

# The one opinion that counts

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[0:00] So the background and context of what Jesus is now saying in this particular passage is the previous six verses we looked at last week and in particular I draw your attention to verses two and three.

! So John's in a very vulnerable place isn't he? He's alone. He's under threat of imminent execution. It appears in some way that his own ministry has come to an end and anyone in that situation is going to feel a sense of grief. And perhaps having all that time by himself, banged up in prison, not out in the open air, not seeing firsthand the works of Jesus.

He's put into a place where all sorts of things are going through his mind. That's true isn't it? When we're out of the run of things, all sorts of ideas can come into our mind.

He was probably malnourished. He was poorly treated. He wasn't in a good physical state. Your mind plays tricks, doesn't it? We were talking about sleep amongst ourselves this morning. A lot of people struggling with sleep.

[1:32] And you know what it is, if you don't get your sleep at night, all sorts of things go on at three o'clock in the morning in your head.

Prison was not a good place for John to be thinking deep thoughts about the ministry of Jesus Christ.

But he does have these thoughts and he's visited by his disciples and he's saying, he's saying, can you please pass this message through?

Are you the one or is there someone else we should look for? It's curious in a way because John was hearing about the very things that we've been reading in Matthew chapters 9 and 10.

All the miracles were already, you know, John's disciples were well aware of that. When John heard in prison what Christ was doing, it wasn't as if he was just having to make it up.

Or somebody was bringing false rumours about the ministry of Jesus. But he was actually hearing about the ministry of Jesus Christ. And yet he is still in a place of some uncertainty and doubt.

[2:37] What I've called a momentary wobble there. What's going on? We were reminded last week that the very things that Jesus was doing were the very things that demonstrated that he was the one who was to come.

But in a way, the devil was getting in here and just saying to John, well, maybe, maybe the Messiah isn't like this at all. Maybe he is the one who is going to come and conquer the Romans and bring the kingdom of Israel back under Jewish authority.

So there's this conversation going on and other people are overhearing it.

And as they overhear it, then of course, they too are having thoughts. They're having thoughts about John himself and saying, well, what about this character?

You know, he's done all these works and so forth. But he doesn't seem to be ending very well. It's a bit disturbing, isn't it? A bit upsetting. If you were one of John's disciples, you remember John's ministry is coming to an end.

[3:46] And he should be passing his disciples on to Jesus Christ. But they're hearing this stuff from their master, their leader, their guru, if you like.

They're hearing it from, they are getting problems as well. They're getting upset and disturbed and uncomfortable. So it's not a happy moment, is it?

It's not an easy moment at all. It's almost like Jesus is having given the answer back to John's disciples and saying to them, you know, go back to tell John, it's all right.

You know, be reassured. Because I'm doing the very, very things that have been prophesied of me. The very things that you can read in your own scriptures.

These are the very things that I am doing. And you can go drill into the detail of it. And you can see the way in which everything that was prophesied is now coming to pass.

[4:55] It's all under control. This is the time. The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news. And what you've been doing before, John, you've been absolutely right.

You were preparing the way and you were pointing, signpost pointing to Jesus as the prophesied one. Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

So it's a lovely reassurance that Jesus gives. But he goes on. And it's interesting. He goes on.

He talks to the, goes to speak to the crowd. Now these were the people who had gone and seen John. Many of them no doubt had been baptised.

They'd certainly gone to see this strange man dressed in a strange way, eating strange food.

Certainly a bit of a one-off, wasn't he? And so Jesus has something to say about John.

[5:57] Having reassured John himself, he wants to put the record straight about John himself. So he asks these questions.

What were you expecting of John? And what did you actually find in practice? So this passage we're looking at is Jesus' opinion of John the Baptist. And the first thing I want to draw your attention to is that there is no doubt as to John the Baptist's status as a citizen of the kingdom of heaven.

Look in verse 12 here. From the days of John the Baptist. I'm sorry, verse 11. Among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist.

Yet he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. They're together in the kingdom of heaven. Jesus is making a comparison that we can look at a little bit later.

About the fact that John is a shining light within the kingdom of heaven. He's a child of God. I reference Philippians 3.20.

[7:11] You might turn that up. Our citizenship is in heaven. Our citizenship is in heaven, says Paul.

And that's exactly where John's citizenship was. It was in heaven. So we just settle that particular point. His status is a child of God within the kingdom of heaven.

And he stands alongside the greatest and the least. But actually Jesus has incredible praise for John. He's saying this man in his season, at his time, with the knowledge that was available to him, there's no one greater than being born to a woman.

That's an incredible statement for Jesus to make, isn't it, about anybody at all. And he's saying at that particular moment, he was a bright and a shining light. And he was able to take hold of the promises and prophecies of God.

And to apply them exactly in the way that God wanted to be applied. He shone for Jesus in his generation. May that be true of us. May that be true of us.

[8:21] May we take hold of our full revelation of scriptures available to us. And may we be applying it. And this rather strange statement, which is in verse 11, He who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

I think he's referring to the fact that John was a predecessor of Christ. He was seeing the beginning of Christ's work. Jesus is alive. John did not see his crucifixion.

John did not see the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. He did not witness the ascension of these things which we are blessedly party to.

And it's almost talking about the privilege that's belonging to those who actually live in the post-Christ era.

We have a knowledge that even the greatest prophets were not party to. They couldn't see it in the way that we can. They didn't know about the nails through the hands.

[9:21] The burden he had to bear. The intensity of what happened on the cross. The words he actually was going to speak. Father, forgive them. They know not what they do. My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

They glimpse these things from afar. And even John, living in a period of time, even sort of a year or two before Jesus actually went through these processes, he didn't have that knowledge.

He didn't have that intensity of understanding. That everyone who has lived and believed on Jesus subsequently enjoys. We are privileged, aren't we? To live in these days.

We will one day be with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Because they're in the kingdom of heaven. But we've had so much more privilege here on earth to understand the Messiah, the sacrifice, what he's done.

When they went into glory, all these things began to be revealed to them, wasn't it? The Mount of Transfiguration was a glorious moment when the Old Testament people had a revelation of Jesus that they'd never seen before.

[10:37] We're so blessed. So we who are least in the kingdom are greater, in a way. Greater because of the knowledge that we have been privileged with. Which puts us under responsibility.

Responsibility to love and adore and praise our wonderful Saviour. Because we see him more clearly than those in the past. It's a blessing.

But Jesus has much to say about the calling and service of this particular man. Totally unique.

John the Baptist is totally unique. There was none like him. Well, you could say there was some like him. Like Elijah was like him. But he is a complete one-off.

He's a true prophet. Matthew 11, verse 9. What did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, he was a prophet. Let's be clear on that.

[11:35] He was a prophet. He stood in the prophetic line. As the prophets who had lived before, so was he. He was the last Old Testament prophet. That was his dignity.

He was finalizing all that had been spoken before. And he's a prophesied prophet. I think there are several possibilities in the Old Testament of prophesied prophets.

But it's a bit unusual. This is the one about whom it is written. I will send my messenger ahead of you. Who will prepare your way before you.

See in the footnote. It's in the book of Malachi. Chapter 3, verse 1. Malachi was written 300 years before John the Baptist was born. But he prophesied that such a one would come.

And we've looked already at the high praise that Jesus gives to this man. There's none greater. Verses 11 and 12. No one has risen greater than John the Baptist.

[12:40] And from the days of John the Baptist until now. The kingdom of heaven has been forcefully advancing. And forceful men lay hold of it. He had a very fruitful ministry. Things really went up a gear when John came on the scene.

There were people who were being prepared for an encounter with the Lord Jesus Christ. Through the fruitful ministry.

He is a voice calling out in the wilderness. But he's not a voice calling out in the wilderness in vain. He's not an Isaiah character. Who just has to live the whole of his life with the disappointment. Of things not happening. As he would love them to happen. But he's on the cusp of seeing the kingdom of God arriving in power. Forceful people taking it by force.

People actually getting a grip. Realising that something is happening. And they want to go in the slipstream of God's providential working. This is the moment. This is the hour.

[13:43] I want to be part of this. Linking themselves to Jesus Christ. So what a wonderful thing. John didn't hear this personally.

But Jesus gives his testimony. Jesus the son of God gives his testimony. About this one man. What a precious thing it is to hear it from the lips of Jesus.

Jesus. And that's why. I think the heart of this passage. Is that we should address the issue of the one opinion that counts. Many people have views about John the Baptist.

The crowd have a view about him. His disciples have a view about him. The apostles have a view about him. But the one opinion that counts. Is of course the opinion of the Lord Jesus Christ. And for us tonight.

That is exactly the same. You don't need to be a prophet. You don't need to be in that same. Rather particular category. To be brought under the spotlight.

[14:45] The searing spotlight of this. Particular point. That the one opinion that counts. In terms of us. Is what Jesus thinks of us. Jesus opinion of us.

Is the only one that really counts. Because it's deeply true. Everybody's opinion of us. Everybody else's opinion of us. Is bound to be flawed. They can't see deeply into us.

They don't know us from our mother's womb. They don't know the fullness of our lives. They don't know the things that have been done in secret. They can't see any of that. But everything that Jesus sees.

Is deeply true. Because he sees it in all its proportion. In all its weight. He has a perfectly true picture of ourselves.

Which is very scary isn't it? Which is very scary. But do keep hold of this thought.

[15:49] That our status is children of God. If we have accepted. The forgiveness is offered to us. Through Jesus Christ on the cross. Nothing in my hand I bring. Simply to the cross I cling.

So he looks at us. But our status is secure. In Christ and Calvary.

But yet. He's looking at us. In terms also of our service and calling. And we've been seeing in the book of Revelation. That sort of double. Double.

Position. As held. Our names are in the. Lamb's book of life. But still there is a judgment. That takes place according to works. And that matters.

That's important. So Jesus. Is the only one that can really understand us. It's the only opinion that matters on the day of judgment. That's what I've been referencing just now.

[16:47] There's only one person. To whom we have to give account on the last day. And that's Jesus Christ. He is the only one. But we will have to give account.

Just because we are sheep and not goats. Does not mean that we are excused from giving account. We have to stand before Jesus. And give account for the lives we've lived.

What have we done with the privileges that we've had? The callings that we've received. The giftings that we have enjoyed. The opportunities. We have to give account on that.

And the only opinion that matters on the day of judgment. Is not going to be ours. But it's going to be Jesus. We need the loving favor of Jesus Christ.

To face eternity. With hope. And that's why I come back again. We run to the cross. We run to Calvary. Run for the blood.

[17:51] We run for the righteousness that covers us. Because we know that a single sin condemns us. If we do not have the covering of the righteousness of Jesus Christ upon our lives.

If you're not a Christian tonight. That's the one thing needful for you. The one thing you need to hear from this message is. Are you covered? Are you protected? Can you face judgment?

Because the Lord Jesus Christ who sees and knows all things. There will only be acceptance on that day of judgment.

If we're covered. Because all our sin has been paid for. And his righteousness covers us. Christian person.

This is just so wonderful. To be in this place. To be enjoying this. And that's why we never move from this. We sing the songs of righteousness and cleansing.

[18:48] Our prayers. Our prayers of thankfulness. For him who bore our pain. For one opinion that counts.

But we're easily seduced and misled by other people's opinions of us. Aren't we? Aren't we? Flattery. Criticism. Faint praise.

Avoidance. Ridicule. Slander. Misunderstanding. Rejection. We all know that. And that. All of that has an effect upon us.

I'm absolutely confident. None of us in this room tonight would say. I'm not affected by the opinions of other people. You are. You are.

You're deeply affected. You're deeply affected by a conversation that's gone wrong. You're deeply affected by a relationship that's gone sour. You're deeply affected by someone who's given you some flattery and praise.

[19:49] And you've nursed it. You're troubled by criticism. Well, all these things are made even more complicated when they come alongside truthful and wise things that sometimes came from the same source.

And we can't avoid this. And we can't avoid this. The book of Proverbs is full of sort of talking about the relationships.

And we can't avoid this. This is the world we live in unless you become a hermit and go into a desert place and just have yourself to deal with. And by the way, that's not an answer either. But unless you do that, you're going to hear the voices, aren't you?

None of us is so rock hard that we are impervious to what other people think, good or bad. So it raises a big question.

It raises a big question. In the day-to-day of life, whose opinion counts in our lives? What is it that you agonize over and have sleepless nights about?

[21:03] Is it what Jesus thinks of you? Or is it the fact that you've just had a falling out with your neighbor? I think we know the answer.

We're flesh and blood. Remember, we're all sinners. Remember, we're all sinners. And we're easily seduced and misled by our own opinions of ourselves.

Every single one of us has a self-image. We do. We do. You're not immune from that.

You've built up that self-image over years and you retain that self-image. It's the baggage of your life. Someone might say to you, put you on the spot and say, what do you think of yourself?

Please describe yourself. Say, well, I'm this sort of person. You know? You know? And you might be near the mark, but you may be horribly wrong.

[22:10] You may be desperately surprised if someone would say to you, I don't recognize that at all. There's pride. Romans 12, verse 3.

Please look at that. This is in the context of serving. And we can get that badly wrong, can't we?

The idea that I think God's called us to do something.

It may have been nothing within the armory that he's given us of giftings. For by the grace given me, I say to every one of you, do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment.

In accordance with the measure of faith God has given you. It's interesting, isn't it? He says, don't think of yourself more highly. I'm sure there are people who think of themselves more lowly than they should.

But the real problem here is pride. Don't think of yourself more highly than you should. You should lower your self-awareness or understanding of yourself.

[23:18] It kind of is like the default thing, that we think we're better than we are. Defensiveness. Confidence. Only seeking opinion from those we think will tell us what we want to hear.

Nursing praise and burying criticism. Remember, we're all sinners. You're a sinner. I'm a sinner. So when we interact, we've got two sinners interacting.

Which makes a complicated algorithm of problems. Doesn't it? You know, your view is wrong. It's bound to be.

My view is wrong. It's bound to be. It's got some flaw in it. Two flaws together is a sort of multiplication factor rather than additional. Confusing, isn't it?

How merciful God is. Isn't it great that we're put into the family of God? So that we learn to live with one another. We learn to bear with one another.

[24:19] And to be kind and generous and thoughtful. And do all the things that we actually looked at briefly this morning. Remember, we're all sinners. There's James 3 verse 2, which we will look at now. It talks about teachers to begin with.

We all stumble in many ways. If anyone is never at fault in what he says, he's a perfect man. Show me the perfect man tonight. Don't think he's there, is he?

It's a kind of man of straw because he's not there. No one's perfect tonight. And he's just saying, you're probably going to be tripped up on your language.

And he wants to keep his whole body in check. You've done that? No. We all stumble in many ways. What a challenge it is for preachers of gospel.

How many people who preach the word of God have been felled by pride? It's the most dangerous thing to stand and speak to others with authority in some way.

[25:29] Because whatever kind of feedback you get can nurse dangerous things within you. And you need to pray for the elders of this church. Those who bring the word of God that they will be kept safe in this area.

It's not one of the particular characteristics or qualities of elders it's called up for in Timothy. But humility. Well, of course, if we're not humble, God has ways of humbling us.

And that certainly happened in the history of the church. When people have brought God's message but done so in such a fashion that it's become a message that pleases them or gives them status, authority.

I'm so glad I'm not in one of these American churches. You know, 10,000 people. Money streaming in from all quarters. And so forth.

Resources no problem. How dangerous it is. When churches grow especially. It must have been something I did. Maybe in the way I spoke.

[26:47] The relationships I've got with God's people. How dangerous that is. I think God keeps us needy. He'll keep us needy.

I hope he keeps us needy here. So we never get into that place. Reading Deuteronomy. So when you go into the land and good things start happening.

You say, my hand has done this. Down to me. We're just one step away from that. In any church endeavour. God needs to keep us humble.

And he'll do that. Sometimes he'll take drastic measures to do it. Pray for each other. Whatever ministries you're exercising. There's a risk. There's a danger.

Teach us to give glory to God in every situation. To be protected. And here's a case study.

[27:49] Because I'm interested in Paul. Paul's a very interesting character, isn't he? Because in so many ways. He's having to address these very points himself.

So how did he think about himself? He recognises first of all that he belongs to Jesus Christ. Just look at that little passage there. 1 Corinthians 6. 19 and 20.

Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit which is in you? Whom you have received from God. You are not your own. Just take that to heart.

You are not your own. Your life does not belong to you. You were bought at a price. You are a bond servant for Jesus Christ.

You have been bought by the precious blood of Christ. Inestimable. Priceless. He's paid the highest price for you. You belong to him.

[29:00] Therefore honour God with your body. Colossians 1.13. He has rescued us from the dominion of darkness.

And brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves. We were in the kingdom of Satan. Satan was our master. We have been brought by grace.

Into the kingdom of Jesus Christ. Where Jesus is now our master. And he brooks no conflict with his authority. There is no compromise on this.

We have one master. And it's Jesus Christ. And we are called to obey him in everything. We're not our own. We belong to him. That's how he thought about himself.

Puts himself squarely within the kingdom of God. But he's also recognising that he's been called to serve. And these are.

[30:07] I've just plucked these at random really. From the epistles. All these phrases. There are many more. Called to serve as Christ's ambassador. God's fellow worker. Servant of God.

A herald. A soldier aiming to please his commanding officer. A hard working farmer. A dedicated athlete. These are all pictures. Of.

Of service. Of submission. Of obedience. Which is exactly where. Where we are placed. We were disobedient. We were rebellious. We didn't put ourselves under the flag of Jesus Christ.

But now that's all changed. We're into a different place. And we have the beautiful honour. Of serving our master. Every day.

In every way. But how did he position and protect himself. So that he didn't go under. With all those siren voices of approval.

[31:06] I mean. He could count the churches. And he could say. Well. You know. I'm responsible for that. What we're going to do now.

Is. Let's go into. Small groups of five or six. Just look at those verses. I want to just encourage you. To look at those verses. In your group. Pick up the points.

And I want. Them. After. Ten minutes or so. Just get some feedback. From the groups. To understand. What. How he positions him. Protecting himself.

Because. This is very precious. And important for us. How are we going to be. Positioned and protected. So that we do not become casualties. Where our opinion. Or others opinion. Matters more than Jesus. Paul has a way of doing it. And I think these verses help us. And you'll see at the back end. There are question marks. Because there are plenty of other places.

[32:00] In the New Testament. And his writings. Speak of that. You may be able to find. From your concordances. Or an app. Some more verses that apply. Okay. We'll.

We'll. We'll just. Feedback at. 25 to. In a couple of sentences. What's come over to you. From looking at those. Particular verses. Keep your stuck.

I'm a visitor. How could you do that to me? Very silly. Right. Well. We've just found it very sobering. Reading these verses.

And. Realizing. Being reminded. Again. That. We come before the Lord. And it will be. That we are to be judged. Before him.

[33:00] And we're just so grateful. That we can look to the Lord Jesus. And. That. That. As one of our groups said.

That we just. Make sure. That each day. We spend that time with the Lord. And. We have to. Just keep trying to remind ourselves.

Through the day as well. To just be walking close to him. Thank you very much. Helpful. Pastoral. Yes.

I mean. See the. The. The clear things. That it is. Faithfulness. Faithfulness. To the gospel. That matters. And that.

That means we will be. Criticized by. Other people. Or we may be. Sometimes it will lead to conflict. And. But it is. God who judges.

[33:55] In the end. It's faithfulness to him. Could I also. Draw your attention. To one. Passage of scripture. That isn't actually on the list. Is that all right? It's. What. Two Corinthians 12.

Verse. Starting at. First. Well. Read the whole thing. But I won't. Two Corinthians 12. Starting at verse six. Even if I should choose to boast.

I would not be a fool. Because I will be speaking the truth. But I refrain. So no one will think more of me. Than is warranted. By what I do or say. Or because of these surpassingly great revelations. Therefore. In order to keep me from becoming conceited. I was given a thorn in my flesh. A messenger of Satan. To torment me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord.

To take it away from me. But he said to me. My grace is sufficient for you. For my power is made perfect in weakness. Therefore. I will boast all the more gladly.

[34:57] About my weaknesses. So that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why. For Christ's sake. I delight in weaknesses. In insults. In hardships. In persecutions. In difficulties.

For when I am weak. Then I am strong. Thorn. And the. One thing about this. Is that Paul very cleverly. Doesn't tell us what the thorn in the flesh is. So.

If he did. Then we could say. Oh I don't have that problem. So I am okay. But what. By not telling us. Everybody projects their own. Thorn in the flesh. On to you know. You ask what it is. And it really tells you. A lot more about you. Than it. If you speculate. It says a lot more about you. Than it does about Paul. Because you. You think. What is your weakness. What is your thorn in the flesh.

And. And that is what God. Gives us in grace. To. To. So that we don't. So that we can say. When I am weak. Then I am strong. Thank you.

[35:57] Jenny. We didn't. We didn't get very far. Through the verses.

But we got through. A few done. Perhaps just reinforcing. What. Chris you touched on. Before we went into the groups. We thought. That.

Well there's clearly. Dangers about. People who are. At the front. And dealing with the word of God. You're going to get reaction. And as you said. There is a minefield there.

Because. If you are. Particularly if you're a bit younger. And you're new at it. And you get a lot of praise. Hopefully before you started. You're on your knees. Looking for God's help. In doing it. But if

you get a lot of praise.

That can be very hard to handle. Even though it's encouraging. Because the next time. You'll think. Oh maybe I didn't make. Quite so much dependence on God. And maybe I've just got some natural. You know. So that's hard.

[36:52] But also. If you get a lot of harsh criticism. You know. That. That can be very humbling. And it could even be quite destructive. So. So we saw. That sort of thing. And.

And I think one of the verses there. Was saying. Paul didn't really care. What other people thought. As long as he was discharging. His duty. I mean. It's good to have some. You know.

Some people. It's very good. They walk away from preaching. Or something. And they. Feel like they did a useless job. And it's quite nice. If someone lifts them up. With a bit of encouragement. But you know. It is a delicate area.

I think.

One of the things. Is. To be God pleases. Rather than man pleases. So you're looking to. Praise from God. Rather than. Praise from men. And. And of course.

[37:48] Criticism from God. If required as well. Rather than. Criticism from men. I think. As God. God is the final judge. And. The opinions of fellow sinners.

Doesn't really. Make much difference. I suppose. Yeah. Well. We. Thought that. Paul's motives. Were right. Was for. For the glory of God. And how easy. Is for pride. To. Be in everything. That we. Do really. Um.

Yeah. So it's very challenging. As you said. Yeah. Yeah. For me.

Um. Which was quite a shock. I don't know why it was a shock. Because I knew it anyway. It was the fact that. God.

[38:48] Is watching. And listening. To everything. That I do. And say. You know. And it's. And I don't always live my life as such.

But. It was quite sobering. To think. You know. He's there. Watching. And listening. And. And. Let's see.

Thank you. I think that's covered. Covered lots of bases. And. And as Katie said at the beginning, how glad we are that we can flee to Calvary and know the mercy and forgiveness of such a great God who loves us so much that he who knows us so intimately can still find a way of providing that total forgiveness.

But I think one of those verses said something along the lines of, if I was trying to please men, I would not be a servant of God. It's very binary, wasn't it? It's one or the other.

So this is a sobering message, but it's not a destructive message. It's not a message that is to destroy people because Paul could live with that.

[40:18] It's just a call for us to be putting the Lord Jesus Christ first in all things. And not to be ashamed to have him in our vision, as it were.

Saying, I'm pleased to have him near to me because he loves me so much and I want to please him. And so it's not a fear thing. It's something we just want to be closer to him.

And we know that we're not where we want to be. So that's our prayer. It's a good prayer to pray. And perhaps we just spend up to eight o'clock in the groups just praying those honest prayers for one another.

And then we close. Thank you. Thank you.