

An Ignorant Generation

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[0 : 00] Well, very good morning to you. Great to be here at Brunsfield and to share fellowship with you, to see some old friends. And thank you for your invitation and just for the chance to share a little bit by the video of my work with the fellowship, not Federation Ian, nothing against Star Trek, but the fellowship of independent evangelical churches.

There is a pile of these kind of magazine brochures at the door. If you want to take those away, then please do. They'll tell you a little bit more about what's going on in Scotland and the work that we're involved in.

So I'll say no more about that, but there are magazines for you to take away. If you've got your Bible there, it'd be great to have them open at Luke chapter 11. Luke chapter 11 in your series on this great New Testament gospel.

And we're going to be reading from verse 29 down to verse 36. So Luke chapter 11, let's hear the word of God.

As the crowds increased, Jesus said, This is a wicked generation. It asks for a sign, but none will be given it.

[1 : 18] 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 will be hidden or under a bowl.

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.

[2 : 28] Therefore, if your whole body is full of light and no part of it is dark, it will be just as full of light as when a lamp shines its light on you.

May God bless to us the public reading of his precious and inspired words. Well, you'll know as you've been working through the Gospel of Luke that we are in the section of Luke which is often called the Journey to Jerusalem section.

Jesus is heading to the capital back in chapter 9 verse 51. We read that Jesus resolutely turned his face and set out to Jerusalem.

He's heading to the capital because there he will finish his work. The time when his public miracles, his street preaching, his open air preaching will cease.

And the people then, as we today, will have to make their final decision about him. By chapter 11, where we are today, Jesus' ministry and teaching, of course, was becoming well established.

[3 : 39] But as he teaches, as his ministry took place, we see and look as we do in the other Gospels that people were starting to divide around him. Jesus has that effect.

It's difficult, it's impossible to be neutral about Jesus. People have to make a decision. People start to divide around Jesus and his teaching.

There were some loyal followers, of course, but there were also some increasingly hostile opponents, particularly among the religious establishment of the day, who hated the way that Jesus exposed their hypocrisy and their superficiality.

The latter group even accused Jesus of being in league with the devil. Such was their jealousy and annoyance about him in the preceding passage.

Well, we can imagine the atmosphere that Jesus' ministry was creating at this time. Jesus was the ministry phenomena of the day. Indeed, he was the ministry phenomena of all time.

[4 : 47] Israel was abuzz of what was going on. Increasingly large crowds, we read in verse 29, were seeking to see him.

People drawn by news of Jesus' miraculous powers, excited to see the show for themselves. Back in verse 16 of Luke chapter 11, Luke records to us that there were those who were testing Jesus by asking for a sign.

Others tested him by asking for a sign from heaven. Verse 16. But this isn't the request of people who are humbly seeking after truth.

This is the demand of the Britain's Got Talent audience. This is the, come on Jesus, show us what you've got. Impress us. Entertain us.

It's the demand of people who have set themselves up as judges of Jesus. We'll be the judge of you, Jesus. So you'd better make this good.

[5 : 53] The trip for many to go and see Jesus as he taught, as he ministered, was sadly little more than a day out to see a dancing bear.

Could that possibly be a danger for us today? Even for Christians today? I think it can sometimes be heard in the, well, unless God shows himself to me personally, or makes himself known in some kind of dramatic, not my socks off way, then you can count me out of all your Christian and faith stuff.

Maybe you've heard people say things along those lines. In other words, forget the actual teachings of Jesus. Forget the New Testament witness statements to what he did.

Forget all the good reasons that there are to actually believe in Christianity and to take Jesus seriously. Unless God measures up to my personal criteria, unless he fulfills my personal wish list, he can forget it.

Count me out. That's quite a position to take, isn't it? Quite a position to set yourself up in. That God should somehow exist to impress you.

[7 : 19] To fulfill your criteria. And actually such attitudes can even slip in to our Christian mindset at times.

Although we would make them sound much more pious, of course, wouldn't we? Eugene Peterson, the author, describes in one of his books that the approach of some Christians to church and to Jesus is the approach of spiritual tourism.

So Jesus and the church becomes just a place that we visit now and again. And like tourists who visit Rome or Cairo, we just want the highlights.

We just want the wow stuff. We don't actually want to live there. Spend time. Spend time. Spend time. Spend time in the dull bits and get too involved.

Spend time in the dull bits and get too much. And so if church and following Jesus isn't a bit of a thrill ride to us, we get bored and we look elsewhere. Maybe the theme park down the road will provide a bit more excitement.

[8 : 29] We don't want to be those people, do we? Don't be those people. Don't be the people that turn up to church on a Sunday morning, arms folded.

This better be good. But we don't want to be those people. Don't be those people. See, for Jesus, that kind of thinking, the approach of the crowds in his day, was actually, and very bluntly and uncomfortably, symptomatic, verse 29, of an evil generation.

Because for him it was evidence of people who weren't really interested in truth. Years ago, on an alpha course, there was a young guy who came along.

And he was full of objections to Christianity. And he was always quoting stuff that he said he'd read that disproved this part of the Bible or this claim about Jesus and so on and so forth, quoting websites and books.

And so, as he quoted some of these objections, I would say to him, I've actually got some material of my own. I've got some books of some Christian writers that have dealt with that subject, that have responded to it.

[9 : 42] And I would give him some books or some articles or pointing to some websites where he could go and get a Christian response to his particular objections. And then the next week, I would

say to him, did you get a chance to look at that article or that website?

No, no, no, too busy, too busy. Never got round to it, never got round to it. And then he would have another set of objections and I'd give him another set of books or places to go to next week.

Did you look at that stuff? No, no, no, no. Never got round to it, never got round to it. Too busy. It came clear that this was somebody who just wasn't really that interested in truth.

His questions were really just tools to kind of bat away the claims of Christianity. Well, he enjoyed the course, the debate, and if I'm honest, looking a bit superior.

So Jesus is very clear to the crowd who came and tested them looking for signs that he's not in the business of providing signs to order.

[10:46] Rather, he points them to the sign, verse 29, of Jonah. None will be given it except the sign of Jonah.

Now, Jonah, of course, is the famous Old Testament prophet, famous for his three days in the belly of the whale. But Jonah's ministry had been to go and to preach to the great pagan city of Nineveh. And it was a ministry that resulted in the whole city repenting and seeking God's mercy. Jesus talks about that in verse 32. They repented at the preaching of Jonah.

Jonah. Jesus says to the crowds in his day, and through Luke and the gospel as it comes to us in the 21st century, to us this morning, he says, if you want a sign, look at Jonah.

Jonah, sent by God, in God's mercy, to warn people about coming judgment. Jonah's message was pretty blunt.

[11:58] We have just a one-line summary of it from the book of Jonah itself. And it simply says that Jonah went and he preached, 40 more days and Nineveh will be overturned.

And guess what? The Ninevites took him seriously. They took God's word seriously. And they responded not with cynicism, not with a kind of shrugging of the shoulders, but with belief, with humility, with repentance.

They turned away from their wickedness and sought God's mercy. It was an amazing response.

Most of the Old Testament prophets spent a lifetime preaching against a brick wall.

They were unheeded. They were ignored. And those other prophets were for the most part preaching to Israel, God's chosen people.

So for this pagan people, this city way beyond the borders of Israel itself, to turn in the way they did, to respond in the way they did, was quite stunning.

[13:16] Which, of course, made the cool indifference to Jesus of the crowds in his day all the more inexcusable. Think of the contrast between Jonah and Jesus.

Jonah goes to Nineveh, a city that is ignorant of God. Doesn't have the Old Testament scriptures. Doesn't have the rich history of God's hand upon them.

Didn't have all the other prophets. Didn't have the law. Didn't have the covenant. Didn't have the covenant. A city that was ignorant of God in so many ways. And Jesus goes to Israel.

A people that is rich and soaked in the knowledge of God. Jonah goes reluctantly, if you know the story, to Nineveh.

His pool dragging and screaming to go to Nineveh. Jesus goes willingly to Israel. Jonah is angry that God doesn't judge the city of Nineveh.

[14:32] He's really put out by that at the end of his ministry. That the judgment doesn't just fall on them. Whereas later on we'll see that Jesus weeps over Jerusalem.

Jonah preached a message of blunt judgment. Jesus preached judgment but he preached mercy and the compassion and the grace of God.

Truly one greater than Jonah is here. And yet what happens? Jonah is believed.

And Jesus is rejected and crucified. But of course there's another parallel between the sign of Jonah and the sign of Jesus.

It's a parallel that Luke doesn't mention in his gospel in our passage. But if you go to the account of the same incident in Matthew chapter 12, Matthew does.

[15:37] And that parallel, that sign that they both share, of course, is the fact that Jonah spent three days, as it were, entombed.

And although not literally dead, he was as good as dead in the belly of the whale before being miraculously released to go and preach to Nineveh.

And so notice in verse 29 there's a kind of future tense to Jesus' promise here, isn't there? None will be given it except the sign of Jonah.

The sense in which Jesus is looking ahead here, he's pointing them ahead to a sign to come, the sign of Jonah. But a sign that's going to be fulfilled and amplified in an even more wonderful and dramatic way.

Jesus is pointing to what will be the ultimate and incontrovertible authentication of himself. The sign above every other sign, the miraculous proof that will dwarf all others.

[16:47] It's the event, of course, that the great apostle Paul will hang the entire Christian faith upon. Such is the significance and the importance, the centrality of this sign, that Paul is prepared to hang the entire Christian faith upon it.

And says, if this doesn't stand up, if this doesn't hold up, if this hook, as it were, isn't strong enough to hold the Christian faith, the whole thing will crash.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ. If Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. Now we're not told if the Ninevites were aware of Jonah's virtual resurrection.

I guess Jonah would have needed to have told them himself. Maybe that was a factor in their response. Although we don't get the impression that Jonah particularly went out of his way to persuade the Ninevites.

We don't know. The Bible doesn't tell us. But when it comes to the resurrection of Jesus Christ, it's not just one man's private testimony about a life-changing experience.

[18:13] It was an event that was testified to, by scores of witnesses, by ultimately hundreds of witnesses. It was public knowledge.

The tomb was empty for all to see. It was proclaimed openly. It confounded Christianity's opponents and it transformed its followers.

But like all Jesus' miracles, all the wonders and signs that surrounded Jesus, this greatest, definitive, authenticating sign, the resurrection, was given not for its own sake, but to point us to truth.

Truth about Jesus himself. Truth about Jesus. The truth that Jesus is the Son of God. That he is the one who alone can reconcile you to God.

That he is the one who alone can deal with the deepest and greatest problem that every single one of us face. Our alienation from God. Our sin.

[19:27] Our failure to honour God and to live for him in so many ways and at so many levels that will ultimately, if unchecked and undealt with, will bring upon us the judgment of God.

That this is the one in whom alone you can find life. Eternal life. The life of God himself. That this is the one that you were made for.

And in whom alone you can find the purpose and be the person that God created you to be. This is the one whose words lead to life.

The one whose words lead to transformation. The one whose words can lead you to have a living, real relationship with God this morning.

You notice that Jesus then introduces another Old Testament character. Verse 31.

[20:31] The Queen of the South. Or I think the old version used to say the Queen of Sheba. And again, Jesus introduces this character, the Queen of the South, because he wants to make a contrast between this woman and the fickle indifference of the crowds around Jesus.

Jesus notes verse 31. 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. Notice how this pagan queen, again a pagan, travelled a huge distance to hear Solomon.

Solomon, of course, is famed in the Bible and indeed beyond the Bible for his great wisdom. And this woman recognised that here was somebody who was worth seeking out.

Somebody to seek and to listen to. And she expended huge time and effort to do so. Now Jesus' point here seems to be that these crowds, for all their superficial hustle and bustle and interest, don't seem to have any real appetite to actually listen to him.

[21:59] They perhaps travelled a few miles, you know, with their camera phones to get some Facebook filler. These are the people, they're the guests, you know, who go to the wedding for the buffet and the dancing.

And during the service, you know, the actually important bit, where the significance and the meaning of the whole day is being explained, they're sitting staring out the window or tapping their

phones, not interested.

When's the food coming? It's a real danger, even for us as Christians. Crowds around Jesus were the Jewish people.

These were the synagogue attenders. These were the people who should have recognised God's word and been eager to hear it. But instead, Jesus says, it's a pagan outsider who actually valued and sought God's word in the days of Solomon.

Now Solomon was good. Book of Proverbs is brilliant stuff. Ecclesiastes blow you away.

[23 : 21] But it is not to be compared to the teachings of Jesus Christ in the Gospels. They went away, didn't they, with their tail between their legs.

Thought they could catch him out. Thought they could get one over him. They came away. No one ever spoke the way this man did. After all their questions and their trick questions, silence, nobody dared ask him any more questions.

Imagine it, can't you? We're in the election season, aren't we? And we're just seeing interviews coming out of our ears and they're all queuing up to interview and to interrogate the politicians. Imagine it. Jeremy Paxman, Andrew Neal, David Dimbleby, silenced. Nothing else to say. Nothing else to ask.

This was an uncontaminated intellect. I don't want to sound chiding or legalistic, but I personally was so challenged by this.

[24 : 42] Think of the time that I fritter away reading rubbish on Facebook. The hours that I can spend watching TV in contrast to the time that I spend in the Bible.

Listening and thinking and considering the words of Jesus. Perhaps it's the temptation for some of us to miss church in order to watch the sports final.

One greater than Solomon is here. Think of the previous generations of Christians and our brothers and sisters in the developing world who walked miles to get to church on a Sunday.

Set off at dawn. That huge appetite and effort to be under the teaching of the Word of God to learn about Jesus.

And for so many of us, can't speak for anybody else but for myself, Jesus is on the doorstep. He's on the bookshelf. He's on the phone. And even that can seem like an effort at times.

[25 : 54] No wonder, Jesus says, the Ninevites and the Queen of the South will rise up in judgment in a day to come. They'll be aghast at the half-heartedness and the complacency of those who never mind Jonah and Solomon were presented with the sign and teaching of the eternal Son of God.

The Lord of Lords, the King of Kings, the Alpha and the Omega, the one before whose face one day heaven and earth itself will flee away. One greater than Jonah, one greater than Solomon, one greater than all the rest is here.

You see, the primary problem that people have when they come to Jesus is not lack of evidence. It's not that they've not seen enough miracles.

And the problem isn't either that Jesus isn't interesting or that he's not relevant or he's not impressive. The problem is a spiritual one. The problem is that our spiritual eyesight, our spiritual perception is too often obscured and distorted and darkened.

Which is why Jesus moves on immediately to the subject of eyesight. Now, first, the reading we had, and we'll just finish with this in verse 33 to 36, can seem a little bit obscure.

[27 : 25] You think, what's the connection here? You can even feel a little bit convoluted when we read it for the first time. But actually, it's very relevant to what Jesus has been talking about and the big point that he is making is really quite straightforward.

Remember, of course, and we've been singing about it this morning, Jesus has come to give light, spiritual light and understanding to men and women. He is the light of the world.

He is the one who has come into the darkness of this fallen, sin-sick world to make God known. He is pushing back the darkness and in doing so, he is both exposing sin but also calling men and women into God's own presence.

And verse 33, he's not hidden that light. He's not come with a light that he's tried to obscure or hide away. It's not what you do with light. That's his point. You put it somewhere that it can be seen.

He has publicly declared God's word. He's made himself known. He's gone out to the people, to the highways and the byways. He has held up the light to maximum effect.

[28 : 44] But of course, that's only half the story, isn't it? Because of course, for the light to be effective and to be useful, it needs to be received. And we receive light through the eye.

That's how we see physically, isn't it? Light comes into our eye. It is the lamp of the body in that regard. And if our eyes are healthy, physically healthy, our whole body gets the benefit. that's why blindness is so hugely debilitating. It affects our bodily functions in so many different ways.

It impairs our ability to handle, to walk, to communicate, to participate. And if that's the case physically, then Jesus wants us to know there's a spiritual parallel to that.

if our spiritual eyesight is impaired, if we're not receiving Jesus' light, then our whole spiritual condition is going to be affected and diminished.

[29 : 50] Verse 34, 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.

That is, the less light that we receive from Jesus, the more likely we are to stumble, to get lost, to misunderstand, to use things inappropriately, to be ignorant.

The more light we receive from Jesus, the better our walk, the greater our understanding, the more you're going to get out of life. So verse 35, make sure that Jesus' light is getting in.

See to it then that the light within you is not darkness. Make sure that your spiritual eyes are in good order, so that your inner self, your heart and soul are in light and not in darkness.

How do you keep your spiritual eyes healthy? How do you keep yourself in the light? It's very simple. listen to Jesus.

[31 : 04] Pay attention to Jesus. Verse 28, believe and obey. Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it.

God and God and do you see Jesus is very clear. The extent to which you and I this morning are in the light or in the darkness, spiritually speaking, is simply the extent to which you and I are heeding the words of Jesus or we are ignoring them.

So, and we need to finish, don't be fickle, don't be half-hearted when it comes to Jesus, but be like the Ninevites who heard God's word and repented and believed with humility.

Don't be like the Queen of the South who hungered for wisdom and went after it. For someone greater than Solomon, Jonah, and all others is here.

Jesus is here. And may God bless to us. poco to us. Say little about David funny the Bee that you who called