



Obstacles on the Road to Christ: Incredulity

Luke 11:29-32

It's been great lately to see in our bulletin the reemergence of our Compass sports teams. We've been without those for a while, but it's great to see them coming back. It's a great opportunity for fellowship. It's good for a little exercise, a little healthy competition. Great to see new people integrated into relationships at our church through our sports teams. And while I'm excited about it and you might even see me in the stands from time to time, you will not see me on the playing field. It's not gonna happen. I know that's disappointing to some of you. (1:03)

It's not gonna happen because the last time your pastor was on a church team, it was a softball team, a church softball team, and it didn't end well. I, uh, grew up playing third base, so I guess because I'm the pastor they let me play third base on the softball team. And that fateful game, I had this guy up to bat, looked like a serious softball player, if there is such a thing. And he took a big cut off this pitch, and it just dribbled off the bat, kind of a full swing bunt, and it comes right down the third base line. And so I charged this little dribbler off the bat and, to try to impress the ten people in the stands, I barehanded the dribbling ball and tried to throw across my body to first base to get him out. And because it was such a quick throw, ah, my right foot happened to be planted which I'm right-handed so that's not good to throw off your right foot, and I twisted my ankle as I was throwing this ball. Went down immediately. Felt the pain. And of course, I'd grown up in a family with, you know, sporting events, and so I had twisted my ankle many times in the past. But this one, I don't know. I couldn't walk it off for some reason. (2:17)

And I remember going to the dugout. I just, I was, that was it, that was done for me. And I sat there and thought, ah, this is just hurting in a way that I'm a little concerned about. So I had the foresight to say I should stop at the hospital on the way home and just get an x-ray to see what's going on here. So I did. I pulled in there and signed all the forms, and went back there and went into radiology, took a picture of my foot. And I waited there in the room for the doctor to come in and-and show me the x-rays. This was back in the day where they developed the films and had little lightboxes on the wall. And as I sat there, I thought what am I doing here. I really shouldn't even be here. Because when I sit here on this table my foot doesn't really hurt all that bad. I've had a lot worse sprains, it's not even swelling up that much. I don't know. I don't even think I should be here. I started thinking I got to go study all day tomorrow. I got preaching to do this weekend. I've got a big, important funeral to preach, you know, in my best suit on Monday. There's just, I don't have time to have him come in and say ice it and put gauze around it. I just thought, this is ridiculous. I don't need an ace bandage for this. I can walk this off, I'll be fine. (3:23)

As I'm thinking all that through, the doctor walks in. He's very affable, very congenial, happy kind of doctor. And he pulls the little uh, he has a little folder there, and pulls out the x-ray, throws it up on the lightbox, flips the light on, and there's a picture of a foot. And I looked at him, and I looked at the slide, and I started smiling, and just quietly laughed. Tried to wink at him. I literally thought he'd put up some joke file x-ray from his drawer that was just these bones going all different directions. I thought, this is not my foot. I literally thought he was joking with me. He said, no, that-that's your foot. That's why when I press it here, you scream. That's your foot. Those are your bones. Those metatarsals there, those foot bones that are supposed to be nice and



parallel that are in pi—it looked like a Fred Flinstone cartoon episode of bones going in all different directions inside my foot. So he said we're gonna have to cast on it. I said I can't have a cast on—I'm trying to picture putting on my suit with a cast on. A-and crutches. I can't do that. I-I need a dark color. Hah. I left with a purple cast that night on my foot. That was the darkest color they had. I didn't want to accept the diagnosis. (4:45)

As Christians of course who care about our non-Christian friends we feel a lot like that doctor, I suppose, trying to be kind, trying to be affable and nice and congenial. And yet we have to deliver the bad news of sin. We have to. We have to give that. As a matter of fact, that is essential to the gospel. We can never give the gracious remedy of the gospel to people who have not understood clearly from us that there is a really bad problem called sin that has to be fixed by that cross. And we often are encountering people a lot like me that just are like, I don't want to accept that. There's a stubborn disbelief—here's the good word—the incredulity of people to say, I don't want to believe. I don't care what the evidence is. I can see my name on the corner on the x-ray, it doesn't matter. I know I just took the picture. I don't want to believe it. And they don't want to believe it. They have incredulous attitudes for the same reason I did, and that is, if I accept that diagnosis there's too many implications I don't like. If I agree with that and say that is me, and that is my problem, there's just far too much at stake for me to agree with what you're telling me. I just can't. It's not about the evidence anymore. It's about an issue of my own heart, and my concerns about the implications. (6:02)

That's the problem that a lot of people have. It's a lot of problem—it's a lot of what the problem is for us even in our Christian lives as we grow. Now I've told you throughout this series in Luke 11, the second half of Luke 11, I said I want us to view two very clear points of application. We're looking at Christ presenting the truth to all these people and they're responding negatively. And I said listen, we're gonna present Christ to people in our generation who are going to respond negatively. Let's see how Christ dealt with them, so we can learn in that regard. But also, I always want us to say, am I in this passage anywhere in terms of being the person that responds that way to truth? (6:35)

So with that in view, let's look at the passage this morning knowing that we need to think about this in terms of how we respond to the truth sometimes. But perhaps first and easiest to depict in our own reading of this text is how we present truth to people that often act like the generation of Christ that say, "I don't care what proof you give me, I'm gonna need more." (6:56)

Now, look back if you would to get started with this. This is Luke 11. Let's start in verse 15, 'cause I made a promise, weeks back, that we would get to understanding and unpacking this line from verse 16. But let's start in verse 15. It said, but some—after this very dramatic mute man becomes a speaking man, and this guy who's got problems, serious problems, become a man in his right mind who is able to speak full sentences because there's an exorcism that takes place, this phenomenal thing that took place—some said—that was week one; those were the cynics, we called them—they said he cast out demons by Beelzebul, the prince of demons—then I said we'll get back to this sentence, and so we are this morning—while others—that's part four of our series, the incredulous—they to test him kept seeking from him a sign from heaven. (7:48)

Now what was that you just saw? Right? He's, he's expelling demons by the finger of God, as he

puts it, and that had just happened before their very eyes, and they say, well, we want—we want to see a sign. We want to see some signs from heaven here. So we've dealt with propriety; that was the intervening ser-uh, message. We dealt with diversion last time we were together in this passage. And now I want to look at this one, the incredulous. Those who with incredulity look at Christ and say, well, I just don't have enough proof, when really, that's not the point at all. It's not. It's that there's a moral issue going on, and an issue of saying if I accept this diagnosis the implications are far too costly. The ramifications are too uncomfortable. (8:24)

Now, let's read the text. Verse 29. Here's where we pick up the people wanting a sign. Verses 29-32, that's our text for the morning. It says, "When the crowds were increasing, he began to say—now let's get back to those wanting a sign—'This generation is an evil generation. It seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah. For Jonah became a sign to the people of Nineveh, so will the Son of Man be to this generation.'" Now he quotes this historic situation where the queen of Sheba, as we know her from 1 Kings 10, visits Solomon. And she say—he says, "The queen of the South will rise up at the judgment with the men of this generation—so now we're picturing this time when all the people have to answer to God in the day of judgment. And he's seeing the generation here in Judea and around Jerusalem who are rejecting Christ, and they're not willing to accept, they always want more signs. And he's saying let's talk about the queen of the South here. She's gonna rise up and look at you guys and say, what's wrong with you?—She'll "condemn [you], for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon. And behold, something greater than Solomon is here." (9:41)

Back to the story of Nineveh, verse 32. And speaking of the judgment, the men of Nineveh. They're gonna rise up at the judgment with this generation—so picture that, they're all standing around before God—and they'll say what's wrong with you guys? They'll condemn it, "for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold, something greater than Jonah is here." So the two historical situations that Jesus brings to the fore is the Queen of Sheba traveling all this distance to see Solomon and hear of his wisdom. And the men here in Nineveh, the Assyrians here in the divided kingdom of the Old Testament; this foreign prophet Jonah that goes and ministers to them by giving them the truth of their problem, giving them a bad diagnosis, and they repented. So these two situations. (10:26)

You'll see if you've got the worksheet out, I want to start at the bottom and work backwards. And the reason is because at the beginning he starts to say, you guys want a sign, you're gonna get the sign of Jonah. Now if you know your Bibles you may say, well, Matthew 12 when Jesus talked about this problem with the Pharisees he brought up the sign of Jonah being the resurrection that was yet to come, and that's true. That's part of it. We'll touch on that later. But he then unpacks the story of Nineveh in verse 32 by saying, listen, let's just focus on the message he brought to them, the preaching. He brought to them the preaching that led them to repentance. Now, important for us to catch that. And it's important for us to say, why does my generation, like the first century generation, unlike the generation of Jonah in Assyria—why, why is it that people refuse to respond the way that the Ninevites did? Why? What's the problem? Well, let's examine that passage and see if we can't come up with an answer for our first point. (11:24)

Turn to Jonah if you would. Jonah, the minor prophet. If you find Isaiah, that's a big a target, which we're reading in our DBR. Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel. Then they get



small—Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah. Now when you think of Jonah you think of what's going on down the hall in the Sunday school classes, where you were taught—maybe not in ours, but in some—where you get the flannelgraph story. And the big thing about Jonah, when we think about Jonah, you think about— Okay. That's really not the point of Jonah, that he had interesting transportation to his mission field. That's not it. It's really not even that he was reluctant, although that's a really big part of the emphasis of application in Jonah. The real point is verse 1, Jonah 1. Here's what it's all about. (12:13)

Jonah 1:1. Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah the son of Amittai saying, "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city"—it's great in that it's big; that's what we're dealing with there, 'cause we're gonna see it's morally great, that's for sure—"and call out against it"—now underline this—"for their evil has come up before me." Now that's now the book starts, verses one and two. We have a very wicked, evil, violent, terrible city full of sin. Interesting to note, by the way, that Nineveh, if you look in the back of your Bibles, or you call up a map or a biblical atlas, you'll find today that Nineveh, though it was on the northern shores of the Tigris River in northern Iraq, today, just across the river today is the downtown area of Mosul. Matter of fact Mosul encompasses the whole thing. If you really want to bring to life the book of Jonah, all you have to think about is Mosul in the modern era. You don't hear a lot of good news out of Mosul, do you? Don't hear a lot of charities springing up, a lot of great parks being built. This is a place that's full of violence. You want to talk about violence? Yeah, that's what's happening there, as will be pointed out in the third chapter. (13:24)

Now if you glance in verse three, now starts the interesting transport to the mission field. You've got a guy that doesn't want to go. He tries to flee from the Lord, and of course God's not going to be defied. When he calls his man, he's gonna get his man to go where he wants him to go. And so we have these intervening chapters, chapter- uh, the rest of chapter one, and then all of chapter two. Now turn ahead to chapter three. Now we get back to the point. (13:45)

Jonah 3:1. Then the word of the LORD came to Jonah the second time, saying, all right, are we done with all that, about you running from me now, Jonah? Great. Let's get back to where we started. I want you to get up now, go to Nineveh, that great city—no, not great in terms of morality; it's great in terms of its number—call out against it the message that I tell you. So Jonah arose, went to Nineveh, according to the word of the LORD. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, a three day's journey in breadth. To get through it it's gonna take you three days. Jonah began to go into the city, going a day's journey, and he called out. Now here's his message. The message is the one that, according to verse 2, is the message that's from God. And here it is. Note this carefully. "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown." That's it. Exclamation point, end quotation. That's the gist of his message. You got forty days, then you're going to be destroyed. (14:45)

Now think about this. We just saw in Luke 11 that they repented. And clearly that's what happens next. They're gonna repent. But that's not the message. See, the message that you picture him bringing is the message of, "Hey, you're bad. If you'd repent you'd be forgiven." That's the message of the gospel, right? That's not the message of Jonah. The message of Jonah is just throwing up the x-ray and saying, look at the mess of your lives. Your foot is a mess and it's gonna be destroyed. We don't even talk about casting, and healing, and therapies, and all the rest



to get this thing right. There is no mention of that. The mention, the whole point of Jonah's message is you're a mess and God's gonna destroy you. (15:29)

Verse 5. And the people of Nineveh believed God. Now a lot of us, if we assume too much about the book of Jonah, you think they believed that if they were repentant they'd be forgiven. They have no idea of that. That's not, that's not at all a part of the message. Keep reading, I'll show it to you. They called for a fast, they put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them to the least of them.

Verse 6. And the word reached the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, and he removed his robe, and he covered himself with sackcloth, and he sat in ashes. And he issued a proclamation and published it throughout Nineveh. Quote, "By the degree of the king and his nobles, let neither man nor beast, nor herd nor flock, taste anything. Let them not feed or drink water, but let man and beast be covered with sackcloth—this ancient, near-eastern sign of my mourning and contrition—and let him call out mightily to God. Let everyone turn from his evil way and from violence that is in his hand." Because just as Jonah said, God will then turn and relent and turn his fierce anger away, and always correct me if I ever read the text wrongly. (16:30)

Did I read it wrongly, interactive nine o'clock crowd? Yes. Were you following along? See, you don't trust the pastor reading the text without you looking at the text. Let man and beast, verse 8, cover with sackcloth, let him cry out mightily to God. Let everyone turn from his evil way and from the violence of his hands. Because, verse 9, Jonah told us if we did that we wouldn't get dinged by God. Is that what it says? No! Here's the—they're just saying, who knows? Maybe. I don't know. I'm not heard any gospel message here. All I've heard that we're bad and we're gonna be destroyed. But you know what? We feel convicted and we now are ready to enter into contrition, a heart of repentance, and then who knows? Who knows? Maybe God will turn and relent and turn from his fierce anger, and we won't perish. (17:16)

When God saw what they did—not even on a promise, but just on the condemnation of their sins—and how they from their evil way, then God relented of the disaster that he had said he would do to them, and he did not do it. Oh, that's big. Number one on your outline. The reason the generation of Christ who listened to him preach did not repent is the same reason our friends and neighbors do not repent when we reveal the problem of sin. Now it's happening here in Nineveh. It's not happening in a lot of people's lives for the same human condition that we all share. Number one, let's put it this way. The aversion that we have to conviction and contrition. We don't like those two things. And we've gotta beware of that. (17:58)

1. Beware our aversion to conviction and contrition

And I say "our" because it's not just found in our non-Christian neighbors, it's found in our lives as well. But let's just talk about our neighbors for a minute. Your coworkers do not want to hear you talking about sin. They certainly don't want you say, you know, the wages of sin is death. God will destroy you because of sin. They don't want to hear that, and a lot of preachers are more than happy to accommodate the fact that people don't want to hear it. Am I right about that? Smile at me if you understand that's how people are today. You don't want to hear about sin and judgment, you don't have to. I can preach some other kind of message to you. I can preach all the benefits of God's love and grace in your life, but let's not talk about sin and judgment. Lot of



people like that kind of thing. They love that kind of thing. But if you eviscerate the gospel, and you take out the problem, then all you have is a God that's nothing more than a self-help guru that steps in to improve your life, not a God who sent his son to a cross and spilt out his hostile anger on his own son. His fierce anger, as it's put in this passage, so that you wouldn't have to suffer his fierce anger. See, the gospel really is predicated and founded on the problem of sin. If you don't understand that, you don't understand the gospel. (19:11)

Now Jonah comes to town and says, "You're sinners. You're gonna be destroyed." You're sinners, and you're gonna be destroyed. I want you to picture getting on a plane and going to Mosul today, that's full of violence the same way their city in verse number eight says was full of violence. And go in there and tell them, oh, all these crucifixions of Christians, and all the beheadings you're doing, and all the, the withholding the human rights of your citizens here in Mosul. Go tell them that God hates it, and God's gonna destroy it. I don't think I have to buy you a round trip ticket. Am I right? It's not gonna go very well for you. Why? Because people don't want to feel convicted that they're wrong before God. That they are punishable before God. And they certainly don't wanna be contrite, repentant in their heart. They don't care for that. (20:00)

And by the way, you don't even have to get on a plane and go to Mosul. You can get on a domestic flight. Let me just send you to Times Square in New York City. You think there's any sin going on there? Oh, yeah. You been there? Just walk around down there where all the tourists are and say, you know what? This sinful city? God's gonna destroy it. You don't know if it's forty days, or four hundred days, or four thousand days, but you do know the wages of sin is death, and God is gonna punish sin. So you go out there and you tell them that. I'll give you a megaphone, and you can spend the afternoon doing that. How's that gonna be received? Not well. Why? Well because, people don't want to think they're at odd with God. They don't want to feel they're somehow bad and guilty. They don't want to feel that sense of conviction. And they certainly don't want to sit there and say, wow, if I'm making God mad by my sinful behavior I need to repent. They don't want to feel conviction, and they don't want to feel contrition. (20:50)

You can just go up the I-5 to LA, if you want. Go stand outside the Staple Center and tell people, hey, your sin equals God's wrath. You're gonna be punished by God. And again, there's some of you here I'm sure that are saying, "I don't even believe that that's true." Open your Bibles, and read the Bible. Because you've been painted a picture of a fuzzy, cuddly teddy bear God that doesn't feel that way anymore, and he took a nap between Testaments, and now in the New Testament he didn't even think about sin anymore. You haven't read at all. Matter of fact, read the last book of the Bible. As my old pastor used to say, God's coming back, and he's real mad. That's really a summary of the Book of Revelation for you. He's really mad. Mad at what? Mad at sin. Why? Because he will not be defied. Let no one deceive you with empty words. Whatever man sows that's what he's gonna reap. And the hope of the gospel is you know what, you don't have to experience that. God loves you so much he sent his only son, that if you would trust in him you wouldn't perish. You'd have everlasting life. That's the message of the gospel. It's gotta be predicated on the problem of sin, though. (22:00)

But people don't like to feel convicted. That feels bad. And they don't want contrition. Oh, I gotta, I gotta go before God, an-and grovel, and say, 'I'm sorry, and I blew it, and I was wrong.' We don't want to do that. Oh, and by the way, you don't have to go to New York, Mosul or LA.



You can just, you can walk down to the town center with your megaphone, and tell them that they're sinners and are going to incur the wrath of God. Is it going to go any better with our upstanding Orange County citizens? No. Why? This is the universal problem. Everyone wants to look at themselves and say I don't really have a problem with God. And if you're to in your own relationships with non-Christians try and somehow say I want to offer a God that's gonna improve their life, but I don't want to talk about sin and hell, which has become institutionalized in a lot of modern, quote-unquote, "Christianity", you've eviscerated the gospel of what the whole gospel is all about. You understand that. You want the warmth of God's love without the exposure of the sin that must be exposed if you want into the light. Is that not what Jesus said to Nicodemus in John 3:19-20? He said that's the problem. I can't get people to walk into the light. Why? Because it's gonna expose their deeds. (23:13)

[Chuckle]. This is a bad illustration. I probably shouldn't give it. But I've started it now. You've been at someone's house. You're outside, summer, they've invited you over, maybe your home fellowship group. They got a barbeque going. You get to eat dinner. And you see that they have a pool and spa, and they've even heated the spa, and up rises the steam from the spa. You've come from work. It's been a long week, it's Friday night. You'd love to sit in that spa. But you don't dare, right? Unless you're twenty, I guess. You just do. But most us when we're with our home fellowship groups we're not gonna be peeling off our clothing, putting on bathing suits, and walking down the steps of the spa. Okay, not you. Well, guys like me, right? We're not gonna want to do that. We don't want the exposure. I don't want people to see me for who I am. I don't want that. I want to be nicely clad here, and covered and draped, so you don't see the real me. I'm not gonna get in your spa. I'd like to, but I don't want the exposure. Bad illustration. I told you it was a bad illustration. (24:16)

But Jesus said what you need is to walk into the light, but you don't want to see your sin for what it is and be exposed. You've got to, though, if you're gonna preach the gospel to your non-Christian neighbors and friends. Jot this reference down, if you would. 2 Corinthians 7:8-10. 2 Corinthians 7:8-10. What a great passage for you this week, which I think I might even put on the discussion questions this week on the back of your worksheet, just to spend some time in. And that is the apostle Paul saying this. I see that my letter that I sent to you, it grieved you. Verse 9 says, I rejoice, not because you were grieved, but because you were grieved into repenting. You felt a godly grief, and that's a good grief. That's a godly grief so that you suffered no loss at all, for godly grief produces repentance that leads to salvation without regret. You look back and say I'm glad I was humbled. I'm glad I was convicted. I'm glad I felt guilt. I'm glad I had to bow down in humility and say I'm a sinner, I deserve your wrath. Because you look at what repentance did. It opened for you the gateway into the presence of God's gracious love. And you don't get there without contrition. (25:39)

Now you'd have to be with me way back in the day when I used to take crews to Israel and actually be able to go and visit Bethlehem, before it got kind of difficult to take big groups there. But if you've been to the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem, or you look it up on your Google as you sit there with our free wi-f. And you say, how do you get into this church? You're gonna see a nice, big archway, from this old, you know, it's been rebuilt and all the rest, but back when Constantine's mother went through the land and looked for places that were important in the life of Christ, found the place according to Monica's research where you—Helen, rather—her



research through here's where Christ was born. So Constantine put money into it, built a church there, and there it is, the Church of the Nativity. Went through a lot of things, through a lot of the era. But you'll see an archway, or the big doorway, into the Church of the Nativity. (26:29)

But during the Ottoman period, what they did was they put stones all up in there so that you couldn't go through that archway. They kept one opening, and it's tiny. It's like the little doorway, the half-door under the storage part of your stairway, under the stairway. It's a tiny little portal. So there's a—you can get in the church, but they've called it the Door of Humility. To walk through the Door of Humility, you can't get there without bowing down. Now that makes for a great poetic statement for getting into the presence of God with contrition and humility. It was done for practical reasons though, because people with carts, you know, were coming in and looting. They were riding in on horseback. And it was such a contested place through so much of the medieval period that they boarded this thing up, bricked it up, if you will, put stones in it, so that you had to dismount, you had to get off, you had to bow down and walk through the portal of the church. (27:25)

Either way, I think it's a great picture of what we need to understand. You got a lot of people riding in to Christianity, if you will, trying like consumers to grab whatever benefits and blessings they think they're gonna get from God, because they know God loves them so much 'cause they're such peachy people. And they wanna take their carts go out with all the blessings of God. Well there is no—God will have none of that. You want the blessings of God, and the love of God, and the grace of God, and all the things we celebrate in our singing, you've gotta go through the door of humility. You have to bow down and recognize your sin. You don't go in on horseback. You don't go in with your carts to pillage the place. You go in with a contrite heart that recognizes the sinful problem, and you're just like the people in Nineveh that say, who knows? May God will relent and I won't be punished, but I, I understand I deserve it. And I'm willing to put on the clothing of contrition. The men of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah and behold, something greater than Jonah is here. Beware of our aversion to conviction and contrition. (28:31)

Thankfully from time to time there are pockets of people that don't have that aversion override the benefits of the gospel, and you have people responding to the gospel, plowing through their aversion to conviction and contrition and accepting the diagnosis. (28:46)

Working backwards, verse 31. It's printed on your worksheet. Luke 11:31. The queen of the South. The queen of the South, we know her as the Queen of Sheba in 1 Kings 10. Solomon's on the throne. The most prosperous period of Israel's history, really. I mean, we had David kind of clean up the borders and expand the kingdom. And now you had Solomon, born with a silver spoon in his mouth, sitting on a throne in Jerusalem, and he is reaping the benefits of his dad's hard work. And things are going really well, and there's a lot of riches, and a lot going on. And God endows him with all this wisdom, because he humbly asks for it, and now he's dispensing wisdom to his kingdom. He's writing proverbs, and he's singing songs, and all the things that are going on where God is a channel of wisdom to the people through Solomon. And the queen of the South, she hears about it. She's gonna rise up at the judgment and look at the people at the first century, and people in our century, and condemn them, because she was willing—look at

this—to come from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom Solomon. And if you want to compare Solomon's teaching to Christ's teaching, there's no comparison. Something greater than Solomon is here. (29:54)

My wife got a Fitbit. Do you know what that is, the Fitbit? This little thing you wear on your wrist. It keeps track of all your paces. She even had me go out on the driveway and help her figure out how long her pace was so she could calculate the Fitbit so it tries to accurately tell you how far you walk. Well, these competitive gals that wear the Fitbit start walking a lot when they get it. At least my wife did. And she's walking and walking, and that thing's going off, and—one night she said to me, "Hey, I got an award." I thought, are you an elementary school? What are you talking about? You got an award. And she said it with a gleeful joy, I got an award. I said, well what did you get? She looked at her Fitbit, she said, "I got the Serengeti Award." What is that? She says, "I walked five hundred miles since I've had my Fitbit." (30:44)

Now, that is impressive, I'll tell you. You walked five hundred miles. That's a lot. I don't know how long it took. Figure it out. She does her ten thousand steps a day, so great. You're doing it. Which is what, five miles a day? Five hundred miles is a lot. Well I hate to tell the queen of my house that the queen of Sheba has lapped her, a couple times over. But when it came to going on a long trek—now I understand, she's a queen. She's got a retinue. She's probably, you know, carried along half of it—but this is a long journey. A journey that takes anywhere from thirty-five to forty days, walking eight to ten hours a day. She came all the way from what is modern day Yemen. Now if you know your math, think this through. You gotta leave Jerusalem, go through—if you take today's map—either Jordan or Egypt, and you have to come down through Saudi Arabia all the way to the bottom of the Arabian Sea to a li—country, I say little, it's a big country—called Yemen. She came from there. It's known in the Bible as the area of the Sabeans, these marauders that took out Job's, you know, herds and all that. That's criminals came from the—they were called Sabeans. They came from the area of Sheba. She was the queen of Sheba, all the way—that's about fourteen, fifteen hundred miles, walking. Forty days. (32:06)

Remember that old movie, "Around the World in Eighty Days"? Think about and this without a balloon. She's walking, being carried part of the time. I get it, she's a queen. But I mean, this is a huge thing. It's gonna her eighty days, round trip. To do what? To check this guy out in all of his wisdom and everything I've heard about him. He's on the map. He's in the news. I mean, this is big that Solomon apparently has the kind of wisdom that no other person's ever had. And she's willing to walk and walk, and travel in the dusty, dirty deserts of Saudi Arabia, as we know it today, to make it through the desert of the Negev all the way up. Finally to get to a place where she sees some water which is nothing but the Dead Sea, full of the highest salt content on the planet. Finding her way up to the top to the Jordan River, across through the cragged road to Jericho that Jesus immortalizes in his parable. To make my way up the long walking hill to get to the place of Jerusalem to find this king that everybody's talking about, and I just want to sit and learn from you. (33:09)

This is worth turning to. 1 Kings 10. Take a look at her response when she sits in the presence of Solomon for a while. And think about it. Now, you've read Solomon. You've read the Proverbs. So much of Solomon's wisdom is codified for us there in Proverbs. If you read Proverbs, you'll see it's not easy to accept the wisdom of God that's coming through Solomon, because you have



to look at yourself and say what I'm doing it wrong, I need to change and do what it right. Now take a look at what she does and picture the, the crowd around her. Her host, her armies, who are, you know, got their Sabean flags. They've got the Sabean you know, um, shield, if you will, to kind of modernize it, emblazoned on their clothing. Here's the foreign queen from fourteen, fifteen hundred miles' travel. (34:00)

Look at verse 6. After hearing all of his wisdom, in the first five verses there, it says in verse 6, she said to the king, "The report was true that I heard in my own land of your words and of your wisdom." I heard you were great. I heard you had wisdom. Man, it's all true. But you know what? Verse 7: "I did not believe the reports until I came and my eyes have seen it. And behold the half was not told me." Oh, I heard great things, but man, it's twice as good as that. Your wisdom and your prosperity surpasses the reports that I heard, and at this point you can see some of her royal officials reaching up and go, "Calm down, Queen. I mean, you're kind of humiliating yourself here. We got a kind of good thing going on down there on the Arabian beaches. Stop acting like this is the center of it all." Oh, no, it is good. Matter of fact, "Happy are your men," verse 8, "and your servants, who continually stand before you and hear your wisdom. Blessed be Yahweh"—you see how that's spelled, capital O-R-D? This is the proper name of the God of Israel. At that point you got some religious people who worship the idols of the Sabeans saying, Queen, come on! What are you doing? I mean, you're kind of dyeing and betraying our culture and our gods." Yeah. "Blessed be Yahweh your God, for he has delighted in you and set you on the throne of Israel! Because the Lord loved Israel forever." (35:21)

Wow. Talk about not being ethnocentric. Talk about recognizing that your political system and your way of doing things, in the economy and everything else in your country, you're all just now you're bowing down before the greatness of Solomon, and this little country called Israel in the tenth century B.C. Why? Because the Lord Yahweh has loved Israel forever, made you king that you may execute justice and righteousness. I've heard you talk about it. It makes sense. I realize you're right. That's humbling, isn't it? Humbling. (35:54)

I've talked a little bit about justification in our evangelism with non-Christians. Let's talk about your sanctification. Let's talk about the sanctification of your neighbor who comes to Christ, and has that wonderful gift granted to them of repentance, a convicted conscience and a contrite heart. Now, time to grow in Christ. We hand them the Bible. We bring them to home fellowship group. We take them to church. And we say here's the wisdom of God. Here's a lady that's willing to embrace it because she's worked through her aversion and the rest of our universal human problem, aversion, two things. Ready? Number two: of correction and conformity. (36:28)

2. Beware our aversion to correction and conformity.

I don't like conform and be like you guys. I don't want to be the part of the cookie-cutter, kind of you know, Stepford Wives group that you want me to be a part of. I want to kind of be my own person. I certainly want to see there's more than one right way to do things. And I don't like you telling me my way's wrong. Well that's certainly what's gonna have to happen if you will accept and embrace the wisdom of God. (36:52)



Listen to it. Proverbs 9. Starting in verse 6. Leave your simple ways. Leave them behind. Leave them behind and you'll live. Walk in the way of insight. So your way, you gotta say, is wrong. Think about what wisdom says. Wisdom says, to use the colloquial term today, you're doing it wrong. Right? You're doing it wrong. You're doing life wrong. You gotta do it my way. Leave your way behind. Whoever corrects a scoffer—now if you're not gonna have this willingness to be corrected and conformed to the truth, well then you're gonna get abuse. You correct a scoffer, you get abuse. If you reprove a wicked man you're only gonna incur injury. Don't reprove the scoffer. You're gonna waste your time with him. He'll hate you. Reprove a wise man, though, oh, and he'll accept it, he'll love you. Give instruction to a wise man and he'll be still wiser. Teach a wise man and he will increase in his learning. (37:44)

I'm reading this passage and I turn on the news on my little TV, and up pops Marie Osmond. She's, uh, pitching her weight loss thing that she's doing with a big company. Such a, a moment of, that's exactly what I'm talking about! That's exactly what I'm reading about! She says this. I'm quoting now her line from her little nutrisystem commercial. She says, "I looked in the mirror and I saw what I didn't want to see: the truth. I was fifty pounds overweight"—and I've memorized it at this point. I love that line. "I looked in the mirror and I saw what I didn't want to see: the truth." What did you see, Marie? Well, a little too... chunky here. Not the gal I should be or want to be. I saw the truth. "I looked in the mirror and I saw what I didn't want to see: the truth." (38:49)

That's why in James 1 the Bible is presented to us as the mirror. It's the mirror. You look in it and you see what you don't want to see. You see the truth. The truth about what? About your flabby spiritual life. About the fact that you're not in spiritual shape, that your life isn't conforming to the way of insight. Unfortunately you got simple ways and they need to change. And it's not any normal mirror. (39:18)

I went through almost three decades of marriage without a magnified mirror in our bathroom. And I don't know what happened. Maybe she found one on sale or something, but she comes home and she says, I'd like to have this put up in the bathroom. Being the loving husband that I am, I said, all right. And she said, Oh, by the way, it's electric, so you're gonna have to run some electrical to it. It's bad enough that it magnifies your face a whole lot more than anyone would ever need to magnify their face. But there's now a whole ring of lights around it. It's awful. I don't understand why anyone would want this or need this. But I, I put it up. I try to avoid it. I walk by it every morning. Unless there's something in my eye or something, I might turn it on. But I think to myself, that is the word of God. It not only is this passing reflection as you walk by. I mean it's like Marie Osmond looking into a magnifying mirror with lights, that just like, Marie, whoa. I don't know what happened to the little bit country thing, but it's, it's gone now. You gotta lose some weight. I mean, it's huge. And the lights. The light of the word, it exposes. (40:45)

See, the only kind of Bible study you're gonna go to that doesn't bring conviction, or the only kind of church you want to go that doesn't make you feel bad from time to time, or a lot of the time, is one that isn't gonna preach the Bible to you. Because that's what the Bible does. It is the mirror of God's word. And it doesn't just ask you to glance into it. Here's what it says. The one who looks intently at the law of liberty, it wants to free you from what you're seeing. It wants to



free you from that. And you don't just look at it and forget, you stare into it. You persevere in looking into. Oh, that person. If you responds by doing, mm, that person will be blessed in what he does. God wants to fix the problem, but the word of God is the source of correction. (41:30)

Beware your aversion to correction and conformity 'cause it's gonna make you turn away from the Bible. It'll try to come up with another way, for you to maybe sit on your porch and try to kinda picture what God might say to you. All this fancy little trend in sanctification these days. Avoid it like the plague. You might as well be imbibing on satanism. Let me say that as clearly as I can. Why? Because if you want to sit there and imagine what God might want to say to you, you are engaging in something the Bible calls rebellion. Divination. In other words, we need to look at what God has said, not what we imagine that he might say. Are you following me on this? Number one bestseller in our country for Christian books, and it is nothing but—I'd like to say tripe, but it's worse than tripe. It's arsenic for the Christian life. You've gotta recognize that when we want to take God and kind of somehow tailor him through our imagination, and the filter of our own affections for ourselves, and adapt some kind of direction for my day by what I think God might want to say to me as opposed to what he does say to me, I'm in big trouble. And I know why we do it. Because we don't like correction, and we don't like conformity. (42:43)

When my kids really young we made a list of all these vacations that we wanted to do before our kids left the house. We didn't realize that they would be out of the house in a snap, but we started doing some of those through the years. And of course we didn't get through them all. We had big ambitions to do this and go there and visit that place. We've done some of them. But one of them was a cruise. We thought at some point when our kids are in our home, we want to go on some kind of cruise. Now I'd been on cruises before, but I'd always been preaching on the cruises so they weren't much fun. I mean, they were okay, but I was working the whole time. I was preaching morning and night. So I'd done a few of those. But I just wanted to go a cruise where I can go to the midnight buffet and not have to worry about preaching the next morning. And so we finally went on one. (43:26)

Now, we didn't go on the party cruise. And of course, we're not gonna hang out in the casino. And I don't gamble, and I don't smoke, and I don't drink, and I don't do all those things that most of these boats are geared for. So we picked a, you know, a cruise line that we thought would, would be okay. And it was. It was pretty good. Now we didn't have the money to go on the kid-oriented one. I don't see how anybody affords that, but whatever. So we say, great. We're gonna go on this. Well, we go to a show. We pick a show we think isn't gonna be that bad, and it really wasn't that bad. I lasted about twenty minutes and then finally said, we gotta go, this is just not good. So I got my Fabarez clan there. And we're sitting there, and I thought, this has just gone over the line. We don't need this. I'd rather go watch some weird mid-Atlantic, cable satellite news show, or something in our room. Or go play shuffleboard on the deck. So we walked out. (44:12)

Now instead of walking out—I didn't want to protest. I wasn't trying to stand on a table or something in protest. So I didn't want to walk all the way to the place where you're supposed to walk out, where all the crowds walk out when this is done. I just went for the nearest door. And I found a door. It wasn't far from my seat, but it was like, "Personnel Only", it said. Ask my kids. That doesn't—you'd normally stop me. I just figured, I can blaze my own trail. I opened this

door. We went through this corridor. And I try not to show my family that I'm lost, as most dads do. But man, we were in some strange labyrinth in the bowels of this ship for a long time. There were moments I'm thinking, I haven't seen anybody for five minutes. I don't know where I am. And it's weird. It's painted really drab. And I was like, this is bizarre. And finally we run into somebody and she looks at me like, how did you get in here? You try to act like you know what you're doing. I don't know what I said. I, I—we just are here. But can you help us get out of here? And I thought to myself, as she takes me back to where everyone else is supposed to be, and told me you wanna get out of that place you're gonna have to go through that door, I didn't want to do that. I mean, I don't care how godly you think you are, we all still want to blaze our own path. And in our Christian life we don't like conformity. We don't want to be like the crowd. I don't want to be a part of the herd. Well, sorry. You are. You're part of the flock. And your goal is to be like the good shepherd. And the more you correct and adjust your life, you'll be conformed to Christ. And guess what? You're gonna start looking like other people that are being conformed to Christ, and you—you're gonna be a part of the herd, here. You're gonna have to be. That's what spiritual growth is gonna result in. (45:55)

Beware your aversion to conformity. I know we don't naturally desire these things. I don't like correction. I don't like conformity. But spiritual growth isn't going to happen unless I break through those. And that brings me to the beginning of this discussion, verses 29 and 30. Crowds were increasing and began to say, Jesus did, "This generation is an evil generation. It seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah. Where as Jonah became a sign to the people of Nineveh, so will the Son of Man be to this generation." (46:25)

Cross reference: Matthew 12 does refer to the sign in the discussion he has with the Pharisees that that sign is going to be parallel to his death and burial and resurrection. But in this particular passage in verse 32 when this theme of Nineveh is revived, it's a focus on the preaching that leads him to repentance. So commentators struggle with this. What is the focus here? What is he talking about? What is the sign? Well it is in the future tense. It's gonna be a sign. It will be given. So, maybe this is a focus on the resurrection. Perhaps that's underlying this. But nevertheless, there's been plenty of evidence already, and to say is this an evil generation 'cause you keep seeking a sign. No sign's gonna be given. Well, a bunch of signs had already been given. And it was given. As a matter of fact I went back in just the near context to see all the things that these people, since he'd come to Judea, had seen. His emissaries were doing miracles. He had done healings. There were things that clearly pointed to it. The context is they watched him, by the finger of God, take this mute man that was demon possessed and make him whole. That is a remarkable sign, and they say, well, we want a sign. (47:35)

The truth of what God is saying has been attested to. The whole book of Luke—I went all the way back, working backwards, to the first chapter. I counted twenty-one undeniable things that Christ, in the book of Luke, had already done to prove he was savior and Lord. You oughtta trust him, which means you're gonna have to be convicted and contrite. And you're gonna have to follow him, and that means you're gonna have to be willing to be corrected and to be conformed. So he's already proven it. He's proven it and given enough evidence. And we have to realize that's a human tendency as well. But what I need to do is let the truth of what he says demolish my reluctance to believe, and follow, and conform, and be contrite. And I've got to say, God, I'm gonna listen to what you say, and I'm gonna accept it, and I don't *need* anymore proof. Now is

there a time I might possible need some intellectual answers to questions? Sure, of course. I'm not talking about this kind of, of mindless faith. But I'm just talking about even when we know and are convinced, we've gotta realize my incredulity is based often on my morality and my reluctance, a sinful reluctance, and not in the fact that I'm not intellectually convinced. (48:51)

This of Gideon. Gideon was told by an angel appearing to him out of nowhere. The angel of the Lord saying you're gonna go after the Midianites and you're gonna, you're gonna wipe them out. You're gonna be the leader of the army. I don't want to. And then you what he asks for? I want a sign. I want a sign. And so the angel of the Lord indulges him. And he brings out, and it seems like it was assumed what he wanted, but he brings out these things to do a sacrifice. And then, sure enough, the angel of the Lord takes his staff and burns up the burnt offering right there in front of him. And there's a miracle. This is not a, you know, tiki torch lighter. Bam! Wow, look at that! And then he disappears before his eyes. Two signs right there. (49:32)

So off he goes. No, he doesn't go. Why? 'Cause he's afraid? 'Cause he's concerned? Because I don't want to do it? Because it's too hard? I might die? Whatever the reasons are, his reluctance to conform to the will of God. What does he do? I want another sign. Now speaking of the flannelgraph stories down the hall, what are the things you remember about Gideon when you were Sunday school? What was it? The fleece. I mean, one of the things that makes him famous for little kids in Sunday school is he wanted God to confirm his will. He had two signs already, and he says I just want a sign here. I'm gonna put a fleece out here at night, and I'd like that to be soaked with dew on the fleece but the ground to be dry. Does God do that for him? Graciously. And you know what his answer to that is? Oh, God, please don't be mad at me. Please don't be angry. Can you just do it the other way tonight? I just need another sign. Now again, I have to talk about God getting off the couch 'cause he's mad. He doesn't get off the couch at that point. He indulges him. Okay. Fine. He reverses the sign. Ground is soaking wet, the fleece is dry. Hm. I mean, uhh, the physics of dew points don't work here. I don't know what's going on. God does something miraculous for him. And finally he reluctantly steps up and does it. (50:47)

You gotta realize that when God speaks, he speaks with attestation. In other words, he gives us adequate evidence to believe that it's true. What we need to do is to accept the word that he brings us and not keep seeking after the confirmation. We want more proof than we need. That's the problem. And it's driven by a moral problem, not an intellectual problem. Number three, let's just put it this way. We need to let the truth demolish our defenses. (51:15)

3. Let the truth demolish our defenses.

And I'm not asking for brainless faith. I am asking for an informed faith that says there's enough evidence for me to follow what God has said, both as savior and Lord, as the one who convicts me of sin that I repent of, and the one that I conform to and find correction in. I'm ready to let the truth do that. I don't need more proof. Which, by the way, the resurrection as it says is Matthew 12 certainly was adequate proof. Paul adds to that as he writes people so far away from the events of Jerusalem, that he says to the Romans in the first four verses of Romans 1, he says, you know what? You got two things that if nothing else you ought to be thoroughly convinced by this. Prophecy and the resurrection. And that ought to be enough to know I got a book that spoke in detail about the coming of Christ that no other religious book on the planet does. And then



you've got this historic event that the whole Christian faith rests on, the bodily resurrection of Christ. With those two things apply your brain. Accept those. You got all the fleece you need. Now, do what I've said. You just gotta let the truth now work through all my reluctance to conviction, contrition, correction, and conformity. I just gotta let the truth blast through that. (52:28)

Yeah, well. I'm reading about a resurrection, but if I'd seen it with my own eyes. You know what Jesus says in Luke 16 in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus? It doesn't matter if you saw it with your own eyes. Here's how it's put. Even if someone comes back from the dead, if you can see it with your own eyes. That's the context. He says, they won't believe. Because if they don't believe Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convicted if someone should rise from the dead. Which he hadn't yet done at the time he said this. It's not more evidence you need. For most of us in this room we've got enough evidence. We've got enough proof. We've got enough attestation. It's about you looking at the truth, engaging with the truth, and letting the truth blast through our aversions. We've gotta say, okay. I don't like conviction. I don't like contrition. I don't like correction. I don't like conformity. That's the reality of my flesh, but I'm gonna bombard my life with the truth and be willing to let the truth work through those. (53:29)

Why? Because the Bible says it will. You know the passage. I quote it all the time. Hebrews 4:12. It is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword. What is? The Bible. The truth of God's word. Let it go. Let it out. Now I'm all for defending the truth, but as Spurgeon said, sometimes we spend too much time trying to prove that the Bible is true as opposed to unleashing the Bible so people can interact with it. He says sometimes we're trying to defend it when we need to let it loose. We need to exposit it. We need to quote it. We need to explain it. We need to read it to people. Why? Because according to 1 Thessalonians 2, it goes to work in people. It's active, it's living, it discerns the thoughts and intentions of their heart as Hebrews 4 says. It's gonna do work in people's lives. (54:12)

Let me get practical now. You're sharing the gospel. I remember one of the best things I was ever taught as a new Christian learning to share my faith. Open your Bible, turn it around to the person you're talking to, have them read those words from the page of scripture. It's powerful. Read the Bible to people. Have people read the Bible for themselves. You want to accept the correction and conformity of the mirror of God's word, even though you know you're gonna see stuff that you don't want to see, that's gonna convict you and call for correction? Open the Bible. Read it. Study it. Memorize it. Meditate on it. (54:50)

What does that do? It changes everything. 2 Corinthians 10:4-5. We've got weapons of warfare and not just for others, but even for ourselves in our own reluctance. They're not of the flesh. It's not flesh against flesh. No, it's divinely powerful to destroy strongholds. It destroys arguments. It takes lofty opinions raised up against the knowledge of God, and it destroys and demolishes them. It's able to take thoughts captive to the obedience of Christ. It may sound like old news but we need more scripture in our evangelism, and more scripture in our spiritual growth. And watch how it will wrestle our aversions to the ground and change us. (55:34)

Our daily Bible reading today takes us to Ephesians 6. I quoted in our service today Ephesians 1. This morning's reading, or tonight's reading, is Ephesians 6, that great passage on the armor of



God, speaking of flannelgraph stories. Remember that? There's one weapon in the arsenal. Got a lot of defensive things, a breastplate, we've got a belt, we've got a helmet. But what's the one weapon? It's analogized as a sword. It's called the sword of the Spirit, and it's clearly defined. The sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. You want to battle the aversions of our flesh, to conviction, contrition, correction, conformity. Well, pull out the word of God. Unsheathe the word and let it go to work in our evangelism and in your own life. And you'll see as 1 Thess 2 says, it'll get to work in you. It'll change you. People will be prepared and receive it for what it is. Not the word of men, but the word of God. Let's pray. (56:37)

God, help us. In a generations that's a lot like that first generation who sat there and listened to Christ, had their defenses higher up than the people in Nineveh, and the queen and her hosts down there in modern-day Yemen. Here were people that are more responsive, working harder to get to a sermon preached by an Old Testament king than they were to listen to Christ in the first century. And we know we deal with people like that all the time. Unfortunately sometimes we reflect that personality. And that for us we don't want to change, we don't want conviction, we don't to be conformed to the image of Christ. It's uncomfortable to put off the simple ways and to step into the path of insight. We know that is costly. But help us not to be incredulous, to sit there and say too many implications for that, but to be the kinds of people that look at the truth of your word and are willing to accept it, and to say, God, we have to embrace the truth even if our feelings don't care for it, even if it's hard for us to ingest. And God, all this is really contingent on the reality of us getting into the Bible. Help us to do that. I know there are questions sometimes we need to answer, intellectual questions, but help us to realize our aversion to your word is often more a moral issue than an intellectual one. Give us the patience, and the disciplines, and the perseverance this week to be digging into your word. And let it do its work in us, and in our friends as we share the gospel. In Jesus' name. Amen.