



Moving Beyond Ignorance

Psalm 4:1-8; Luke 24:36b-48; Acts 3:11-19; 1 John 3:1-7

Ignorance is bliss. There are so many bits and pieces of information we often believe we do best not knowing. Life is simpler when we ignore the 2.5 million plastic bottles our nation throws away every hour of every day. We are happier remaining ignorant of the political and economic distress that pushes so many Somali young men into piracy. We are happier when we remain unaware of the plight of millions of babies in Africa who have been orphaned in the epidemic of AIDS. We can more readily breeze through life when we ignore the families of Mexican immigrants who depend on what minimum wage earners can send home to feed them.

Ignorance is bliss when it allows us to shut out the cries and plight of others. Ignorance is bliss when it means we can look the other way when the consequences of our actions, choices, and decisions affect others in a negative way. Ignorance is bliss when it allows us to live without much thought to God and God's will for our living in purity, love, and the holiness of Christ Jesus.

There is a time for ignorance. Ignorance is, after all, simply not knowing. It is the natural state of a child born into this world. It is right for a child to come into the world without understanding all the problems of society, all the laws of physics, the principles by which nature is governed, and the will of God. It is not right, however, for us to remain ignorant when our very lives and eternity depend on learning to live according to the parameters set before us by our Creator.

Peter and John announced that the crucifixion of Jesus was the product of ignorance. Certainly, there was more to the issue than simply not knowing, but at heart ignorance drove the crowds and their leaders to nail the Almighty to the cross. Many had heard comments to the effect that Jesus might indeed be the long-awaited Messiah. Many had doubtless heard conjecture that Jesus was indeed God come to earth in flesh and blood. That was, after all, the official complaint against Jesus at the unlawful, after-hours trial before the high priest.

They had not known they were placing God on trial. Ignorance allowed them to proceed with their plans, yet it was more than that, as well. Along with ignorance was the desire not to know—the desire to ignore the facts before them and so to remain oblivious to the truth before them. Ignorance is one thing, but remaining ignorant when confronted with truth is quite another issue, altogether.

Here in the temple courtyard, Peter and John had healed a lame man known by to Jerusalem. For a generation, he had lain at a gate to the temple to beg. From birth, he had been lame, and there was no help for his condition. In the authority of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, Peter and John had healed him.

Jesus was the one they had tried to silence. Jesus was the one they had condemned to die. Jesus was the one they had considered a menace to Judaism and the society as a whole. They had considered him a blasphemer, as he called himself "Son of God" and claimed greater importance than Abraham. Now these two ignorant fishermen had healed a man born lame under the name and authority of this very same Jesus of Nazareth whom the crowd had killed.

God was willing to overlook ignorance in the case of condemning Jesus to die. God was willing to charge their crime to the shock of claims they found too extra-ordinary to believe. God was willing to

recognize that they were unprepared to deal with the truth facing them during the time of Jesus' earthly ministry. Now, however, the time for remaining in ignorance was past. It was time to face the music—the reality of the facts before them—and come to terms with the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The resurrection was no simple event to grasp. The incarnation of God—God living among the people was hard to comprehend. It is one thing to tell stories of long ago that have been ratified and accepted by a host of witnesses. It is quite another to come face to face with the presence of God and understand this abnormal experience for what it is. Time for suspending judgment in consideration of the facts was over. It was time to move beyond ignorance and make decisions regarding the facts at hand.

The church has often had a problem with this. During the time of Galileo and Copernicus, the church struggle with questions of scientific discoveries that seemed to contradict traditions of faith. In the time of Martin Luther, the church struggled with questions of indulgences and excesses of power that countermanded the teaching of Scripture. In the days of William Carey it was whether God needed or even desired the participation of missionaries in reconciling a world to Christ. In the days of slavery, it was understanding the full humanity of all people. Too often, the church has stood for the traditions of its elders or those paying the bills and neglected to consider the facts placed before us and the witness of Christ Jesus.

Ignorance is one thing. Ignoring God's revelation is quite another.

The first step in moving beyond ignorance is often repentance. We must repent of the selfish desire to remain in the comfort of ignorance and continue ignoring the truth of God's revelation. Repentance was the first step for the crowd at the temple in Jerusalem that day. Peter called on them to recognize the reality of their actions and assess the implications of this lame man's healing in the name of One they had sent to the cross. Repentance is also John's word for all who sin.

John tells us God demonstrated love and purity of life in Christ Jesus. As Christ has come, he has called us also to live in purity, even as Jesus modeled for us. John says we still living in a time of at least partial ignorance. We still have not seen God in his full revelation. In Jesus Christ, however, we have all the knowledge we really need of God's identity, character, and purpose. We have in Christ the example to follow in the daily living of our lives. We also have the challenge to set aside all in us that is not pure, that we might fashion our lives after the example set before us of purity under the will of God.

There were many in John's audience who wanted to spiritualize questions of the gospel. It was only the world of the spirit that needed attention, they claimed. Sin was nothing, as long as the spirit was pure. Give your spirit to God, they said, and the body can do as it pleases. John had a very different take on it. We cannot be spiritually righteous while living under that kind of ignorance. Righteousness requires the application of the gospel to our daily living. It means no longer ignoring the will of God, but applying the life of Christ Jesus in our daily walk.

How long will we plead ignorance? The time for ignorance is past. It is now time for repentance and action. It is time to allow the righteousness of God in Jesus Christ to flow through our lives before the world all around us. It is time for moving beyond ignorance into the full reality and expectations of the gospel. Ignorance is not really bliss, after all. It just encourages us to grasp an illusion. Beyond the illusion, life awaits. Are we ready to live the true life set before us?

—*Christopher B. Harbin*