

Objections to Jesus

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[0 : 00] Well, please turn in your Bible to John chapter 7. John chapter 7 and John chapter 8 are chapters of controversy.

! John chapter 7 and John chapter 8 are chapters of controversy.! And we've been looking at them. I cherry picked some of the best bits. And realized that I need to backtrack just to fill in some of the gaps.

And that's what we're going to do today. We're backtracking into John chapter 7. And I want us to think about Jesus and controversy.

And you might, I don't know what everybody's thoughts about Jesus are. You might think he's a good person. You might actually think he's a bad person.

You might think it is, it would be nice to believe in Jesus, but actually it's an impossible thing. Or you might say it would be nice to believe in Jesus, but, well, but, but all sorts of things.

[1 : 13] But you might say Jesus is ridiculously old and out of date. You might say that Jesus is, and what he represents is intolerant and bigoted.

Interesting word, bigoted. Never quite sure what it means, except that people don't like you if you're bigoted. I looked it up on Wikipedia, so this must be true. It says, somebody who, through prejudice, has fear, distrust, hatred, contempt, or intolerance for someone based on their ethnicity, religion, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, disability, socioeconomic status.

I think that was the end of the list. Now you know that's what bigoted means. It means somebody who has prejudice and fear, distrust, hatred, contempt, intolerance. There we are. So you might say Jesus is those things.

That he shows contempt, hatred, intolerance towards people. You might think that. You might think that he's unscientific.

So that it's just a betrayal of modern knowledge to believe in Jesus. You might go a little bit further to think about his followers, the church.

[2 : 37] And you might say that the church is hypocritical. You might have met some people who say they were Christians. And you think, well, if Christians are like that, I don't think much of Jesus. I wouldn't say that that doesn't happen.

You might say that the church is middle class and therefore you're not interested. Or you might say that the church is full of gullible and fanatical people.

So you're not interested for that reason. Two different reasons. Almost contradictory perhaps. But you might say you're against the church for that reason. Interestingly, if you look for a review of Calvary Evangelical Church on Google, you will find it has been reviewed by somebody who came in to vote.

And they said it's a very nice building. He says it's evangelical. You can tell that it's an ongoing evangelical church. And he says, and if you meet the people there, the light in their eyes is not cataracts.

It's Jesus. Now, why is it? So that's what it says. How he would come to that conclusion, I don't know.

[3 : 43] I think he's saying that we're gullible and fanatical. But anyway, he says it's a nice building. If you are Muslim, you might say, well, I can't believe in Jesus because he didn't really die.

And all those Christians have got it completely wrong. All sorts of reasons why Jesus might be difficult for you to believe in. And all I want to say this morning, well, actually I want to say more than this, but I can at least say this.

It's not new. Not new. There have been objections to Jesus from the word go. And we're going to look at some of those objections this morning.

And we'll find that the objections that crop up actually recorded in the Bible are also in a measure contradictory. And they're also in a measure based on ignorance.

And some of the objections are irrational. No evidence for them. Some of the objections are nonsensical if you actually take them out and look at them.

[4 : 45] And that's what we're going to do. We're going to look at some of these objections to Jesus this morning. Okay. Let me give you an overview of what happens in John chapter 7.

Personally, I find it a little bit of a difficult chapter to keep tabs on. But I can... This is the sort of thing that's been happening. Jesus was in Galilee at the beginning of John chapter 7.

And he makes his way down to Jerusalem to the Feast of Tabernacles, which is a very important, very important festival in the Jewish calendar.

And interestingly, he gets criticised for not going. And then he gets criticised for going. So you see the sort of situation that's described there.

He gets criticised for being too cautious. And he gets criticised for his timing. Well, when he gets to Jerusalem, there are a number of people that he meets up with.

[5 : 46] So in John chapter 7, verse 25, he meets the crowd. And some of the crowd are from Jerusalem. They're not all from Jerusalem because lots of people have come as pilgrims.

So that's perhaps one of the reasons why you get divided opinions. Some of them are locals. Some of them are incomers. But there's definitely a crowd. And in verse 12, John chapter 7, verse 12, people are talking to one another about Jesus.

And some of them say he's a good man. That's what they say in verse 12. But not everybody agrees. Some people say, in verse 12 again, no, he deceives the people.

He's pushing people out of course. He's pushing them off course. And in that discussion, there's an atmosphere of fear. Verse 13, no one would say anything public about him for fear of the Jews.

So presumably, the Jews are not the same as the crowd. Maybe it's shorthand for the Jewish leadership. So in order to distinguish them, I've drawn some little men with hats.

[7 : 03] I don't know why I did that. But it's just a good way of distinguishing the leaders. And the leaders have their thoughts and objections. So in verse 15, they sort of sneer at Jesus about his academic record.

Verse 15, the Jews were amazed and asked, How did this man get such learning without having studied? So they're sort of saying he hasn't got a PhD.

He hasn't been through a theological school. Hasn't been to Oak Hill. Any of these places.

So the question about his academic respectability. How can he talk without having studied? The Jewish leaders also have in mind the Jewish heritage.

And so this is not actually them that says this, but Jesus refers back to them about Moses. Verse 22, Moses gave you circumcision. And Jesus refers to their law.

[8 : 09] Verse 23, a child can be sacrificed on the Sabbath so that the law of Moses may not be broken. And the Jewish leaders were very keen on Moses, who, as we know, was in some ways the founder of the Jewish religion.

And there is within the Jewish leadership anger, which Jesus refers to in verse 23. Why are you angry with me?

And there is an intention of murder. So some of the people say, in verse 25, isn't this the man they're trying to kill? And some people say, no, they're not trying to kill him.

And other people say, yes, they are trying to kill him. So that's what's going on. And in verse 32, some minions are sent to arrest Jesus.

Verse 32, the Pharisees, who are part of the leadership, the Jewish leadership, heard the crowd whispering such things about him then the chief priests and the Pharisees sent temple guards to arrest him.

[9 : 16] So off they go to arrest Jesus. And meanwhile, Jesus speaks about, if you're thirsty, come to me and drink.

And at some time later, the guards come back empty handed. Verse 45, the temple guards went back to the chief priests and Pharisees who said, why haven't you brought Jesus back?

What's the matter with you? And they give their reply. So that's the sort of thing that's going on in John chapter 7. And I'd like to focus on verses 40 to 52.

How are the crowd thinking?

What would you be thinking if you were there? What sort of things are going on? Well, in verse 31, here's one of the things that the crowd is saying.

[10:19] They're saying, it says, many in the crowd put their faith in him. They said, when the Christ comes, will he do more miraculous signs than this man?

So I put a list on the screen of some of these factors and one of them is definitely the signs, the miracles that Jesus did. Signs is a better translation than miraculous signs.

The huge things that Jesus did, nobody says he didn't do them. They saw them. And the question is, what do they mean? And the crowd is saying, the things that he did, the power of them, the quantity of them, he must be the Christ.

So there's the signs. In verse 40, when Jesus has said, on the last and greatest day of the feast, if anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink.

When Jesus has said that, in verse 40, on hearing his words, some of the people said, he's the prophet.

[11:31] So notice, it's not seeing the signs, it's hearing the words. When they heard the things he said, and the way that he said them. And then in verse 41, others said he is the Christ, and the debate goes on, bringing in the matter of the fact that he's from up north, from Galilee.

Okay, so let's deal with that one at a time. So first of all, he's proposed as prophet. Number one, he's proposed as prophet.

So I'm taking that from verse 40. Some of the people said, truly, this man is the prophet.

Now what do they mean like that? What do they mean by that? What do they mean by that? Oh dear, I haven't put down the Bible reference. That's silly of me.

I think it's Deuteronomy 18. It is. So what do they mean by the prophet? Well, I can tell you what they meant.

[12:40] They were thinking about an ancient promise of God, which goes back to Moses, so thousands of years before. It's Deuteronomy 18. It's Deuteronomy 18.

And verse 17. Where the Lord says, what they say is good. I will raise up for them a prophet like you, Moses, from among their brothers.

I will put my words in his mouth, and he will tell them everything I command them. If anyone does not listen to my words, that the prophet speaks in my name, I myself will call him to account.

So it's a very important figure of the prophet who follows on from Moses. Now, it seems to me that that had several fulfillments.

we have, through the story of Israel, going on through history, different prophets at different times that called the people back to the covenant that had been made with Moses.

[13:51] And if you like, they are covenant policemen. Then, they're not particularly saying anything new, but they're drawing out from what Moses has already said about God's promise to his people.

And they call people back to that. And they point forward what you can expect from that. So these are the prophets. And the people are saying, Jesus is the prophet.

Do you notice a difference between what I wrote and what they said? Because they're not saying Jesus is a prophet. Notice that little word, the.

They're saying, Jesus is the prophet. Here's another incident in the life of Jesus on the, what's called the mountain of transfiguration.

It's in Mark chapter 9. And this is an incident in the story of Jesus.

[14:58] He went up onto a high mountain. He took some of his disciples with him. And there was this amazing, remarkable incident where he seemed to sort of shine like the sun and his clothes shone like the sun.

And it seemed as though the power of another world had temporarily broken through into this world. As if the obscure glass between our world and the next world was suddenly taken away.

and you've got the full force of the light of who Jesus is shining through. And another part of the curiousness of this was that two other figures appeared.

One of them was Moses and we just refer to and one of them was Elijah. Does anybody know what sort of person Elijah was? He was a he was a prophet. If you like, these two then stand for Moses the one through whom the covenant started and Elijah one of the great prophets.

And so you have Jesus and Moses and Elijah and a voice comes from heaven and says about Jesus this is my son whom I love listen to him.

[16:20] Very significant words. There's Moses who wrote a lot of the Bible there's Elijah who I think stands for the whole tradition of prophets and you think the voice from heaven might say there's your Bible listen to Moses listen to Elijah that's what you need to do but no the voice from heaven says there's Moses there's Elijah but here's Jesus listen to him.

He's not a prophet but he's the prophet about whom all the others spoke. He's not part of the root he's the destination. He's not one among many he's the great towering figure.

Surely truly he is the prophet as the voice from heaven comes here's Jesus listen to him.

Jesus then is proposed as prophet and it fits in with a couple of things that was said. First of all in the beginning of John's gospel when Jesus is introduced in this way no one has ever seen God but God the one and only who is at the father's side has made him known.

No one has ever seen God but Jesus who comes from who comes from God who is who has been eternally in communion with his father face to face with the father forever Jesus has come down and made him known.

[18:10] No wonder the voice from heaven said he's the one who knows listen to him and the people were right when they proposed Jesus as the prophet and the guards did you remember when the guards come back from trying to arrest Jesus they say we'll look at this again in a moment no one ever spoke like this man we were just knocked out listening to him we we couldn't do anything other than be so totally impressed by the words of Jesus so he's proposed as prophet and I ask the question shall we listen to him so I ask the question to Christians do you make it your business to listen to Jesus do we make it our business to live lives under the word of

Jesus and actually taking notice of what he says do we do that or do we are we a little bit too lazy to bother listening to Jesus Jesus is on the phone I'm sorry I'm busy at the moment can't be bothered do we listen to him do we actually bother to put into practice what he says it's a crucial fundamental thing it's not possible to be a Christian without having Jesus as the prophet whom we listen to shall we listen shall we do him the honour of listening there's a temptation in the Christian life just to talk to Jesus and tell him things that we are concerned about it would be very polite to listen to him and for him to tell us the things he's concerned about wouldn't it so there's my first point that he's proposed as prophet here's the second point he's commended as the

Christ and this is in the next verse he's commended as the Christ verse 41 so some people say he's the prophet others said he's the Christ now what does it mean by Christ Christ comes from a Greek word it's the equivalent of the word Messiah which is the English attempt at a Hebrew word and it means anointed that's what it means literally in practice the Christ is the king because in in the Hebrew scriptures what you did with kings you didn't particularly crown them although you could crown a king but what you certainly did was you anointed a king I think the same thing is true in the UK coronation ceremony I think there's some oil used in that isn't there so they're saying he's the king he's the king strange thing to say because they've already got a king but they're saying no he's the king he's the king that's been foretold in the

Bible let's have a look at some of that foretelling psalm 2 which we sang right at the beginning is if you like messiah's manifesto it's a rather sobering document because I suppose we tend to think that Jesus ought to be nothing other than warmth gentleness supportiveness non-judgmental our friend and so on and this actually gives a different angle on who messiah is this is psalm 2 I won't read the whole thing but I point out that in verse 2 he is the object of resentment the kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the lord and against his anointed one so it's saying that people the people described here very fundamentally resent the claims of the lord and the claims of the messiah maybe that's where you are today maybe you've got no further than that you just feel

I really don't want this Christian stuff and I really don't want to go along with it I would like to shake that off I remember there was a time in my life when that was very much what I was feeling I wanted to shake off anything that's to do with Christianity because it's an encumbrance an unwelcome encumbrance and that's what they're saying here he's an object of resentment and he is also the ultimate answer to the rebellion of humankind in verse six the lord sees all these rebellious people resenting his constraint on their lives and he says I've got an answer to that and the answer is I've installed my king on Zion my holy hill don't get bogged down with the geography of it I think he's just saying that the Zion the holy hill is his headquarters and it's saying the king is put into position in headquarters he's put into the position of power and authority and action and execution and this is

[24 : 03] God's answer to humankind what's God's answer I've put Jesus in the place of power and the place of authority and the psalm goes on to say that the Messiah is able to deal with humankind with lethal power you will rule them with an iron scepter and dash them to pieces like pottery which seems to be rather off message for Christianity doesn't it you'd think that Christianity ought to say something much more warm and fluffy about what Jesus thinks about the whole wide world actually the Bible is very realistic it says the Bible the world is full of wickedness well you know that don't you from looking on the television reading the news and rather than Jesus being rather fluffy and patting people on the head he's very angry with that and he has a rule he has a power and he says at some point not necessarily today but at some point that will all be sorted out and it will be sorted out with as much force as it takes including lethal force there is a day when

Jesus will put all wrong things right and the price will have to be paid for rebellion and enmity against God and refusal of his power and refusal of his ways after all he is the boss he does own everything it's all his and if we're sitting there shaking our fists metaphorically at God it's not surprising that at some point God will say I'm going to sort that out that's not on that's unacceptable and he'll do it through Jesus and the point comes right at the end of the psalm where it says this being the case now's the opportunity to get right with the king to not be his enemy to say can we have an armistice look I'm putting my weapons down if I come out you won't shoot at me and that's what the psalm ends up saying therefore you kings be wise be warned you rulers of the earth serve the lord with fear rejoice with trembling kiss the son lest he be angry and you be destroyed in your way for his wrath can flare up in a moment blessed are all who take refuge in him and the king is our greatest enemy but he's also the solution to our problem that he's at the moment saying my finger judgment day yet you can come this minute you can come we can make peace you come before me it says kiss the son come and make friends with me now blessed are all who take refuge in him now is the opportunity to come and shelter in him now is the opportunity to be forgiven in him now is the opportunity to be welcomed!

despite yourself he's currently welcoming subjects so you're not coming and still shaking your fist at him you're coming and saying sorry about all that was completely out of order can I be on your side will you welcome me will you forget the past will you obliterate all that and just take me in as I am and Jesus says absolutely yes absolutely yes that's what Messiah does blessed are all who take refuge in him so some people are saying this is who Jesus is he's the Christ he's the king and some people are saying oh hold on hold on hold on hold on but but but but but but and what they're saying is here's a problem the problem is what's written in the Bible is that the king is of the royal line and the royal line is the line of

David and David's family background I've written it in there I didn't really write it in Hebrew but I wrote it in English backwards could you see where David's family home is Bethlehem so they say this can't be right there's an objection there's a problem he ought to come from Bethlehem that's David's city but we know that Jesus comes from Nazareth which is up north Jesus comes from Galilee and you see I don't know whether you've experienced this that there's some things that urge you towards Jesus and yet there's some things that get in the way as objections you say yeah but this can't be right it's not a new thing people have always had to struggle with this and this is a particular factor in this case the Galilee factor if you like and they're saying well he ought to be royal he ought to be southern and

I suppose they're saying he ought to be posh but what he actually seems to be is uncivilized northern and therefore undesirable so they say we can't believe in him because he's a Galilean can't even pronounce donkey correctly do you see what I mean it's an objection and I don't know whether you've had those sorts of what I want to say is that an objection like this need not necessarily turn out to be true and it need not necessarily be a showstopper there may be an answer to these things or you may actually be giving the objection more weight than it really ought to have and I say that because the road to Christian discipleship and the road of Christian discipleship does not mean that there's never any conflicting thoughts in our minds but those need to be overcome and in this case of course they we can see how they ought to be overcome but please notice at this particular moment the objection is a combination of half understood theology snobbery geography bigotry and ignorance he can't be the messiah they're saying he can't be the messiah partly based on misunderstood theology snobbery geography bigotry and ignorance that's what that objection comes from and is there an answer to it well there is of course they didn't yet know this we know that

[31 : 30] Jesus was actually born in Bethlehem wasn't he all the Christmas carols keep on telling us that we didn't realise that it was so significant but it is Hark the herald angels know what's the one Christ is born in Bethlehem what yes thank you very much he was born in Bethlehem so they need to have been stuck on that point he was a temporary refugee and went to Egypt which also turns out to be significant and he settled in Nazareth in the end so here they were he was commended as the Christ but people found objections what I want to say about this is maybe you're struggling perhaps not over this particular issue but over something like it and say that faith what is the nature of faith faith is based on evidence now Richard Dawkins says that faith is when you believe and there's no evidence I don't think he has any evidence to say that but he does say it anyway faith is based on evidence but there will sometimes be little bits of grit in that nice system don't be put off by the little bits of grit on something that you know is basically going the right direction be prepared to trust

I'm not saying believe things that you know aren't true faith is based on evidence but there's often comes up little counter examples for example you're thinking the Lord is leading me in such and such a direction and then you can see the Lord providing and then something comes up which seems to go contrary to that and you think oh maybe I've got it all wrong well maybe you have but not necessarily if you know you can trust the Lord you can trust the Lord in this particular challenging issue that comes up that is temporarily unresolved you know it might be for you a Galilee factor I want to say keep trusting the Lord keep trusting the Lord in fact there's a whole set of teaching in the Bible which says that the Lord as he watches over us and plans our lives sometimes deliberately allows contrary contrary things to come in he calls it discipline things that perhaps make us frustrated or make us down hearted or whatever but the message is that God uses those things for good and we're to keep trusting him and I just put as a second thought I wonder what Galilee issues people stumble over at the moment quite unnecessarily this Galilee thing they shouldn't have been put off believing over this matter let's come to the third thing he was proposed as the prophet and commended as the Christ alliteration there so I thought I'd do some more alliteration but in the last bit he's abandoned through arrogance verses 45 to 52 so the the guards come back and the Jewish leaders the chief priests and the Pharisees said we sent you off several verses ago to go and arrest

Jesus we wondered what had happened to you and now you've come back empty handed what's what's on earth going on and they say we had a close encounter with Jesus no one ever spoke the way this man does it's a remarkable thing to say isn't it I mean they didn't go out as his fan club they've changed their minds and this is what they come back and this is apparently their excuse for being sent to arrest somebody and not doing it the way he spoke no one ever spoke the way this man does how do you expect us to arrest somebody like this they had a close encounter with Jesus maybe you know people who've had a close encounter with Jesus I hope you don't react to it the way that these Pharisees reacted to the guards because they say you idiots you mean he has deceived you also say the

Pharisees he's a deceiver he's deceived you as well the guards might be saying well no we heard him and no one ever spoke like him the Pharisees say you stupid idiots you're deceived you're deceived you've been taken in unlike us and then notice what they say has any of the rulers or of the Pharisees believed in him no we don't believe so it can't be true it's very do you get the sense of the irony of that and the conceit of it we're you know we're the people who know we don't believe so it can't be true bit like it's almost like the BBC isn't it you know Jeremy Paxman doesn't believe so it can't so Christianity can't be true none of the people on question time believe so it can't be true there's sort of arrogance about it isn't there although some people believe they're the crowd notice see what the leaders say about the crowd oh the crowd oh well that lot that lot this they use it uses the same word for crowd as it used before but it's translated here as mob that lot oh you know it's the people who go shopping in London

[37 : 58] Road that lot they they're so ignorant they know nothing of the law they're ignorant and stupid and they're inferior in fact as far as we're concerned there's a curse on them we wouldn't those sort of people believe in Jesus which means nothing they're just so stupid I suppose the Pharisees would include us in that wouldn't they they believe but they must be stupid there's a certain arrogance and conceit there please don't get caught up in that please don't look down your nose at Christians simply because of some snobbery or prejudice or something like that oh these Christians they're all homophobic gullible with light shining out of their eyes well are they have you

actually talked to any of them have you thought about it there's an arrogance and a conceit in the Pharisees well all of them except one one that's recorded and this is he's actually been to theological college he's respectable he probably knows which knife and fork to use when he goes to a posh dinner and so on this is called Nicodemus verse 50 Nicodemus who had gone to Jesus earlier and was one of their own number he was one of their own number and he says well hold on a minute we're supposed to be Jewish leaders we have a certain code we have the law of Moses we're supposed to be upholding that aren't we and doesn't our own law say you don't make judgments like that you don't just write people off in this rather conceited snobbish way without actually listening to them have we done that that's what he says does our law condemn a man without first hearing him to find out what he is doing have we done that have I know that we sent temple guards to arrest him but have we actually sat and listened carefully to what he said have we found it out first hand or have we just written him off because we know that he's stupid we know that he's a deceiver so that's what Nicodemus says and look at the reply that he gets Nicodemus you're from up north as well aren't you you're a Galilean too are you from Galilee are you one of those idiots can't even talk properly and they do go back to a half understanding of scripture don't they they say look and find a prophet does not come out of Galilee so we never get them any further than this they got stuck on that bit of grit it's ignorance because they don't know that Jesus has been born in Bethlehem but it's for them they can't get any further than that it's sad isn't it but my heading was for them he's abandoned through arrogance and that's where we have to leave them

Jesus is going on to say I am the light of the world whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life he is in the business of bringing truth to open eyes so if you're stuck don't abandon Jesus keep on because he is able to shine through into confusion and muddle and darkness I am the light of the world whoever follows me will not walk around in confusion and uncertainty and darkness but will have the light of life says Jesus and he's going to say in chapter 8 verse 28 the clearest light that you can look at whereby you will not be uncertain but you will know the clearest light comes from the cross and in chapter 8 verse 28

Jesus is going to go on and say when you've lifted up the son of man that means lifted up on the cross then you will know that I am the one I claim to be and that I do nothing on my own but speak just what the father has taught me he says that's the clearest place look at what I will do where the place I'm at on the cross when you see that you will know I would imagine there's a good number of people in this room who would say I know exactly what that means my clearest sense of who God is and what it is to know God comes to me as I consider Jesus dying on the cross it all focuses there that he should love me that he should give himself for me that he should die on the cross for me that he should forgive my sins it all focus there and as

[43 : 25] I look again and again at that place I know I know God I know what he's done for me I know that I belong to him I'm not wandering around in darkness but I have the light of life the clearest proof is by looking at the cross I'm sorry we have to leave the Jewish leaders there and we leave the crowd in a degree of confusion as well but perhaps not all of us are confused perhaps some of us can say I know I've looked I've trusted