

Turning Out The Light To See

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 20 December 1989

Preacher: Harry Robinson

[0 : 00] Well, the passage that we're looking at and that sort of concludes this series on Luke chapter 11 is from Luke chapter 11, verse 29.

And I still have one in reserve here. Luke chapter 11, verse 29 to 36. When the crowds were increasing, he began to say, Hey, this generation is an evil generation. It seeks a sign, but no sign shall be given to it except the sign of Jonah. For as Jonah became a sign to the men of Nineveh, so will the Son of Man be to this generation.

The Queen of the South will arise at the judgment with the men of this generation and condemn them. For she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon.

And behold, something greater than Solomon is here. The men of Nineveh will arise at the judgment with this generation and condemn it.

[1 : 16] For they repented at the preaching of Jonah. And behold, something greater than Jonah is here. No one, after lighting a lamp, puts it in a cellar or under a bushel, but on a stand, that those who enter may see the light.

Your eye is the lamp of your body. When your eye is sound, your whole body is full of light. But when it is not sound, your body is full of darkness.

Therefore be careful, lest the light in you be darkness. If then your whole body is full of light, having no part dark, it will be wholly bright, as when a lamp with its rays gives you light.

I want you... I've titled this, Turning Out the Lights in Order to See. North of Toronto, and I was brought up just north of Toronto, there is the Dunlop Observatory up near Richmond Hill.

And the Dunlop Observatory has been a... was in an endowed sort of institution that was put out way in the country. And now the suburbs of Toronto have completely surrounded it.

[2 : 28] And the light from those suburbs have considerably decreased the capacity of the Dunlop Observatory to observe. Because there's so much light around it, it can't see out into the sky.

So you have a kind of conflict of light here. And in order for it to work most effectively, some of the other lights need to be put out. Or else the observatory has to be moved, which perhaps it has been by this time.

Well, that's what I'm talking about when it talks about light here. And that comes at the end of the passage. If you look at the opening of it...

Now, I'm very self-conscious about this process, but I... This is a crowd scene here, which you can...

A great many people... And you have Jesus facing an increasing crowd.

[3 : 34] Now, you know that current history is marked by great crowds appearing in the center of great cities and demanding change.

You also know that the adroitness of any disciple, or any politician nowadays, depends on being able to...

to read the crowd. What is the crowd demanding? And then you stand up in front of them and say, and that's what I'm here to give you. And then you get elected to office, and you can do what you like.

I mean, that is, in a very real way, that I suppose is one of the great threats to democracy, is the crowd. The crowd that can turn up in the street by the thousands and demand certain things to happen.

And it's interesting that you have the same picture here in verse 29, where it says, the crowds were increasing. And with the crowds, considerable pressure on the person of Jesus Christ to meet the crowd's expectation.

[4 : 50] You know, I mean, it's very difficult this week being in the job I'm in, because we really expect to have big congregations on Sunday night and maybe Monday morning.

And all these people have very real expectations, and it would be lovely to be able to meet all their expectations. I don't want to try, but that's the thought that it might...

When the great Lausanne conference gathered in Switzerland back in the 70s, and everybody was standing up and saying, we have thousands of people from all over the world, and this is the greatest assembly, and this is the largest number of representatives of the Christian community all over the world, Malcolm Muggeridge stood up and said, 10,000 people can't be right.

And, you know, it was a very kind of sobering thing that the crowd doesn't necessarily know the answers. And I think you don't have to read this with too much concentration to recognize that what was happening is that the crowd were putting Jesus Christ on trial.

And this was just the beginning of the process which led to his... Sorry, to his crucifixion. The crowd was gathering to crucify him.

[6 : 25] And he is dealing... He's dealing with them, and in this passage, he puts the crowd on trial. He starts off by saying to them, this generation is an evil generation.

It's evil because what they are doing is putting God on trial. You know, and... Our society... Sorry. Our society has done that in the generation in which we live at the moment. We found God. We put him on trial. Found he is very inadequate, incapable of running the world the way it needs to be run. Those who believe in him are not to be trusted. And therefore, we have... We have condemned him. We have put him on trial. And that's the...

That's what they had done. You remember... Thank you, Lise. You remember that statement that came out of the high days of communism when somebody said...

[7 : 32] One of the leaders, the people in the sort of communist party, said, if Christ came, we would have to kill him. In other words, our goals are sufficiently, clearly defined that if anybody came with such a message as he has brought, we would have to get him out of the way.

And so you see that what happens here is that our society, in its enormous sophistication, has been able to put God on trial and find him wanting, and most people in our society believe that.

And so to believe in God is to be out of step with our culture and our society. That's becoming increasingly true. And lots and lots of people who have depended for most of their life on belonging to a culture which is able to accommodate Christianity fairly comfortably, they find that the culture they belong to now refuses to accommodate Jesus Christ.

and that's what's breaking the process down. So you get what happens here then, that Jesus says, this is an evil generation, it seeks a sign.

Now, they are evil because they seek a sign. Now, it seems reasonable that a generation should seek a sign. And we look for signs, don't we?

[9 : 03] I mean, we take events and say, is that a sign? And what is it saying to us? And I think you have to distinguish in the New Testament between the miracles of Jesus, which were, in a sense, demonstrations of his power, and what the crowd was asking for here, which was a sign.

The sign was something, and one of the commentaries defines what a sign is. It's the intervention of the power of God in the course of events.

It's something that happens that would authenticate Jesus and the claims that he makes. You know that this request for a sign came when Jesus healed a man who was dumb, the man with the evil spirit.

And Jesus healed him so that he was able to speak. And they said two things. One thing they said was, this is because he's in league with Satan.

And Jesus dealt with that by the story that we've been going over the last few weeks. The other accusation they brought against him is authenticate this miracle that you have performed by showing us whose authority you have in performing it.

[10 : 30] Show us a sign that Jesus should undertake to show by a sign that the God in whose name he works has unequivocally authorized him to do it.

In other words, it's a sign which isn't Jesus himself, but it's something that happens or could happen that would demonstrate to that crowd that Jesus was doing what he was doing in the name of God.

And that was what the crowd was after. They wanted that kind of authentication. It's a word which I think in some ways is closely related to a word we use right now currently and that's the word disclosure.

You know, we want disclosure. You know, when something happens politically or when somebody, some act of parliament goes through, there is a scream for disclosure.

You know, and in a sense you could take this scene with Christ and they're saying to him, we want disclosure. We want to see the books. We want to see how it is you are able to do this.

[11 : 44] We want to see whose authority you have. And so that's what the crowd is screaming about and that's why Jesus calls them an evil generation.

Now, Jesus then goes on to deal with that and he says to them, you know that he says that there's no sign to be given to them. But he says, Jonah became a sign to the men of Nineveh.

So, so will the son of man be to this generation. Now, you know that Jonah was the man who under the Lord's command as a prophet of the Lord was to go to the city Nineveh and he took a boat in the opposite direction.

He came to the point where the boat was so harassed by natural catastrophes that Jonah knew something had to happen to stop the process and he said, throw me overboard.

And they said, we are reluctant to do so, but they nevertheless obliged him and did it. And he was he was thrown into the sea, swallowed by a great fish and in due course vomited out by that fish landed on the shore and continued with his prophetic commission to go to the city of Nineveh where he arrived.

[13 : 07] Testimony was born to him that this man was given up to death and here he is standing among you. Hear what he has to say. And so Jonah went across Nineveh preaching and the whole city broke out in sackcloth and ashes and deep repentance.

And God changed his mind about the judgment he was going to bring on them. Now Jesus says, I want you to take the men of Nineveh and see how they responded to Jonah and then I want you to contrast with the way that you are responding to me.

First, the men of Nineveh were given the sign and that was that he had been given up to death and here he was standing among them.

They were a Gentile city and yet they heard what he had to say. Well, this group of people who consider themselves the elect of God are not prepared to hear what he has to say.

It's a very sobering thing in the religious community of a city like Vancouver. does the religious community listen to what God has to say or do they assume that they know and they know how God should behave?

[14 : 33] You see, it's very incisive what Christ is saying to these people. He said, these Gentiles heard Jonah and they were pagans and you're not hearing me.

Jonah, he says, was a prophet preaching repentance. you are confronted by the Son of Man preaching the kingdom of God. And he said, he puts it in the future tense, you know, because he says you don't recognize what's happening but I'll tell you what's happening.

Jonah gave himself up to death and the Son of Man is giving himself up to death and you are going to be the instruments of that death.

And then he, Jesus concludes by saying, the men of Nineveh repented and you will not repent. And so he told them that that's what was happening right there in their midst.

Then he brings up a second witness and the second witness is the queen of the south, the queen of Sheba who apparently lived close to 1,200 miles away from Jerusalem and in the early days of camel travel she made her way up simply because of the reputation that this man had as a wise man.

[16 : 03] And anybody who had that kind of wisdom deserved to be heard. And so the queen of Sheba made her way across 1,200 miles of desert till she came into the very courts of Solomon and there her heart fainted because more than half of what she had heard, what she saw was far more than she had only heard the half of all the wealth and the power and the grandeur of the setting in which Solomon lived his life.

And Jesus said to this male crowd of the elect, this was a pagan woman and she recognized Solomon.

And he in a sense told her that and said, now there's a greater, wiser, and wealthier king than Solomon standing before you with a far greater kingdom to make known to you.

A greater than Solomon is here. And so Jesus sort of brings his trial to an end and says, okay, you're going to put me to death but I want to tell you that on the day of judgment the men of Nineveh will stand up with the queen of Sheba ignorant pagan savages will stand up with a woman

from hundreds of miles away and bear witness to the fact that you who were confronted by a prophet infinitely greater than Jonah and a king infinitely wiser than Solomon and you didn't pay any attention.

and you see what that means and that was the situation that they were left in.

[18:11] Well, then Jesus gives two sort of quick pictures to show how that applies. He says, no one after lighting a lamp puts it in a cellar or under a bushel but on a stand that those who enter may see the light.

And you see what he's saying is that you have you know better than you're behaving. And you see when when we look at our society we know a whole lot better than we are prepared to acknowledge.

Now, last week here Barry gave me a copy of the Atlantic Monthly. The Atlantic Monthly has a feature article has the feature article is can we be good without God?

And what one of the things that that article says for the whole of our society says we got a lot more light than we're willing to acknowledge.

The light that we have we have taken and put down in the cellar where it won't shine where nobody can see it. the light that we have we put under a bush where we refuse to acknowledge the presence of it.

[19:31] And Jesus says if you've got light put it up where you can see it and everybody else can see it too. Don't hide it. And yet the perversity of men's hearts is such that we do hide it.

Now I know that the Christian community is in trouble because they come across to the rest of our world as being the people who have all the light while everybody else is in abysmal darkness. But I don't think the Christians do have that much light. There's lots of questions and answers that they haven't got and lots of understanding that they haven't really grasped. I am prepared to concede that.

But in a sense I suppose it's a far better thing than to take the light that you have and put it in the cellar. And that's the accusation that Jesus brings against these people.

You have the capacity he says to them to know who I am. You have the background and the understanding and you have the scriptures so you should know who I am.

[20:43] And what are you trying to do? Take me down into the cellar and lock the door. get rid of it. And this article from the Atlantic Monthly is a brilliant article as it shows how for the last hundred or more years our society has taken the light of the Christian gospel and tried to hide it in the cellar and say we don't need it.

We don't need this light. I mean you can say what's happening in Eastern Europe is the recognition that maybe we do. But that may be premature to say that.

I don't know. But that's what we do. And I think that not only is that true of our society it tends to be true of us. Ignorance is very handy when you come to have to justify the way you're living your life and the way you're doing things.

And what Christ is saying look you have light don't put it in the basement. And then he says why you're not to do that. He says the reason why is your eye is the lamp of your body and when your eye is sound your whole body is full of light.

Now he was probably a little primitive in terms of physiology there but what it means is that your hands are no good to you if it's totally dark.

[22:14] dark and you try and walk when it's totally dark and you will stumble. The whole of your body depends on light in order to operate. And when there is light and it's coming in through your eyes then you can do things.

As soon as you walk into a room you turn on the light and then you can do things. As soon as you get up in the morning you turn on the light. Now what Jesus is saying is that we cannot live if we haven't got light.

It means that our bodies are useless to us. If your body is full of darkness and you cultivate darkness then you are incapacitated as a person.

You can't be fully a person because it's only as your eye is the lamp of your body that your whole body can operate.

It's only as the light which is ours in Christ comes to us that we can be fully who we are meant to be. The function of your body depends on light.

[23 : 27] The function of your whole life depends on the light which God has given us in Jesus Christ. And that's why as Christmas comes the light shines in the darkness.

and despite all the efforts the darkness is not able to put it out. And that there is a vast resource of light in our world that it looks like we're not going to be able to hide it much longer.

It's going to break out in spite of our very sophisticated attempts to put it under a bushel. we're not able ultimately to put it out.

And that's the great joy of Christmas is that the light breaks out. Let me pray. Lord Jesus help us to see you as you stood before that crowd and as they proceeded in their darkness darkness in their dark design to put you to the cross.

We thank you for the way you brought the Queen of Sheba to testify against them and the men of Nineveh to testify against them and that you solemnly bore witness to the fact that they knew more than they were prepared to acknowledge.

[24 : 53] Our God we live in a pagan world but maybe some of the light of the gospel we need to acknowledge and we need to get over having to hide it.

So give us grace to walk in the light as you are in the light and to find a new fellowship one with another. In Christ's name.

Amen.