

Looking For a Sign

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Date: 11 April 2004

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[0 : 00] Okay, it'd be great to keep that passage open because I'm going to jump around a little bit because it's a hard passage and we need to get a handle on it by looking at a couple of little other passages.

So let's pray. Lord God, I pray that you would help us to hear your words and to see your glory.

Amen. I reckon that words are pretty weak in our society and our culture today.

We're so much more into the visual, aren't we? We love the visual aspects of the sporting spectacle. We love to go watch sport, but we hate politicians and their words.

Words are cheap. Visuals are powerful. Most kids today watch TV and play PlayStation 2 rather than read books. Words are cheap.

Visuals are powerful. Now, when I was young, I used to love to tease my little sister Lorraine. And she's actually here tonight, so you can get it verified later on how much of an evil little child I was.

[1 : 13] I loved to sneak into her room and steal her stuff. And just as I was leaving, I would show her like that and I'd run and she'd run out after me screaming and yelling at me.

And I'd be just laughing at the top of my lungs with delight. And Mum would then come out and yell at me to stop. But they were just words. I just kept doing it.

I'd run in to Lorraine's bedroom, annoy her, poke fun at her or something, steal her stuff, and she'd keep screaming and yelling and I'd keep running out laughing.

Until Mum got sick and tired of warning me with her words. She'd go to the bottom drawer of the kitchen and pull out a wooden spoon. And she'd sneak up behind me without a word.

And then all of a sudden, I'd turn around in horror and see her holding this instrument of pain. Immediately, I'd start begging for mercy.

[2 : 16] I'd start pleading with her. And I said, look, I'm repenting in tears that I stopped teasing my sister Lorraine. And I swear I'd never do it again.

You see, the visual was powerful. Words were cheap. But the visual of Mum standing there with an angry face and a tightly gripped wooden spoon convinced me to repent of all my evil ways.

But as I got older, the visuals needed a bit of an upgrade. Okay? They needed an upgrade. You see, I'd tease my sister. Mum would warn me with words. I'd ignore them. I'd continue to tease my sister.

Then she'd go and get that wooden spoon and come after me and I'd just laugh at her. I was too big. It didn't hurt anymore. So I'd continue to tease her. But then Mum would say this, wait until your father gets home.

Those words were powerful. Because when I heard those words, I got a visual. I got a mental picture to ponder. I could visualise Dad coming home after a hard day at work, walking into the house, me running out the back of the house behind the shed to hide.

[3 : 43] I could visualise him walking out the back door, putting a strap around his hand as he strode towards me. I could visualise the determined look on his face as he pulled me out of my hiding place and gave me a good old thrashing.

I can still visualise it today, obviously. That picture was so powerful that I immediately stopped what I was doing.

I repented and said sorry to my sister Lorraine and then I begged Mum, please don't tell Dad.

Today, words are cheap. Today in our society, visuals are powerful.

But it hasn't always been that way. It hasn't always been that way. The Queen of the South in our passage tonight, as the Queen of Sheba, thought that words were very powerful. The Queen of Sheba thought that words were so powerful that she travelled thousands of miles to go and hear Solomon, the King of Israel.

For her, Solomon's words were very powerful. So powerful that she listened and hung on every word that he spoke. So powerful that she kept his word close to her heart, obeyed them, took them back to her land and taught others.

[5 : 06] You see, unlike me, when I was a child refusing to listen to my mum's words of wisdom, stop doing that, Stephen. The Queen of Sheba listened to Solomon's words of wisdom.

But it's different today, isn't it? Today, words are cheap. Today in our society, visuals are powerful. But it hasn't always been that way.

The Ninevites thought that words were powerful. They thought that words were so powerful that they listened to Jonah. They listened to a prophet who came from their enemies, the Israelites. They listened to an enemy prophet. They listened to an enemy condemn their religious practices. They listened to an enemy warn them of God's imminent judgment and punishment.

For them, the words of Jonah were very powerful. So powerful that they listened to Jonah and they hung on every word that he spoke. So powerful that they repented of their evil deeds, asked for mercy from God and their punishment was averted.

[6 : 22] Unlike me when I was a child, refusing to listen to my mum's words of warning, stop doing that, Stephen, the Ninevites listened to Jonah, Jonah's words of judgment and they stopped their evil deeds.

You see, words can be powerful, but the people following Jesus in this passage were more like us and our society, weren't they? For them, words seemed cheap, visuals were powerful.

Look there in verse 29. When the crowds were increasing, he began to say, this generation is an evil generation. It asks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah.

You see, the people following Jesus wanted a visual, to see another miraculous sign, but he's just been doing that in the previous section.

He's been doing some amazing things. Just have a quick look back over the page. Luke 11, verse 14 to 16. Verse 14. Now he was casting out a demon that was mute.

[7 : 35] When the demon had gone out, the one, the man, who had been mute, spoke. And the crowds were amazed. What an amazing miracle. What an amazing thing to see.

But some of them said, oh, he casts out demons by Beelzebul. The ruler of demons. Others, detest him, kept demanding from him a sign from heaven.

You know, as we read this passage, this section, we're supposed to think, you idiots. You don't need any more signs. You don't need any more signs.

Two years ago, Mel and I went to Tasmania for a holiday. And we drove around Tassie for two weeks. It was a great, great holiday. My favourite drive during that two weeks in Tasmania was through the western wilderness of Tasmania.

Mel and I drove from Hobart in the south to Strawn in the west, along the Lyle Highway. The Lyle Highway is 306 kilometres long. And it's the only road that connects Hobart to Strawn in the west.

[8 : 47] It's the only road that goes through the Gordon and Franklin World Heritage area. It's mountainous, it's treacherous, it's windy and twisting. It's beautiful as it crosses over these running rivers and these lakes and these weirs.

It's magnificent. It cuts its way through magnificent forests, World Heritage Forests. It's the most wonderful drive I've ever been on. But there's a problem.

there's one problem. Tasmanians aren't big on signage. The number one criticism that tourism Tasmania receive is the lack of signage in the west along the Lyle Highway.

That's the number one criticism. You see, the mistake that Tasmanians make is that they assume that, well, you don't really need many signs on the only road.

It goes from Hobart to Strawn. They assume that once you're on that road, you just keep going. It's obvious.

[9 : 55] Just trust the directions that we give you. They think it's a dead-set certainty that you'll arrive in Strawn. And I tend to agree with them. It sounds pretty obvious to me.

But many Victorians get lost. As they drive along, they start to get worried about the lack of signs along the way. You see, there's no mile markers along the lower highway.

They start to get confused by a lack of sense of direction because of all the twists and turns. They start to doubt that they're actually on the right road. You sure we're on the right road, honey?

Are we heading in the right direction? They stop the car and they turn back and they go look for a sign. Even though it's obvious, even though there's a dead set certainty, they turn back.

For them there isn't enough signage. They lose confidence in the directions that the Tasmanians have given them. You see, the people following Jesus must have thought that Jesus is a little bit like a Tasmanian, I suppose.

[11:01] They want him to give them more signs, more visual aids, more signs to prove that he is their long-awaited Messiah, the one who has come to save them, more signs to prove that the kingdom of God is near, and that God is going to finally come and judge the other nations, more signs to prove that they really need to repent, that Jesus demands to stop what you're doing, repent that his turn and ask for God's mercy, we're valid.

They want more signs because they weren't listening to his words, more signs because words are cheap, visuals are powerful.

But Jesus says no more, no more. You're acting like silly Victorians who don't listen to the directions given you. you're acting like evil children who don't believe my words.

Just look back at verse 27, and you'll see for yourselves that they're not listening. Look at verse 27, while he was saying this, that he's teaching them, a woman in the crowd raised her voice and said to him, blessed is the womb that bore you and the breast that nursed you.

He said, blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it. You see, Jesus knows what these people are like.

[12:45] He knows that they're not listening to his words. So, he decides that they need a powerful visual so that they'll listen to his words, like mum standing there with a wooden spoon.

Then I listened. I stopped teasing my sister. I said, sorry. Jesus knows what these people are like. He knows that they're not listening to his words and he knows that they need a powerful visual so that they'll listen to his words.

Like mum when she said, wait until your father gets home. I listened. I stopped. And I pleaded with mum for mercy.

You see, he knows they're like me when I was a child. He knows that they need a powerful sign so that his words will have some impact.

So he says this in verse 29. This generation is an evil generation. It asks for a sign but no sign will be given it except the sign of Jonah. For just as Jonah became a sign to the people of Nineveh, so the son of man will be to this generation.

[14:04] Let's just stop there for a second. Now I'm going to ask you a question. And it's not rhetorical so I do want an answer. And it's definitely not a trick question.

It's pretty easy. I'll even give the person who answers me the question first a prize. I'll show you what the prize is. It's a packet of sardines.

Okay? It's a packet of sardines. It's from, yeah, we got this from Aldi. There's the plug. So I need you to clear your thoughts for a second and get ready to answer.

Okay? I want an answer and it's easy. What picture do you get in your mind when I say Jonah? Well done, Christopher.

You win. He likes sardines. whale. Big fish.

[15:07] Well, it's a mammal, isn't it, I think? It's natural, isn't it? If you've heard of the story of Jonah, you can't help but think whale, big fish.

You see, that's the same for the people following Jesus. They would have thought, they would have pictured big fish, whale. But not only that, they would have pictured a man stuck in that whale. for three days and three nights. They would have pictured a man flying through the air onto the shore, being spat out of that whale. But they would have pictured that man walking to a capital city of his arch enemies, the Assyrians, and getting up and preaching to them about the coming judgment of God and their need to repent.

That's what they would have pictured. You see, that's the sign of Jonah. Just as Jonah became a sign to the people of Nineveh, so the Son of Man will be to this generation. What Jesus is saying is this, if you've got a picture of Jonah, a visual of Jonah, you need to take that picture, pick it up, and then plonk it onto the Son of Man.

You need to take that picture, pick it up, and then put it on Jesus, the Son of Man. And there you have your sign, your big sign. You see, like Jonah, Jesus was in the depths of the earth for three days at Easter.

[16:32] Like Jonah, Jesus is spat out alive, resurrected from the dead. Like Jonah, Jesus is sent to preach to his enemies, that evil generation, about God's coming judgment and their need to

repent, that is, turn back to God.

Like Jonah, Jesus is sent to tell his enemies, that evil generation, to stop what they're doing, repent, turn to God, plead for mercy, and they'll get mercy.

That's the sign for that evil generation, but it's also the sign for us, and our generation too. You see, at Easter 2004, that's the sign that Jesus gives us.

He was dead and buried for three days. He powerfully stood up and walked out of that tomb, to prove that his words are powerful, to prove that his words need to be listened to and acted upon, to prove that his words of the coming judgment of God are powerful and true, to prove that we need to stop, repent, that is, turn to God, and ask for mercy.

and we'll receive it. Jesus' resurrection is the big visual that gives his words impact. You see, not even Solomon or Jonah have as much power or impact today, do they?

[18:15] Or even in this passage. Look in verse 31. The queen of the south will rise up at the judgment with the people of this generation and condemn them because she came from the ends of the earth to listen to the wisdom of Solomon and see, do you see something greater than Solomon is here?

The people of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it because they repented at the proclamation of Jonah and see, do you see something, someone, greater than Jonah is here?

That's the key question tonight. The key question is this. If you don't listen to Jesus' words, who will you listen to? Because there's no one greater than Jesus.

because only Jesus has come back from the dead to prove that his words are powerful, more powerful than anyone else's words.

You see, by rising from the dead, his words of warning stand up. by rising from the dead, his words are wiser than Solomon's.

[19:37] By rising from the dead, his words are a stronger proclamation of God's imminent judgment than Jonah's. His resurrection proves that he's the greatest.

Sorry, Muhammad Ali, you're not. You haven't risen from the dead yet. Therefore, do you listen to Jesus?

Do you listen to his words? Do you listen to his words that proclaim that he's Messiah, your saviour? Do you listen to his words that warn you about the coming judgment of God?

Do you listen to his words that demand that you stop what you're doing? Listen, repent that he's turned to God, and ask for mercy and you'll get it.

You see, if we don't listen, then what we're really doing is denying the resurrection. If we don't listen, then we're saying, you didn't really rise from the dead.

[20:46] Your words are powerless, and they're not worth listening to. But I want to say, don't do that tonight. This passage says that.

Don't do that tonight. Don't ignore the sign of the resurrection. That's the sign that points to his powerful words. Don't be like that evil generation that was walking around with him, who was stuck in darkness.

That evil generation that couldn't see. That evil generation that couldn't see the sign of his resurrection, and therefore didn't listen to his words. Verse 34, your eye is a lamp of your body. If your eye is healthy, your whole body is full of light. But if it's not healthy, your body is full of darkness. Therefore consider whether the light in you is not darkness.

When I was a kid, if I didn't see that visual when my mum said, wait till your father gets home, I would have been in the dark.

[22:03] I wouldn't have pictured dad coming through the door tired after work. I wouldn't have pictured him walking out the back door with a strap. I wouldn't have pictured him giving me a good old belt.

I would have been in the dark. I would have just kept doing the things I was doing. I would have kept going. thinking that nothing was going to happen.

I would have kept teasing my sister, kept ignoring mum's words of warning. I wouldn't have stopped, I wouldn't have turned and repented, I wouldn't have asked for mercy. And when dad finally got home, I would have got a hiding in the backyard.

See, if you can't see the visual, the sign of Jesus' resurrection, you're going to ignore his powerful words of warning. you'll be in the dark and you'll just keep living life like nothing's going to happen.

But one day, the son of man will walk through that door. Will you be able to stand before him with confidence, knowing that you've received mercy from God because you've asked for it?
[23 : 16] this verse 35 sends a shiver up my spine. Therefore consider whether the light in you is not darkness.

Examine yourself. Are you in the dark? Are your eyes healthy? Do you see the resurrection clearly? Do you listen to Jesus' words? do you stop? Do you repent? And do you ask for his mercy? Because it will be given to you if you do.

Tonight, why don't you do that? Just start listening and start looking at his sign. Look at that sign. Because if you do, you can be assured of verse 36, can't you?

this then, your whole body is full of light, with no part of it in darkness, it will be as full of light as when a lamp gives you light with its rays.

[24 : 27] See, when you listen to his words, when you look at his resurrection clearly, see, we're full of light. We're as wise as the Queen of Sheba, who listened to Solomon, and we're as forgiven as the Ninevites, who repented the proclamation of Jonah.

How about we pray? Lord, help us to see your resurrection clearly.

Lord, help us to listen to your powerful words. Jesus, you are the greatest. There is no one higher than you.

Teach us to live lives that reflect your light. Cause us to be full of light as when a lamp gives out its rays. Thank you for your resurrection power in our lives.

Amen. Amen.