

Sunday 4th February 2024 - Sunday Service

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Preacher: Johan DeJong

[0 : 00] Father, thank you that we can be together. Thank you we have freedom and peace. Thank you that we have words from you to think about. Please help us to listen well. In Jesus' name. Amen.

How you'd feel if you were to meet the King? Maybe you'd be thinking, it was a great honour, he was a very important man. I'd quite like to meet the King.

Or maybe you'd be thinking, you know, basically irrelevant to my life. I haven't really got the time. A bit like Henry VIII. Read about him at school.

Yeah, sure, he probably had six wives, but I didn't actually know any of them personally, so it doesn't really matter to me a great deal that a lot of them died or got divorced. You know, it could have been four and a half wives, for all I care.

Irrelevant. Or maybe you're in the other camp and you think, well, this whole royal family business, they're just a leech on society. They don't contribute anything.

[1 : 05] The money would be better spent elsewhere, and I certainly don't want to meet them. In our passage today, Peter invites us to come and meet King Jesus.

Maybe you have similar reactions. You think, oh, Jesus, very important historical figure. I'd be quite interested in meeting him. Or maybe you think, basically irrelevant to my life.

Or maybe you think, this whole Christianity business, it's a blight on society, and you'd be better off without it, and I certainly don't want to meet Jesus. And under all of those reactions, really, is the question, well, why should we care about meeting Jesus?

Surely there's a million other things that I could spend my time and attention on better than some dead guy from 2,000 years ago. Well, Peter, in our passage, tells us why we should care.

It's a bit like the stuff in life that seems unimportant and then turns out to be a lifesaver. When I went to school, there was a kid in our year who nobody liked.

[2 : 14] It's that sad fact of school life, isn't it? There's usually a kid who nobody likes in school. It shouldn't be that way. It is. And I came to school one day, and it was exam time, and guess what I did not have with me?

My pencil case. And guess who lent me the necessary equipment for the exam? The kid in the year who nobody liked. Suddenly, from unimportant, maybe even irritating, to a lifesaver.

Or, I wonder how many of you at home have one of these lying around? I went through the first 10 years of my adult life not having a clue what this was. And it was kicking around in the drawer for years, and then I just thought, taking up space, throw it out.

But if you ever have a gas leak, you'll be really glad you had this useless-looking piece of metal, wouldn't you? Jesus is like that, friends.

If you feel he's irrelevant or just irritating, he turns out to be a lifesaver. The Jesus we thought was just Ari in history turns out to be vital, our passage tells us.

[3 : 27] How did we get here? Just a little bit of reminder, background. Chapter 1, Peter was telling us, giving us, Luke rather, was giving us a sense of how Jesus is going to carry on building the kingdom of good news, even though he's gone, and it's through the worship and witness of his followers.

And then in chapter 2, we got a sense of how he's going to do that, God's plan and God's purpose. And the Holy Spirit coming showed us where the power was going to come from.

So that's the kingdom. But what happens when you meet the king? That's what we're thinking about in our passage. And to find out why we should even care, we're going to go to the punchline of the first sermon ever preached, because that's what this passage is.

We're going to see what Peter says, and we're looking at verses 36 to 39 especially. And what we see there is that when we meet the king, something happens in our minds, something happens in our hearts, and something happens in our lives.

So first of all, there's a message for our minds. There's a survey done in the US this year about attitudes to religion and spirituality, and it turns out that 80% of people say there is something beyond the material world, even if they can't see it.

[4 : 40] And I'm thinking in the UK it might be slightly less, but probably not significantly different. 74% said there are things that science can't possibly explain. And 83% of grown-ups believe that people have a soul or a spirit in addition to their physical body.

So what do I conclude? Well, the world doesn't really have a problem with spirituality as such, right? It's fairly easily tolerated if you believe there's something out there.

And the evidence is that actually the younger you are, the more important you think that is. But when you press into being spiritual, what you find is that people say, I'm connected to something bigger than me.

Yeah, I am. And you ask, well, what is that? And people say, I don't know, I can't explain it, I can't define it. And when you ask them the question, what difference does that make to your life?

What does that look like? They say, well, I'm not sure, I don't think it really works like that. But friends, that's not God. In fact, it's not even really human.

[5 : 47] Because it doesn't involve our minds, does it? If it's just some vague sense, some vague feeling that there might be something bigger than us out there, then it's not engaging all of what we are.

Because it's not engaging our minds. Jesus is not like that. He is not like the headline that I came across in the Metro this week. I don't know if you're a cricket fan.

And logic overpowered by belief, as Bazeball defies universal laws. Now, as far as I'm concerned, anybody who loves cricket already needs to have a healthy dose of belief over logic. So this headline didn't particularly make sense to me.

But all I'm trying to say is Jesus isn't like that. It is not belief over logic. He doesn't do mystical manipulation. And he doesn't promise happiness first through Peter here.

Through Peter, he appeals to our minds. Because we need to change our minds about Jesus. How does he do that? Well, verses 14 to 21, Peter shows, did you notice, how God's word explains the world that the Jews were experiencing right there and then.

[6 : 57] There's all this stuff about tongues of fire and wind and different languages. And they're thinking, what is happening here? And Peter says, God's word says this would happen in Joel.

It's part of the plan. And he says it's urgent. And he says it's personal. It involves you. And it's the same today. And if you look around, can you explain the mad stuff that happens in this world?

I can't. God's word can. And then, verses 22, 24, Peter invites them to think.

He invites them to think about what has happened. He talks about Jesus. He quotes history. He says, this man came and taught and died and rose again.

And he appeals to empirical evidence as well. He says, we are the witnesses. We saw it. And he says, you've got to deal with those facts. Think.

[8 : 01] And then he moves on. Verses 25 to 35. He moves from explaining what's going on in the world right now. And he shows how believing in Jesus is the outcome of the Jewish people's own thinking.

Did you get that? He refers to David, doesn't he? Who all the Jews believed in. And he says, look, if you think David was important and that God spoke through him, then really you ought to believe in Jesus.

Because Jesus is the one that David spoke about. There's no other explanation that makes sense. The logical outcome of your own belief is to follow Jesus. So change your mind about him.

And it's the same for us. If we think for a moment. Jesus is the answer to our thinking. Because we can see that the world's going the wrong way, can't we? We can see that it doesn't seem to be improving, really, in the important things.

So do we need a kingdom of good news? Yes, we do. And when we look around, it's not hard to believe that it will take something extraordinary, something bigger than what's inside me and you.

[9 : 08] Some power greater than I have or you have to remake this world and change people, right? And Jesus says to us, I have that power in the Holy Spirit.

And do we believe that this world needs more real forgiveness in it? Yes, we do. And if we're honest, do we think that actually we need real forgiveness as individuals?

Yes, we do. So we need someone who can offer us that forgiveness and do it in a way that is still fair and recognizes that wrong is wrong.

And that's what Jesus offers us. And he says, if you really believe in all those things, that the world is not going the right way, and that something bigger than me is needed to fix it, and that actually we need forgiveness, then you ought to be following me.

Then come and believe in me, says Jesus, because I'm the answer to all those questions. And that's Jesus' message to our mind. We need to change our minds about him.

[10:13] But we also need grace for our hearts. See, what Peter's really pointing up with his sermon is the fact that the whole Bible talks about God's grace in Jesus.

The prophets, Joel, the kings, David, they are all talking about this divine human being and who he is and what he will do, says Peter. Verse 36.

Therefore, let all Israel be assured of this. God has made this Jesus whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah.

See what Peter's saying to people? The people who are gathered there. The Jesus that you killed, God made him your saviour and your king. And that's grace.

Grace is God's goodness in Jesus to people who don't deserve it. Not performance, not religion, not rule-keeping. Grace in Jesus.

[11:18] And that's grace for us. The one who made us and who loved us. The one we've got rid of, sidelined, snubbed. Yes, he is the one who's willing to die for us.

The one we rejected as king of our hearts. Died to be king for us. It turns out that Jesus, who we just thought was some Jewish guy from RE, the smelly, nerdy kid from school, who nobody liked, it turns out that he is the saviour and the king.

And I was part of the crew that mocked him. And he died for me. And this is where it gets personal. Because if you really get that, if you really understand grace, it will cut you to the heart. Verse 37.

When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, Brothers, what shall we do?

You see, the good news does something to us. It's not just information that you receive and then you process it and you store it somewhere. And it's not something that you just take up, like, you know, golf.

[12:40] Be good for my mental health and relationships. That is not the good news for Christianity. In fact, it's not even that you feel guilty about some bad stuff that you did in your past.

And God comes along and he gives you really good therapy and then you feel better. No. God's grace cuts us to the heart. What we find is that our hearts are suddenly open to the almighty because I crucified Jesus.

who loved me. And that should cut us to the heart. Maybe you're thinking, well, wait a minute. Hang on.

I didn't kill him. It wasn't me. But if you take a moment to think about it, we're there in the crowd. Think about that crowd.

Who are they? They're people from all those different regions that we mentioned in chapter 2. And here they are. They've come on holiday. And what do they get to hear? They get to hear that they killed Jesus.

[13:49] They weren't even there. And yet, they were cut to the heart. So what's happening? I think those people knew and understood that anybody who denies that Jesus is God in their heart and in their life and with their words is the same as those who agreed to his execution for claiming to be God.

See what's going on here? If we deny that Jesus is Savior and King, then we stand not with his apostles, but with his executioners. But for those who have agreed with his killing, there is good news because Jesus said, I died for you and my grace extends even to you.

So I have to change my mind about him and I need to be cut to the heart and I need grace. And because of that grace in my heart, I have to turn to him and trust him and give him my life.

And that's what Peter urges his hearers to do, finally. Jesus calls us to do today through these words. Verse 37. When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, Brothers, what shall we do?

And Peter replied, Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, the promises for you and your children and for all who are far off, for all whom the Lord our God will call.

[15 : 29] When we meet King Jesus and we give him our lives, here is what happens. We repent, which means we turn away from the things that we have done wrong against God and other people.

And what do we get? We get forgiveness. And we are baptized, which is the mark of belonging.

And what do we get? We get a new community and a new family.

And we get new power to change and to be changed. That's the Holy Spirit that Peter talks about.

You see, there's change for our lives.

And with all of that joy, we also get the chance to reach out because who is the promise for? It's for all who are far off. People who are far away from us right now.

People on the margins. People next door. People who are odd, maybe a bit offensive. And we can reach out to them so they can become our brothers and sisters.

[16 : 40] Change for our lives. If you're a Christian here this morning, I just invite you to look at how the Holy Spirit has changed Peter's life since he was cut to the heart.

Do you remember after he denied the Lord Jesus? And Jesus looked at him and he wept. Where's Peter now? Look, he's gone from someone who babbles that he doesn't know King Jesus into this bold man who somehow explains history and whose words open doors.

If that Peter can witness, then we can too, right? In our own way. Even if it's only to be like the rest of the eleven. Did you catch that in verse 14?

Peter stands up with the other eleven. All they did at that moment was stand up to be counted. We can do that. But more importantly for all of us, all of us here this morning, we need to ask ourselves a hard question.

Maybe even a slightly offensive question. But it's a question on which our future turns and it's this question. Did I kill Jesus?

[18 : 02] If you're a Christian, you should be nodding. See, because what you make of Jesus, whether you stand with the people who says he's not God, get rid of him.

Or whether you stand with the apostles and say, this man is saviour and king. What you make of Jesus will determine what Jesus makes of you. And it's not just a hard question, but it's an urgent one because Peter reminds us, doesn't he, by quoting Joel, that this world is going somewhere. It's heading somewhere towards a dark sun and a blood moon. It's the very dramatic, poetic language of Joel. And if your answer to that question, did I kill Jesus, is yes, and you've been cut to the heart, then you'll be asking the same question.

What shall I do? Here's the invitation. Come and meet King Jesus. Change your mind. Receive his grace.

Give him your life. Repent. Be baptised. Come and talk to us. We would love to help you with that.

[19 : 22] I'm just going to pray. Lord, we thank you that you have kept these words for us up to today.

Thank you for the words of Peter, who knew you personally and his explanation of who you are and what we should do with you. Thank you that you speak to our mind. Thank you that you have grace for our hearts.

Thank you that you want to change our lives. Lord, please help us to turn to you and stand up and be counted for you. In Jesus' name.

Amen.