them that a wicked and adulterous generation asks for a sign. The only sign that they would be given is the sign of the prophet Jonah. In Matthew it is spelt out that just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and nights in the heart of the earth. The pattern of events in the book of Jonah corresponds to that in the story of the Son of man. Jonah is thrown into the sea and swallowed by the fish, returns three days later to the land of the living, and proclaims God's message to the men of Nineveh; and the career of Jesus shows the same kind of sequence—death, burial, resurrection, proclamation. Jesus was referring to his own death, burial and resurrection. His resurrection on the third day will be the confirming sign for all concerned that Jesus is indeed God and that his claims about himself being the Messiah would be proven. After the resurrection comes the proclamation of salvation.

Jesus then talks about two responses to God's invitation of salvation: the Queen of Sheba and the people of Nineveh. The Queen of Sheba had heard about the wisdom of King Solomon and she came from the ends of the earth to listen to Solomon's wisdom. Now one greater than King Solomon is here and the testimony about him has gone far and wide. The people who wanted signs and wonders were the very people who had witnessed all the signs and wonders but they were unwilling to accept Jesus as the Messiah. In other words evidence was given to the Queen of Sheba and she checked out the fact for herself and found it to be true. The wisdom of Solomon resulted in the Queen of Sheba recognizing Yahweh as the Lord who had placed him on his throne to rule on behalf of Yahweh. She also recognizes that it is the love of God for Israel and his desire to uphold them forever that he had made Solomon king so that he would maintain justice and righteousness. On the other hand even though the people of Israel had been given all the evidence they needed to believe on Jesus as the Messiah was rejected by the people of Israel. Therefore on judgment day the Queen of Sheba will accuse the people of Israel for not believing in Jesus despite all the signs and wonders he had done in their midst.

The second response was that of the people of Nineveh. Jonah reluctantly went and preached in Nineveh.

The people of Nineveh repent of their evil ways when they were told about their impending doom. It says that the Ninevites believed God and had turned from their wicked ways. On Judgment day they too will stand up and accuse the people of Israel because they failed to respond to the death and resurrection of Jesus.

And so the challenge is, how have we responded to the good news of Jesus Christ? Are we still looking for signs? Have we turned away from our wicked ways like the Ninevites when they heard the word of the Lord? Or are we persisting in our evil ways despite knowing that what we are doing is wrong? May God help us to put our trust in Jesus and believe in him and stop looking for signs.