

Jesus - Mad, bad or God?

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[0 : 00] So this is what we do, John chapter 8. Somebody could give us a page number from the blue Bible at the back. 1074. So if you've got a blue Bible from the back, it's 1074.

If you'd like a blue Bible from the back, if you wave your hand, somebody will bring you one. So we're in John chapter 8, as Mark kindly read to us from verse 48, and let's pray.

Lord, we have no greater need than that we should hear you speak to us. And we're gathered here this morning with different thoughts and perhaps different distractions, but we nevertheless pray that you would be here and that you would be the speaking God who changes lives by the power of his word.

Show us Jesus to our great amazement, for we ask it in his name. Amen. We're looking into the Bible.

John is one of the four writers who tells us the story of the life of Jesus, and he tells this story in a very compelling and intriguing and rather wonderful way.

[1 : 35] In what we nowadays call the eighth chapter, he's been following Jesus through controversy and conflict. And my introductory thought is this question, who is Jesus?

Now, I'm sure some of you have asked that question and come to a settled conclusion about it. But maybe not everybody here has done that. Certainly not everybody in the world has successfully answered that question.

Who is Jesus? We've got him in history. We've got recording of things he said and did. Who is he? C.S. Lewis, the teacher of English and professor of English literature and a writer of children's stories, I think it was him who came up with three possibilities.

That Jesus was bad. That he was actually a bad person. Or that he was mad. Or that he was God.

[2 : 48] I don't think that those three are completely watertight. But they are pretty strong contenders.

That there really are only those three possibilities. That the Jesus in the Bible was either a bad person. Or a mad person.

Or he was God. With that thought, let's look at the controversy that Jesus is in in chapter 8.

The Jews answered him, aren't we right in saying that you are a Samaritan and demon possessed? See where I'm coming from? How would we answer the question as to who Jesus is?

We would say, what's the evidence? What's the evidence to help us to reach a conclusion? In John's Gospel, John would say, what's the testimony?

[3 : 50] Or what's the witness about Jesus? He did things and he said things. For example, he said to a paralyzed man, Arise.

He said it and the man got up. That's a word from Jesus. And an action. And in John's Gospel, he gives us lots of words of Jesus for us to think about.

And he gives us the actions, what John says, the signs. And a sign points to something. And a sign tells you something.

And the fact here that Jesus said, arise. And the man got up. John says, now, you take a good look at that. Because that's telling you something about who Jesus is.

That's showing you something. That's pointing to something. And that's just one example. He also, for example, fed 5,000 people in the desert.

[4 : 54] He also walked on stormy water. He also opened the eyes of the blind. And he also raised Lazarus from the dead.

So he did those things. There's the evidence. And the question remains, so who is Jesus? Who is he? Is he bad or mad or God?

And before we dive into it, let me just say, of those choices, when we're saying God, we don't mean any old God.

We mean particularly the God of the Bible, the Lord God. In English translation, you'll find the word Lord in capital letters.

If you were to pronounce it in Hebrew, the particular name that the God of the Bible has is Yahweh. And I'll put the Hebrew letters up there if that's of any interest to you.

[6 : 03] But that is the name of God. He's not Thor or Wodin or Krishna or Ganesh. In English, the God of the Bible is the Lord, Yahweh.

And what's particular about this Bible? What sort of characteristics does he have? Well, in the book of Exodus, he says, my name, Yahweh, means I am who I am. So say, I am has sent you, is what he said to Moses.

He's the God of the history of Israel. The God of King David and King Solomon. You remember it was King Solomon who built the temple. And the whole idea of the kingdom, the kingdom of Israel, the kingdom of God on earth as it then was.

It had an actual headquarters on earth in those days, which was Jerusalem. And there was a temple in Jerusalem which was God's physical headquarters.

Of course, it's not like that nowadays. That's how it used to be. The God of the Bible is the God who sent his people into exile. That's part of the history of Israel.

[7 : 10] Because he is holy and they were disobedient. He sent them away and he himself went away. You might remember in Ezekiel, there's a vision of the glory departing from Jerusalem.

Because God is sort of fed up with his people and he packs up his bags and leaves them. And God is the God who promises a return from exile.

So all the promises that God's made to his people, he says, they won't just fizzle out. They will be fulfilled. Perhaps not in the way you're expecting. But there is a promise that I will rebuild my city. I will repopulate it. I will bring all the nations into it. I will bring new life where there was death. And of course, Christians believe that Jesus is the fulfillment of those promises.

But anyway, that's the God whom we're talking about. Are you still with me? Yeah. Thank you. So let's look into the passage itself.

[8 : 20] What we have is a set of, or a conversation, a set of remarks made by the two groups of people. The Jews and Jesus. So the Jews say something to Jesus and Jesus replies.

And typically, the Jews make an objection. But you this or but you that. And or a contradiction of Jesus.

You shouldn't be this. You shouldn't be that. And Jesus characteristically answers. So if they've asked a question, he will give an answer.

Sometimes he will reason with them. And sometimes, despite the fact that they are contradicting him and being a bit obnoxious, Jesus replies with an offer or a promise like he did when he said, for example, if anyone is thirsty.

On the last and greatest day of the feast, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him.

[9 : 31] Which is an offer, isn't it? To thirsty people to come to him and drink. So that's the way the conversations are tending to go. And in chapter 8, verse 48, this is the objection that the Jews make.

So what do they say? They say, aren't we right, verse 48, in saying that you are a Samaritan and demon possessed? A bit like somebody coming up to you and saying, wouldn't I be right in saying, you've got an ugly face and you're really stupid?

It's not the sort of thing you generally say to people. It's not a polite way of continuing a conversation. But what they say is, aren't we right in saying, you're a Samaritan and you have a demon?

So let me just explain who the Samaritans were. Remember, the Samaritans were a racial group to the north of Israel. They shared some of Israel's heritage and land.

And to a certain extent, their religion. But the Jews looked on them as being a mixed up race, an unclean race. People they would have nothing to do with.

[10 : 47] Remember when Jesus met the Samaritan woman, she was really surprised that Jesus talked to her at all. And that Jesus suggested drinking from the same cup. She was absolutely

amazed because the Jews have nothing to do with the Samaritans.

So they're saying to Jesus, well, that's what you are. You're a Samaritan and you have a demon. And I suppose they're saying to him that you are false.

You're a sort of mixed up, unclean sort of person. To say somebody has a demon is to say that you have spiritual power, but the power comes from a really bad place.

And I think there's the implication of madness as well. That your brain is mixed up. Something's taken over.

You know, you've got mental health problems. It's an insulting way for them to say these things. And I think they're not too far away from saying, you're bad and you're mad.

[11:50] Now, how does Jesus answer those questions? Verse 49. Well, first of all, he answers the charge that he has a demon by saying, I don't.

I am not possessed by a demon, said Jesus. I am not. You are wrong. And it's interesting the way that he continues his answer.

Because he now starts to talk about his relationship with his father. Just follow what he says. I honour my father and you dishonour me.

I am not seeking glory for myself, but there is one who seeks it and he is the judge. I tell you the truth.

If anyone keeps my word, he will never see death. That seems to move the subject on because they hadn't been talking about death. But you see how Jesus answers this.

[12:54] He talks about his relationship with the father, which is about him being God, actually. So it's worth taking a careful look at the way he describes this.

And he talks about his relationship with the father. And I put it in a little swirl of arrows and words on the screen, which I'll explain.

He says there is a dynamic, a relationship between the son and the father. And this is how it works. I honour my father.

Whatever I do, my motive is to honour my father, says Jesus. There's a word for honour in this case.

It's time. And he puts a negative in front of it and says that I honour my father, but you negatively honour me.

[13:56] You dishonour me. Let's come to that in a moment. Verse 50. I am not seeking glory for myself. So I put a little arrow swirling round to say, does Jesus himself seek his own glory?

Is that the way he does it? And I'm going to strike that out because that's not what he does. Jesus says as a matter of principle, I don't seek my own glory.

I seek my father's glory. And then he says, there is one who seeks it and he judges.

So, and this is talking about his father. So he's beginning to spell out for us a very rich relationship between the son and the father.

I don't operate on my own, trying to build myself up, trying to say how wonderful I am. I don't seek my own glory. What I do is I seek the father's glory and the father, he delights to seek my glory.

[15:04] So that's how I get glory. I get it as the father seeks to glorify me. And he also judges.

Now we need to fill in a blank there. Now what is he judging? I think we would say that the father is judging attitudes.

For example, what the Jews are saying. My father is judging that. And the father is judging situations. How is it that you have come with this sort of attitude towards me?

My father judges that. And we could say the father judges people. And he's looking into hearts and saying, is this right? What is that heart doing?

Why are you thinking that? Is this a good attitude that you have? And Jesus mentions his father in this connection too. My father seeks my glory and he is at work judging.

[16:05] So don't think it's a trivial thing or a pointless thing. What you make of me, the father's watching you in this. Now let's look at the human responses or how this affects people who are not the father and the son.

Well, we've got two possible responses to Jesus. And the first one, Jesus has already mentioned. You dishonor me.

Just as it would be insulting for somebody to come up to you and look you in the eye and say, you're ugly and stupid. These people have come up to Jesus and said, you're bad and you're mad. And Jesus says, you are failing to give me the honor that I deserve because I am not bad.

I am not mad. I am God. And simply to come the way that they came was, as Jesus says, to fail to honor him.

[17 : 14] That's one possibility. And the second possibility is the one that Jesus mentions where he produces this remarkable equation where a sinner like you and me plus Jesus' word means that death is removed.

Did you spot that in what Jesus said? He said, I tell you the truth. If anyone keeps my word, he will never see death. What an amazing thing to say.

He's just been insulted. Instead of getting angry, thinking he might punch them, Jesus says, I'll tell you something. Anyone who keeps my word will never see death.

That's a remarkable statement. We're going to think about it a little bit more in a moment. But let me ask you what you make of Jesus at this point. What do you make of Jesus?

Who do you say he is? Are you saying that he is not worth honoring? Perhaps to say, as they did, he's mad.

[18 : 33] And Jesus says, you completely misunderstand who I am. You completely misunderstand who I am. You fail to honor me. Or, the alternative that Jesus is mentioning here, do you keep his word?

Do you hang on the words of Jesus, the promises of Jesus, believe them, keep them in your life, live your life according to them? It's not just earning something, it's believing, and acting in line with that belief.

Because Jesus says here, if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death.

What a remarkable promise that is. That death will have no power. That even if you die physically, you will rise again, is how Jesus explained it later on.

That even as you believe, you have eternal life, which can never be taken away from you. What a statement. I think only God could make that sort of statement.

[19 : 44] And which of those two responses is yours? Let's move on. Well, they think that Jesus has just proved that the Jews were right all the time.

Because verse 52, 52, at this the Jews exclaimed, well, now we know that you are demon possessed. Now we know it.

You just proved it with your own mouth. You're definitely mad, or bad, or both. And here's how they carry on talking about this. They go back to their own heritage.

And they talk about Abraham. Abraham, as you know, is the father of the Jews. And he stands way back in history in a very important place. Also, a father of Islam, if I've understood that correctly.

Now they refer to Abraham. Abraham died, and so did the prophets. Yet you say that if anyone keeps your word, he will never taste death.

[21 : 04] So let's work that out. There's Abraham, the very father of the Jewish race. There are the prophets, who you could say were the spiritual superstars of the Hebrew scriptures.

And Jews would say, our religion is the best religion there's ever been, because God invented it. And they'd be true to say that. Jesus himself said, salvation is from the Jews.

So it's a little bit insulting to all the rest of our cultures, because I think very few of us in this room would be of Jewish descent. So all our cultures, all our efforts at religion, Jesus says, no, not much there.

Salvation is from the Jews. Best religion ever. But they all died. Abraham died, the prophets died. And they say, well, there you are, you see.

How can you possibly say that you are better than that? This is the equation that Jesus presented. Anyone, even you, and me, if we keep Jesus' word, enter into deathlessness.

[22 : 24] We'll never see death, or as the Jews correctly rephrase it, we'll never taste death. So notice what Jesus is saying.

He's not saying that if you follow me, you're going to be very rich. It's not a promise about wealth.

And it's, he's not saying if you follow me, you'll never get ill. It's not a promise about health.

And he's not saying if you follow me, you'll make a million dollars. It's not a promise about success. But what it is a promise about is the long-term spiritual future.

You will not die. Death, which for everybody else is a complete barrier which casts a shadow over the whole of their lives.

What are you living for? You know you're going to die. Jesus says that barrier is removed. you can look beyond death to a personal, wonderful, glorious, future alive.

[23 : 35] That's what Jesus is promising. And you can see that the Jews are working this out. That means, Jesus, that you are saying you are greater than Abraham.

That's what it means, isn't it? You are greater than Abraham. Are you greater than our father Abraham? He died and so did the prophets. So the next question they ask makes a lot of sense. Who do you think you are? More literally, who do you make yourself? Who do you make yourself? What are you making yourself to be?

Greater than Abraham? You must be mad. You're making yourself up not just to be a superhuman being, but you're making yourself up to be, I don't know, something ridiculously great.

Now, is he mad? Is he mad to claim to conquer death? Because that's what he's claiming. He's claiming he has the keys of life and death.

[24 : 46] Is he mad to claim that this is encapsulated in keeping his word? If he'd said, if you do yoga and meditation or something, maybe you say, well that's, oh yeah, I can see, well if you take particular medication or drugs, then you can avoid death.

But he doesn't say that, he says, what I'm looking for is people who hear what I'm saying, believe what I'm saying, trust it and live by it, and that's the way to conquer death.

Is that mad? It's certainly not a normal thing to say, is it? To be honest, if you walk down London Road and found somebody saying that to you tomorrow, I think you would be pretty sure that they did have some sort of problem and you would do best to ring 101 as quickly as possible.

But is that true of Jesus? Do you know, he raised Lazarus from the dead, he said to a dead man, come out and he'd been dead for days and the chap came out.

Jesus does have the power to conquer death by his word and he himself was raised from the dead. There is very, very good evidence that that's true.

[26 : 19] So is he mad? Maybe not. Is he bad? Is he talking about the sort of escape from death, the sort of zombies and the undead and all these sorts of things that are on movies which I don't particularly want to watch myself?

Is it that sort of creepy, creepy thing? And it isn't, is it? There's nothing creepy about Jesus.

If you actually read the things he said and the way he related people, you will find everything is wonderfully clean. It's not impersonal to do with raising up animated flesh and corpses and zombies like there's a computer game that's to do with that.

Maybe even Adam knows what it is. Is there a computer game where you, there's many, there's many, too many to mention. But that's all impersonal.

It's all sort of animated corpses and all that sort of thing. Didn't mean to frighten you there. But the way Jesus does it is always people. He's not saying animated corpses, he's saying you'll see your friends, Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, you'll sit down at the meal table with them.

[27 : 50] It's all to do with people, the value of people. And the cleanness of it is because Jesus went to enormous trouble to clean everything up.

Now you might know or you might not know, in the Bible, the most polluting and unclean substance is blood. And I can also tell you that in the Bible the thing that has the most powerful cleansing effect is blood.

The right blood. Sacrificial blood. And Jesus died on the cross to provide cleansing blood.

to make all his promises clean. To make people clean. To make the future clean. So it's not bad that he's talking about.

It's clean and wholesome and good. Or is he God? The end of his gospel, John writes, these things are written that you may believe believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and that believing you may have life in his name.

[29 : 10] And John says that's the whole reason I've written this. To persuade you, to convince you, to reason with you, to give you the evidence and the testimony that you could actually believe that he is the Son of God.

don't think John is saying, you've just got to believe it because I say so. I think he's saying, think it through. I'm presenting you with the evidence.

I'm going to treat you as a sensible person. I'm going to treat you as a thinking person. I'm going to treat you as a person who's grown up enough to listen to arguments, weigh them up.

And these are the arguments about Jesus Christ and I think they're convincing. And if you believe you have life in his name. Let's go a little bit further.

Verse 54. And Jesus is again telling us about his relationship with his father. And what he's really doing is telling us about his godness.

[30 : 20] He's not claiming that he is the father. the Bible doesn't teach in a very simplistic way that Jesus is God and that's all there is to it.

The Bible teaches the godness of Jesus in a very rich way and says that there is the father and there is the son and there is the holy spirit in a remarkably beautiful relationship together such that Jesus is God that the father is God and Jesus the son relates to the father in a certain rather beautiful way.

And that's what he's telling us about here. So look in verse 54. Jesus again says I don't glorify myself. I'm not telling you these things out of a selfish motivation.

Verse 54. If I glorify myself my glory means nothing. So again strike out this little bit on the screen where the son glorifies himself. He says I don't do that.

My father whom you Jews claim as your God is the one who glorifies me. The father glorifies me. And now he goes on to say some more about his relationship with the father.

[31 : 40] Though you do not know him I know him. You don't know him but I do. I know the father. I have a complete knowledge of the father.

I've seen the father. I've been at the father's side. Therefore I'm equipped to make him known to you. And verse 55 he says you do not know him I know him.

If I said I did not know him I would be a liar like you. But I do know him and I keep his word. Do you notice that phrase has cropped up before? Jesus is inviting us to relate to him the same way that he relates to his father.

I know the father and I keep his word. It's a remarkable thing isn't it? That Jesus has a relationship with his father where words matter and the words that the father gives to Jesus Jesus receives and believes and uses as the basis of what he does and obeys I keep his word.

And then he says this about Abraham your father Abraham well you call him your father and in a sense he is your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day or perhaps more literally he rejoiced at my day he saw it and was glad.

[33 : 17] A couple of strong words for rejoicing there. Abraham was overjoyed to see my day says Jesus. Is he mad or bad or what?

Abraham was overjoyed to see my day. I don't think anybody is completely sure whether this is recorded in any particular incident in Abraham's life.

So this is just a suggestion but I can tell you which I read right at the beginning there is an occasion where we know that Abraham laughed and there it is he fell to the ground laughing and he laughed at the thought that he and his wife would have a child and they were both old.

So he thinks his wife Sarah the next time she goes to hospital it will be for the geriatric ward but God says no next time she pops into hospital it will be the maternity ward and Abraham he laughs whether out of incredulity or amazement or what but it's just laughable.

Incidentally the child's name Yitzhak means he laughs the child was given the name he laughs and Abraham that's what his name was at that moment and Sarah which is what her name was both had a little laugh put in their names so Abraham became Abraham with a ha in it and Sarah became Sarah with a ha in it so the two ha's actually became part of their names.

[35 : 13] I don't know whether that was the bit that Jesus is referring to but here's certainly something in which Abraham laughed and I want to suggest to you it is a suggestion what do you think that Abraham in that moment in the power of God was able to see something looking forward and perhaps what he could see in his immediate mind was the birth of a child and to think that is that's God that's amazing God can bring life out of death our bodies as good as dead Abraham can bring life God can bring life out of that God can bring a child out of nowhere as it were to do this work to further his purposes and I wonder whether in some sense Abraham looked even beyond that and his eyes when you look on a shop window sometimes you can see a reflection of yourself but other times you can look through the shop window and see what's in the window people actually come and stand outside our house in

Shaftesbury Road and comb their hair and see if their eye makeup is okay because the windows are quite shiny and the sun falls on them in a certain way and then they look through and say oh there's Mr and Mrs.

Wells there looking at us wondering what we're doing and I wonder in a sense whether Abraham's eyes might have viewed through this incident to see what Jesus says my day and then I wonder which day Jesus had in mind because there is a countdown going on in John's gospel towards a day and the day that it's counting down to is the day Jesus died on the cross because that's the day when Jesus sorted all this out and did what needed to be done and cleaned up what needed to be cleaned up and smashed open what needed to be smashed open and guaranteed what needed to be guaranteed and signed off what needed to be signed off that's the great day he did it but he died on the cross and Jesus commented on that do you remember he said something on that day do you remember what he said it is finished and I'm still among the regions of speculation and suggestion here I wonder if Jesus is saying there's a sense in which

Abraham saw that and when he laughed he wasn't just laughing at the idea of having a baby he was laughing at the idea of Jesus finishing that all amazing well I'm going to ask for the third and final time what you make of Jesus was he mad the chronology makes him look stupid doesn't it you must be mad Abraham seeing you you seeing Abraham I mean it's ridiculous the age the time it's all impossible and yet the very thing we're talking about Abraham saw an impossible thing happening in his life the whole of the Jewish race is based on that impossibility of the baby Isaac being born so it's not mad to think of

God doing miracles at all is Jesus bad because he's saying I'm greater than Abraham for anybody else to say that I think would be unbelievably proud and vain you're so vain there was a song wasn't there you're so vain you probably think this song is about you which of course it was and so if Jesus is you could say to Jesus you're so vain you think the Bible is about you but actually it is I don't think it's vanity and Jesus sort of puts the tin hat on it by what he says next he says well they say to him you know you are you are really off the wall Jesus you are not yet 50 years old said the Jews said to him you've seen Abraham you must be crackers bonkers and Jesus answers

[40 : 02] I tell you the truth before Abraham was born do you notice the next two words before Abraham was born I am before Abraham was born I am do you remember what I said about God at the beginning what his Hebrew name is there it is I've written it in Hebrew so that you can read it I am I am who I am and Jesus is saying before Abraham was I am it is amazing isn't it if we believe we are talking about new life we are talking about death reversed and removed but actually they didn't believe do you notice what they did they picked up stones to stone him which is what you do if there is somebody who is so bad and mad that he needs to be got rid of and that's the conclusion they came to do you notice what Jesus did next when they didn't believe he hid himself and what else did he do he hid himself and he slipped away from the temple more literally he departed from the temple he hid himself and sometimes

God hides himself sometimes we can treat God in such a way that in the end he says well I'm I'm not going to listen to you and when you say I need you I'm not going to be there and when you say I want to be I want you to be close I'm not going to be close sometimes God hides himself for good reasons and Jesus is entirely consistent with that when Jesus says well if you're not you know I've spent two chapters debating with you giving you sensible answers and at this point you've still concluded that I'm not worth living I'm going to hide myself from you a bit scary really isn't it because if you are yourself in the process of saying to God no don't want you don't want you not going to listen to you you better be careful because if he hides himself there'll be a day when you'd want him to be there but he's not to be found he hid himself and he departed from the temple which is exactly what the glory of

God did in the days of the exile the glory departed that's scary let's sing together we're going to sing number 711 to Thank you.