

I Hamilton, Big Lessons for the Christian Life, 20210718 evening

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Preacher: Ian Hamilton

[0 : 00] Well, thank you for staying behind. You'll gather from my accent, I'm not from here. It's called Educated Glasgow. That's not an oxymoron, by the way. I was raised in the east end of the city, a large housing scheme.

At one time, it was the murder capital of Western Europe. That was shortly after I left. I had no Christian background whatsoever, and in the Lord's kindness, almost but not quite out of the blue, I became a Christian really through the life of a boy.

The year ahead of me at school, I would be in lower six, he'd be upper six. We're very, very different. I was in the academic stream. He kind of stumbled along. I was into girls and football. He wasn't too fussed.

But his life, he just lived differently. He was normal. He wasn't odd. There was something about his life that really touched me. I didn't know it was Jesus. But through him, really, I came to faith. If my four children were here, they'd be sitting, waiting, thinking, you've asked him to speak on anything.

[1 : 38] He's going to tell you about the importance and glories of grammar. I love grammar. Do you know the best way to pass seven hours on a transatlantic flight?

Read a Hebrew grammar. Read a Hebrew grammar. Fabulous. Time just goes by like that. But I won't talk about that. When I was a very young Christian, I was given one piece of advice that did more for me than anything else that I have ever heard in relation to my Christian life.

I was told to make morning and evening worship and the churches gathering for prayer, which in this church happened to be a Saturday evening, Presbyterian Church in Scotland, make them your non-negotiable priorities.

And I assumed that that's what every Christian did. I didn't know any better. I was pretty ignorant. So I just did what I was told I should be doing.

And that became the structure of my Christian life. My final year at school, went to university for four years, then went to Edinburgh University, did another whatever.

[3 : 04] And all the way through, life was structured by morning and evening worship and Saturday night meeting for Bible study and prayer.

They were like oasis in my life. They almost unthinkingly, they recalibrated my life. They gave structure to my Christian life.

They gave encouragement. They reminded me of the things that really matter. You know, when you're a late teenager, you can get caught up in who knows what.

But these punctuations in the week were just oasis to me. And I just loved, I loved sitting under the Word of God.

It wasn't always comfortable. But it was always enriching, challenging. It, as I said earlier, it just constantly reminded me of who God is.

[4 : 22] And that my calling in life was to live for His glory. And His glory would be my joy. So, if I can say anything, I said that to my four children growing up when they went off to university.

Please, God, you'll have three non-negotiables. And that might seem a little legalistic to some people. But I think God has made us such that we need boundaries.

We need aspirations. We need help. Because the Christian life is never to be lived atomistically.

It's always to be lived in community. And that advice was just absolutely stellar for me. And the other one thing that I would want to say is that the Christian life is lived, nourished, nurtured, and is grown together with all the saints.

You know how in the New Testament, in fact, throughout the Bible, the church is pictured relationally. All the pictures of the church, Old Testament and New Testament, has to do with connectedness.

[5 : 49] The church is the temple of the living God. We're all living stones built into a spiritual temple where God is present by His Spirit.

The church is the bride of Christ. He has one bride. We all, with our differences, background, culture, color, education, giftedness, we all fit together into this beautiful bride that God is preparing for Son.

And perhaps most picturesque or picturefully is when Paul writes about the church as the body of Christ. And regularly over the last 40 plus years that I've been a Christian, in fact, it's 50 years now, you meet people who really think they can do it on their own.

And church is there as a kind of top up when the mood suits or when difficulties come. But you think of a body. Think of my little finger here.

Well, this little finger has been attached to me for a long, long time. And maybe one day it decides, you know, I'm fed up with this decaying, decrepit, second law of thermodynamics, decaying body.

[7 : 09] So I'm off. Well, if the finger could, you have to use your imagination here. If the finger could amputate itself and sort of drift off into the ether, I would guess for a few seconds people would think, wow.

You wouldn't believe what I saw. A little amputated finger. You know, normally fingers belong to bodies. But this little finger somehow had become detached. It was quite a sight.

But very soon the finger would putrefy, blacken, die. It would just dissolve into nothing.

And the Christian life is to be lived out connectedly. We need one another. Absolutely we need one another.

No one's redundant. And only as we commit ourselves to one another and together live under the ministry of the Word of God, which always leads us to the Son of God, will we grow up.

[8 : 18] How do we grow up as Christians? It's not rocket science. It really isn't. You grow up as Christians as you commit yourself to a local church and with brothers and sisters.

You know, it's wonderful for me to look out at the variety here tonight. When I was in Cambridge, we had about 14 nationalities. Excuse me. In Inverness, they're all pasty white like me.

I think out of 400 in our congregation who come in the morning, we've got one black face.

To me, this is wonderful. I just think this is fabulous. And we're all different. And yet, we're all the same.

I used to do a lot of open-air preaching in Cambridge. And did it with a black Nigerian brother who was doing a PhD. And a Malaysian who was a mathematician.

[9 : 21] And they were both far better at it than me. I remember one occasion I stood up in the middle of Market Square in Cambridge, if you've ever been there. And I said, what does a black Nigerian, a brown Malaysian, and a pasty white Scot have in common?

We've got the same father. And that meant so much to me. And apart from making morning and evening worship and prayer non-negotiables, sink yourself into the life of a local church.

And you will bring something that nobody else can bring. Laurie's been a Christian for a few months. Maybe she thinks a time.

What do I bring? You bring something that nobody else can bring. There's nobody else like you in this congregation in Ealing or in the world.

You are sui generis, one of a kind. Ben is the exact same. One of a kind. And God wants us to live together, serve together, love together, and grow up together.

[10 : 40] There's a wonderful verse in Ephesians 3, verse 19, I think, where Paul says that he might know the love of Christ, length, breadth, height, and depth, together with all the saints.

You will never grow as a Christian. You will wither as a Christian if you dissociate yourself, distance yourself, either in body or in mind, from the fellowship of the church.

So, that really is all I wanted to leave with you. I thought if I kept it really brief, it would be memorable. What did the Scotsman say last night?

Oh, he said I should have three non-negotiable priorities, and I should sink my life into the life of the local church, because the local church needs me. There's nobody like me.

He says I'm unique. Well, the Bible says that, doesn't it? Sui generis. You know, it always sounds better in Latin, doesn't it? Sui generis. When I was teaching in Edinburgh, Edinburgh Theological Center,

you know, students are allowed to critique their professors these days.

[11 : 55] I don't like it. I have a standing objection. But anyway, so the principal of the college calls me in, and he says, Ian, we have your critique.

He said, they really enjoyed your lecture. So, that encouraged me. I thought, that's really good. But they had two negatives.

He said, you ask them to read too many books. What's your response? So, I gave him a three-word response. Get a life. Tell him to get up earlier and go to bed later.

These are critical years. Reading too many. How can you read too many books? And the second complaint was, he doesn't always translate the Latin. To which I replied, I always do.

They don't always listen. So, my children would be saying, no, you don't always. And I'll say, I do. You don't always listen. Anyway, three non-negotiable priorities.

[13 : 00] And sink your life into the local church. Grow together with all the saints. Because that's what our God and Father wants to see.

And that's me finished. Thank you.