

"RECEIVING THE WORD"

I. Introduction

- A. Christian apologist Greg Koukl tells the story of an atheist philosophy professor who held up a piece of chalk in front of his class and said this: "If God existed, he could stop this piece of chalk from hitting the ground and breaking."
1. Then, after dropping the chalk and watching it shatter on the floor, the professor declared that he had just proven that God does not exist. [*Tactics*, 150-151]
 2. Koukl offers a simple refutation to this ridiculous argument.
 3. You just ask this professor to drop a piece of chalk within easy reach of your outstretched hand, and when he does you let the chalk hit the ground.
 4. Then you tell the professor that, according to his reasoning, you have just proven that you do not exist.
- B. The fact that God does not jump through whatever hoops people want him to jump through does not mean that he does not exist.
1. He is under no obligation to respond to man's demand for a sign from heaven.
 2. We, however, are obligated to receive God's word of revelation.
 3. This is the overall point that is being made in the text that we are studying today.
 4. As we consider this portion of holy Scripture this morning, we will see how this theme is set forth in Jesus's teachings about the way of true blessing, the sign of Jonah, and the lamp of the body.

II. The Way of True Blessing

- A. The passage begins with a woman in the crowd offering an exuberant response to the things that Jesus was doing, saying, "Blessed is the womb that bore you, and the breasts at which you nursed!"
1. The woman was so impressed by Jesus that she declared his mother to be the special object of God's favor.
 2. This kind of statement would not be all that surprising in that culture.
 3. People would often complement a mother for raising an exceptional son.
 4. Jesus's mother Mary certainly was blessed.
 5. As she said in her Magnificat, "behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed". (Luke 1:48 ESV)
 6. It was an unparalleled blessing to bear and raise the incarnate Son of God.
 7. We should note, however, that Mary is described in the Bible as a receiver of God's blessings, not as the bestower of them.
 8. This means there is no basis for the Roman Catholic Church's teaching that Mary should be invoked "in the Church under the titles of Advocate, Helper, Benefactress, and Mediatrix." [*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 969]
- B. Jesus's response to this woman's exclamation does not deny that Mary was greatly blessed by God.
1. What Jesus does is address the misunderstanding that was implicit in what the woman was saying.

2. Her words revealed that she thought that God's blessings were bestowed on the basis of biological connections.
3. Her thinking was in line with that of many of her fellow Jews, who saw their biological relationship to Abraham as the thing that secured God's blessing for them.
4. But Jesus corrected this by saying, "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it."
5. The thing that matters is not a biological connection to Jesus but a spiritual one, a connection that comes about by having faith in God's word.
6. The reason why Mary was blessed was because she responded to God's angelic messenger by saying, "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word."
7. Of course it is true that God often uses biological connections to carry out his saving purposes.
8. During the old covenant era, God's redemptive plan focused on one ethnic group, the people of Israel.
9. And in the new covenant era God continues to work through the family to raise up children for himself.
10. Just as Abraham placed the covenant sign of circumcision on his offspring, Christians place the covenant sign of baptism upon our children.
11. In doing this, we declare that our children are outwardly part of God's covenant people and that they are therefore obligated to repent of their sins and place their faith in Jesus Christ.
12. Still, biological connections do not in and of themselves make people heirs of God's promises.

13. In both the old covenant and the new covenant, the only way anyone can come under the shelter of the divine benediction is to receive God's word of promise in faith.
- C. We should also note how Jesus makes a connection between hearing the word of God and keeping it.
1. It is not enough to give assent to the Word.
 2. True hearing involves faith and repentance.
 3. We have to receive God's Word into our hearts and let its truth transform our lives.
 4. While salvation is by grace alone through faith alone, true faith is always accompanied by the fruit of endeavoring after new obedience.
 5. As it says in the epistle of James, "be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing." (Jas. 1:22-25)

III. The Sign of Jonah

- A. We turn now to the second part of our passage, where Jesus responds to the demand for a sign from heaven.
1. Luke calls our attention to the fact that the crowds were increasing around Jesus at this point.
 2. He was attracting a large following.
 3. But instead of being seeker-sensitive and looking for ways to gain traction with these people, Jesus said this to them: "This generation

is an evil generation.”

4. This shows us the importance of calling sin what it is.
 5. Unfortunately, there is a tendency among many Christians today to talk about sin almost entirely in therapeutic terms, preferring words like ‘brokenness’ over words like ‘disobedience.’
 6. While it is true that sin produces brokenness in our lives, we should never lose sight of the fact that sin is a moral problem, a problem in which we are all complicit.
 7. We are not merely victims.
 8. Before God, we are all offenders and evildoers.
- B. Jesus points to the people’s demand for a sign as an indication of the evil of that generation.
1. It was wrong for them to ask for a sign.
 2. Jesus’s teaching bore the mark of divine authority, and the miraculous signs that he performed accredited him as one sent by God.
 3. Nevertheless, there were many who were still not ready to believe in him.
 4. They wanted another sign, a sign from heaven.
 5. They were essentially demanding that God show himself and bear witness to Jesus.
- C. Jesus responds to this demand by saying that the only sign that will be given to this generation is the sign of Jonah.
1. Jonah was the prophet sent by the Lord to the wicked Assyrian city of Nineveh to announce God’s impending judgement.

2. As you will recall, Jonah was a reluctant prophet.
 3. At first, he did not obey God's command to go and preach to the people of Nineveh.
 4. Instead, he got on a ship and sailed off in the opposite direction.
 5. This caused God to send a terrible storm that threatened to sink the ship until Jonah told the crew to throw him overboard.
 6. And when they did this, God did not let Jonah perish.
 7. He provided a large fish that swallowed Jonah whole, and three days later God caused the fish to spit the prophet out onto dry land.
 8. That deliverance testified to the fact that Jonah really was a prophet sent by God.
 9. In the same way, Jesus's deliverance from the bonds of death three days after his crucifixion testified that he had been sent by God.
- D. The people of Nineveh responded to Jonah's message by repenting of their sin.
1. They received Jonah's word as the word of God, and they acted accordingly.
 2. Though they were Gentiles, they believed God's word.
 3. A similar example from the Old Testament is seen in the example of the queen of the South, also known as the queen of Sheeba.
 4. When she learned of Solomon's great wisdom, she traveled from a great distance to listen to him.
 5. Like the people of Nineveh, she received God's word for what it really is — not merely the word of man but the very word of God.

6. Jesus says that on judgment day these Gentiles will rise up against the unbelieving Jews of that generation and condemn them for their failure to believe the word that God sent through Jesus.
7. Jesus's deliverance from the grave was far greater than Jonah's deliverance from the fish.
8. Jesus's wisdom is far greater than the wisdom of Solomon.
9. God has accredited Jesus, both by the signs that Jesus performed and by raising Jesus from the dead.
10. There is no good reason to respond to Jesus with unbelief or indifference.
11. Those who persist in doing so are only bearing witness to the evil of their hearts.

IV. The Lamp of Your Body

- A. This brings us to the third part of our passage, where Jesus employs the image of a lamp as a metaphor for how we respond to God's word.
 1. When you light a lamp, you put it in a place where it will be most useful, a place where it will shed the most light.
 2. You put it up on a stand or you attach it to the ceiling so that it can illuminate the whole room.
 3. This is a picture of how we should respond to God's word.
 4. We should let it shine into our lives and illuminate every part of them.
- B. It is important to clarify that when Jesus says, "Your eye is the lamp of your body," he is not talking about some kind of inner light, the sort of thing that you hear Oprah or other self-help gurus talk about.

1. That is really just a contemporary expression of the ancient heresy that is known as gnosticism.
 2. As Peter Jones explains, those who embrace a gnostic mindset believe that salvation is a matter of realizing that they are “part of the divine; possessing within themselves the kingdom; capable of anything; and untrammelled by human traditions, creational structures, or divine laws.” [*The Gnostic Empire Strikes Back*, 26]
 3. While few Americans would actually identify themselves as gnostics, gnosticism lies behind many our culture’s basic assumptions.
 4. In fact, the Yale professor and literary critic Harold Bloom has made a compelling case for seeing gnosticism as “the American religion.”
 5. The emergence of things like transgenderism seems to support that assertion.
- C. As I said, Jesus is not comparing the human eye to a lamp in order to tell us that we need to look for the light that is within ourselves.
1. After all, a lamp does not actually have any light in itself.
 2. A lamp is simply a medium through which light shines.
 3. In the same way, the eye is the instrument through which light is received by our minds.
 4. And this is not only true in the physical sense but also in the spiritual sense.
 5. It is through the eye of the mind that the light of God’s truth is received into our lives.
 6. A healthy eye lets the light in.

7. But if there is something wrong with the eye, it cannot serve its purpose of letting the light in.
 8. It is like a broken lamp.
 9. When a person's eye are no good, his whole life remains stuck in the darkness.
 10. No matter how brightly the light shines around him, he cannot benefit from it.
- D. The only way that we can receive the light that God has shone forth in Jesus Christ is if God gives us eyes to see.
1. We need the Spirit of God to enlighten us before we can receive the things of God.
 2. And when the Spirit gives us eyes to see, we need to use them.
 3. We need to let God's light shine into our lives so that it can inform all of our beliefs and behavior.
 4. Otherwise, we will go on living according to our own light, which is really darkness.
 5. This is what Jesus means when he says, "be careful lest the light in you be darkness."
 6. He is warning us against spiritual blindness and hardness of heart.
 7. We need to be praying and striving that the light that we have been given is profitable to us.

V. Conclusion

- A. There is no greater blessing than having God give you eyes to see the light of his truth.

- B. As Jesus said to his disciples back in Luke 10, “Blessed are the eyes that see what you see!”
- C. Make sure that you take full advantage of this blessing.
- D. As we are exhorted in the letter of James, “put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.” (Jas. 1:21)