



# Central Peninsula Church

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## Is Seeing Really Believing?

SERIES: *A Savior for All People*

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For most of the people, it would seem that seeing is believing. The reason many people say they don't believe in miracles is that they really haven't ever seen one. If they saw one, they would believe. This seems to be what keeps a lot of people from believing in God. "If there is a God, why does he play hide and seek? Why doesn't he just show up and prove it? If he did, I would be the first to believe."

But I wonder if that's really true? Is it true that seeing is believing? This is an issue that came up several times in the life of Jesus. And Jesus clearly stated that this idea is actually false. Jesus would say that the reason people don't believe is that they don't want to believe. People who want God will find God, but those who don't won't find him.

We saw from Luke 11:14-28 how Jesus performed a clear cut miracle right out in public. There was a demon possessed man who was mute and Jesus cast out the demon and healed him. It was a miracle if there ever was one. And there were two different responses to that miracle. One group said that he got his power from Satan (v.15). To them, Jesus said, "Why would Satan want to cast out his own demons? How can a kingdom divided against itself stand? It doesn't make any sense." But another group seemed a bit more open minded (v.16). They said, "We're not sure. We want to see more. We want to see a sign. If we see a sign, we'll believe." Sound familiar?

Jesus deals with that precise request in vv. 29-26. He sets out to show why seeing is NOT believing. He says five things about people who look for a sign.

**I. Jesus indicts the men of his generation for seeking a sign.**

**A. They are wicked:** The first thing he says is that they're wicked. Look at v. 29a. **"As the crowds were increasing, He began to say, 'This generation is a wicked generation;'"**. Don't you just love Jesus?! The crowds are increasing; his popularity is growing; people are flocking around him. That seems like a good thing. I would be thinking, "Man, this is great. What can we do to keep these seekers around? Let's be 'seeker-sensitive!' I can see that they really want to believe, but they just have these nagging doubts. How can we help them take that step of faith? How can we get them plugged in?" But Jesus says, "These people are wicked!" That's a way to thin out a crowd!

You see, the problem is not with the evidence. Most of these people had seen Jesus do several miracles. He had raised people from the dead by this time! What more could they want? The problem wasn't with the evidence; the problem was with the people. They're wicked. We don't like that word today. But do you know what? Nothing has changed. He would say the same thing about the people in that video. They're wicked, too. Because the demand for proof is most often just a smokescreen for rebellion. People don't believe in God because they don't want to believe in him.

People will come up with any excuse for not believing and obeying. The Bible says in Romans 1:20. **"For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse."** Ever since God created this world there has been no excuse. All you have to do is look at creation. But people still come along and say, "Where did it all come from?" A scientist says, "Well, it came from an explosion."

Someone responds, "What caused the explosion?" The scientist says, "Gas and dust." Someone else asks, "Well, where did gas and dust come from?" He says, "They were just always here." I say, "Well, that's great. So you believe in eternal gas." But, you see, we would rather believe in that than the simple and reasonable explanation that behind it all there is a creator; a first-cause. People don't believe because they don't want to believe. They're wicked.

**B. They are refused:** This leads to the second thing he says about them. He says they will be refused. They won't get what they're asking for. Look at the rest of the verse and into v. 30. **"and yet no sign will be given to it but the sign of Jonah. For just as Jonah became a sign to the Ninevites, so will the Son of Man be to this generation"** (vv. 29b–30).

No sign will be given to them but the sign of Jonah. What was the sign of Jonah? Listen to what Jesus said in Matthew's gospel, **"for just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the sea monster, so shall the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth"** (12:40). The sign of Jonah was that he survived being burped up out of the belly of a fish after being in there for three days. That was all the Ninevites needed to know (can you imagine what he looked like?). But Jesus would do something even more amazing. He would be dead for three days. He would live after being burped up from the grave! What more could anyone want in terms of evidence?

Back when Charlie Chaplin was in his heyday there were Chaplin look-alike contests that sprung up around the country. Contestants attempted to imitate Chaplin dressed as the tramp character he made popular in his films. Even Bob Hope entered such a contest in Cleveland, Ohio, and won. The funny thing is, one day Chaplin himself decided to enter a Chaplin look-alike contest in a San Francisco theater. Guess what? He failed to even make the finals!

Sometimes we fail to recognize the truth about God when it's staring us right in the face. Even after his own disciples saw him raised from the dead, many of them doubted. But Jesus says that's the only sign you get and that's all you really need. You say, "I didn't see him. Why should I believe?" But we have all the historical evidence for the resurrection of Jesus. Have you ever studied that? Why do you believe Lincoln was shot in Ford's theater by John Wilkes Booth on April 14, 1865? Because it is a fact of history, right? We have as much evidence for the resurrection as we have for that.

**C. They are shown up:** The third thing he says about them is that they're shown up. He points to two examples out of the OT where people believed with much less evidence than we have.

First he points to the Queen of Sheba. Look at v. 31. **"The Queen of the South will rise up with the men of this generation at the judgment and condemn them, because she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and behold, something greater than Solomon is here."** Do you remember that wild story? This queen hears about Solomon and his wisdom and comes to Jerusalem to see it for herself. And she wasn't disappointed. Before she left she told Solomon, "It's all true! This is amazing! You're amazing! Your God is amazing!" There are several contrasts here that would have put those demanding a sign to shame. *First, she was a woman.* Unfortunately, in that day, women were not viewed as bright enough to even be educated. So this woman shows up the "men of this generation." Not only that, but *she was a pagan woman; she was a gentile.* Not only that, *she travels all the way from southern Arabia*, which would have been about 1,000 miles, just to hear Solomon. That's like you and I going on horseback all the way to Vancouver, British Columbia, just to hear some guy preach! I mean, let's face it, we have a hard time getting out of bed on Sunday morning and driving three miles to church! There is a kind of reckless, eager, hunger for the truth that she displays. But these people have Jesus right in their backyard for a picnic and they still don't get it! They have

“something greater than Solomon.” They have Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and they still don’t believe. Solomon may have been wise, but as Paul says in Colossians, **“in {Christ} are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge”** (Col.2:3).

But they aren’t only shown up by the Queen of Sheba, they’re also shown up by the people of Nineveh. Look at v. 32. **“The men of Nineveh will stand up with this generation at the judgment and condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and behold, something greater than Jonah is here.”** Once again we have several contrasts. The people of Nineveh were pagans. As a matter of fact, the Jews and the Ninevites despised each other. That’s why Jonah didn’t want to go preach to them in the first place. He knew that if they repented God would forgive them and that was the last thing he wanted! So God told Jonah to go to Nineveh and he took off in the other direction! But the real contrast is in the response. It didn’t matter that Jonah was a Jew, they listened and repented anyway. They changed their minds about the direction they were going. They cried out to the true God for mercy. They were willing to listen to Jonah and change their ways. Jesus says, “You have something greater than Jonah here. You have the Son of God. And you still won’t repent.”

**D. They are accountable:** And this leads to the fourth thing he says about them: they’re accountable. They will be condemned at the judgment because they had something greater than the Queen of Sheba right in their own backyard and they still wanted more. They had something greater than Jonah and they still wouldn’t repent. And so they’ll be held accountable for that. Jesus speaks of a coming judgment. There is a judgment day. It’s not here yet but it is coming. And at that judgment we’ll be held accountable for what we did with the truth that we had. Listen to the words of Jesus taken from the Gospel of John:

John 5:22 **“For not even the Father judges anyone, but He has given all judgment to the Son,”**

John 5:26-27 **“For just as the Father has life in**

**Himself, even so He gave to the Son also to have life in Himself; and He gave Him authority to execute judgment, because He is the Son of Man.”**

John 12:48 **“He who rejects Me, and does not receive My sayings, has one who judges him; the word I spoke is what will judge him at the last day.”**

It’s very clear by what Jesus says that we’ll be judged for what we did with HIM; with the HIS message. Most people don’t realize what’s at stake here.

In his book, *Into Thin Air*, Jon Krakauer tells of his harrowing experience climbing Mt. Everest. On May 10, 1996, Krakauer made it to the top. He paused only for a few minutes before heading down, his muscles exhausted, his limbs frozen, and his brain oxygen-deprived. As he headed down, some clouds drifted up and enveloped him. He almost didn’t make it. Thunder, lightning, and a snowstorm threatened to disorient him, but he was close enough to base camp number four to get there before the full force of the storm hit. But there were four climbers who arrived at the summit shortly before Jon and didn’t have time to get to the base camp before darkness. The storm caused them to lose their way. Exhausted and lost, they simply lay down to wait out the night. When they awoke in the morning, they found they had lain down just one step from the 4,000-foot precipice of the South Wall. They had slept the night on the edge of a cliff in the middle of a snowstorm.

I think that’s a pretty good picture of people in our society. With all of our sophistication and learning and enlightenment, we sleep on the edge of disaster. Our culture tells us, “There is no absolute truth. Whatever YOU think is right and true—that’s the way you should live.” That’s a lie. People say, “How can I believe in God when there is so much evil in the world?” That’s a cop out. People don’t believe because they don’t want to believe. They prefer darkness light.

**E. They are blind:** That’s what Jesus says next. **“No one, after lighting a lamp, puts it away in a cellar**

**nor under a basket, but on the lampstand, so that those who enter may see the light**" (v. 33). It sounds like Jesus is changing the subject here, but he's not. The light that he is talking about is his HIM—his life, his teaching, his preaching. He's out there shining for all to see.

The problem is not with the light; the problem is with you. Look at v. 34. **"The eye is the lamp of your body; when your eye is clear, your whole body also is full of light; but when it is bad, your body also is full of darkness."** What's he saying here? This is dealing with our receptivity to Jesus and his preaching. In essence, he's saying that the problem is not with the light of Christ, it's with your own capacity to receive that light. If you came in this room this morning and all the lights were on, but all you saw was total darkness, we would say something is wrong with your eyes. You see, good eyes admit light; bad ones don't. This is a metaphor for how we receive and respond to the light of Christ. If we have a clear eye we'll take in the light of his truth and our whole being will benefit, but if our eye is bad we will not take in his light and our whole being will be full of darkness. This pertains, of course, to the people asking Jesus for a sign. They don't need a sign; they need new eyes! The reason they don't believe is that their spiritual vision is so obscured by unbelief that they don't see the light. They don't need more light, they need better eyes!

And then he issues a warning. Look at v. 35. **"Then watch out that the light in you is not darkness."** What a scary thought! Think about it. We can actually think we're so enlightened. We hear people talk about enlightenment today. Maybe they talk about how God is some kind of great source of energy and we are all part of that energy and so we are one with God. Or maybe they talk about how much all religions have in common and how there are many paths to God. Or they talk about how important it is to live life on your own terms and get as much out of it as

you can because there is nothing more beyond what we experience here and now. It's like the Bon Jovi song, "It's My Life,"

It's my life

It's now or never

I ain't gonna live forever

I just want to live while I'm alive

(It's my life)

My heart is like an open highway

Like Frankie said

I did it my way

I just wanna live while I'm alive

It's my life

Sometimes it sounds good, doesn't it? But Jesus says, "Watch out that the light in you may not be darkness!"

But there is a positive side to this. Look at v. 36. **"If therefore your whole body is full of light, with no dark part in it, it will be wholly illumined, as when the lamp illumines you with its rays."** When you let the light of Christ into your life, when you take hold of the message of the Gospel, it changes your whole life. It changes your perspective and your lifestyle and your desires and your relationships. It lights up your whole being.

## CONCLUSION

The problem is not with the light out there, it's with our willingness to receive that light. If we don't believe, it's not because we need more evidence, it's because we don't want to believe. Those of you who find yourself asking for a sign, those of you who say that seeing is believing, have to ask yourselves two questions:

*First, are you really eager for truth?* Like the Queen of Sheba, are you willing to go out of your way to find the truth? Are you willing to take the time and make the effort to discover the wisdom that is in Christ? Some of us are just lazy. I mean, we have everything right here at our fingertips. All this information on the internet. All these books. We don't even have to leave our own house. And we get sort of inebriated by all of this. But if you really are willing to seek Christ; if you're really willing to get off your

spiritual rear end, you'll find him.

*Second, are you really willing to repent?* Like the people of Nineveh, are you really willing to change? So often there are things in our lives that we don't want to give up. You know that inviting Christ into your life will mean you have to surrender the right to live the way you want, and you don't want to do that. So often that's the real issue, isn't it? We don't want that light taking over our lives, do we? We like living life on our own terms. "It's MY life," right? But you can surrender now or later. You can do it now or you can do it at the judgment.

Some of us have already surrendered to Christ. We consider ourselves followers of his. This passage challenges us as well with two questions:

*First, is the light impacting our whole body or do we allow areas of darkness to remain?* Jesus talks about our "whole body being full of light, with no dark part in it." Is that you? Is that me? So often we keep a few select areas of our lives in hiding, in darkness. We don't expose that room to the light because we want to keep it for ourselves. Many of you know exactly what I'm talking about. You know where that area is. It's time to let his light shine on that place. Maybe when we invite people up here to pray after the service that would be a time for you to do that.

*Second, are we allowing the light of Christ to shine through us?* Jesus says here that no one lights a lamp and then puts it under a basket. That would defeat the purpose. When the light of Christ comes into our lives, we're supposed to let that light shine. Are we doing that? We're not just here for ourselves. We're not just some kind of religious country club that exists for the benefit of the members. We're the body of Christ moving through this Peninsula with the light of Christ. Are we letting that light shine? I mean, that's why you should join the boy scouts. That's why you do the neighborhood block party on fourth of July. That's why you coach Little League baseball. It's true that people don't believe because they don't want to believe, but if YOUR light shines bright enough, perhaps they will want to believe.

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