

Who is Jesus?

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[0:00] And life or death question, stand or fall question. And when I wrote this, the question was, Will Liz Truss U-turn on the economy?

! It's been overtaken by events, hasn't it? But that's not the big question. There's bigger questions than that. What is the key to human flourishing? That's a big question. And all the matters of human rights, of inclusivity, ethnicity, sexuality, all that sort of stuff, very important.

But there's bigger questions than that. The question of religion. Whether you believe, whether you're religious. We had some chat on our local street, WhatsApp chat people saying, I'm not religious.

Well, I would like to focus really on more than whether you're religious or not, or whether you have a belief in God in some shape or form or not. Because there are lots of believers in lots of religious things that get it wrong.

And there are lots of gods. And the big question I would like to focus us on is, who is Jesus?

Because that is the central question, isn't it?

[1:10] Who do you say Jesus is? Who is Jesus? That's a life or death question. That's a stand or fall question. It is the stand or fall question.

Who is Jesus to you? Who do you say that he is? Who is Jesus? And historically, people have batted this question over.

I mean, one of the ways of saying it is, there are not many options. He's either mad, or he's bad, or he's God.

He doesn't leave us lots of options. I mean, that's one way of putting it. He's mad. Things he said are crazy. Or he's bad. The things he said are malicious. Or he's God.

The things he said are true. And that question is asked in chapter 8, verse 25. They said to him, Who are you?

[2:10] And that question is hovering over all of these verses. And I'm going to try and dip into them this morning and look at what it says on this question, which is a life or death question, a stand or fall question.

And I invite you this morning to work on this with me as we look into these verses. So there is a context. Those of you who've been coming regularly will know that chapter 7 and 8 in John's Gospel is Jesus at the Feast of the Tabernacles, or the Feast of Booths.

It was an ancient Jewish festival commemorating when the Israelites came out of Egypt in that great act of deliverance.

And then they were living in tents as they marched across the desert. And as it was celebrated in the time of Jesus, up there in Jerusalem where the temple was, there were a great display of lights and water.

I got the wrong way around. Water pouring, lights and illumination, and it was a wonderful, amazing festival.

[3:22] And Jesus is at this festival, and what he says is really quite remarkable, as we shall see. I've been looking at these chapters, I think probably since my 20s.

I remember when I was at university leading a Bible study group on John's Gospel, and I still haven't got to the bottom of chapter 7 and chapter 8. It seems like an interwoven, like threads that are somewhat tangled up or whatever.

Throughout these chapters, there is misunderstanding, running, as it were, as a thread. There is confusion. There is division. And it's all to do with who Jesus is.

And you know, there were different sectors in the crowd. There was a crowd from the north, a crowd that were local. There were different Jewish representatives. And there's this sort of thread running through the chapters.

And in the midst of this sort of confusion and division and misunderstanding, there are two huge features, two claims and invitations.

[4:36] And in 737, there is this great declaration by Jesus, full of clarity, full of invitation.

If anyone thirsts, I should say, on the last and greatest day of the feast, Jesus stood up and cried out in a loud voice, if anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink.

Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water. And there's this great declaration and invitation of Jesus in the midst of this confusion.

And then the second great declaration and invitation is in 812, which we looked at last week. Jesus saying, in this light festival, I am the light of the world.

whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life. It couldn't be clearer, could it?

[5:38] And it stands out as a clear invitation in the midst of this confusion. And as a background to this, what are they confused about?

What are they divided about? Well, they're divided about his origin, and this is just recapping. In 727, they say, we know where this man comes from, and when the Christ appears, no one will know where he comes from.

So they say, we know, but we shouldn't know, so he can't be, he can't be Jesus. Jesus can't be the Christ. And then other people, in 741, are saying, others said, this is the Christ, but others said, but he comes from Galilee.

And the scriptures say, that Christ comes from the offspring of David, and from Bethlehem. So it can't be right. So they get confused about this. Some people saying, we shouldn't know where he comes from.

Other people saying, but we do know where he comes from, from Galilee. And then other people, and then saying, but he ought to come from Bethlehem. Oh, it's very confusing. They're confused. And of course, they don't know the background story.

[6:46] But Jesus insists, it's actually, the important thing to know, is I've come from heaven. That's where I've come from. And they just debate about his authority, his words, and we looked at this the other time, didn't we?

Which is verse 17. This is chapter 7, verse 17. If anyone's will is to do God's will, he will know whether my teaching is from God, or whether I'm speaking on my own authority.

And that crops up, in the reading that we had. Is Jesus doing this off his own bat? Or does he have backup from heaven? And Jesus says, it's very obvious.

I have backup from heaven. My father endorses me. My father bears witness with me. And we have that in chapter 8, verse 18.

I am the one who bears witness about myself, and the father who sent me bears witness about me. And we looked at that. That's a whole theme running through John's gospel. I'm not going to pick that theme up today.

[7:47] But you have the witness of the father in scripture, and in the witness of the signs that Jesus is doing. And these all combine to show that he's not just speaking as a lone, crazy man.

Context of the signs he's been doing, the miracles, in other words. And the Hebrew scriptures, what the father has given. And Jesus can say, if you knew your own scriptures, if you believed Moses, then you'd believe me, says Jesus.

And you don't even know your own scriptures. So that's the sort of confusion that's going on. And in this particular passage, I'd like to pick up two of these sort of threads.

They actually run right the way through these two chapters. But I'd like to pick up the thread of his destination, which is that, and their destiny, which is going to be enlarged upon next week, I think.

So these two things this morning, his destination, and their destiny. So let's start picking up that thread.

[9:02] So his destination. In verse 14, Jesus answered, even if I do bear witness about myself, my testimony is true, for I know where I came from and where I am going.

But you do not know where I come from or where I am going. So that matter of where I came from, and the thing will pick up his destination.

Where I'm going. Verse 21. I am going away. You will seek me. I'm going away.

So referring to his destination. And then it says at the end of verse 21, where I am going, you cannot come. Something like that in your Bible?

Where I'm going, you cannot come. Yeah. And they get confused about this. In verse 22, the Jews say, what does he mean? Will he kill himself?

[10:03] Is that what he's talking about? Since he says, where I am going, you cannot come. Is this the destination? That he's going to kill himself? And in 734, we had a similar sort of confusion.

In 734, Jesus said, you will seek me. I'm sorry, let me take it up from verse 33. Jesus said, I will be with you a little longer than I am going to him who sent me.

You will seek me. You will not find me. Where I am, you cannot come. So you see, it's this sort of repeated idea of Jesus' destination.

And in that bit, they get it wrong as well. In verse, chapter 7, verse 35, they say, so is he going foreign? You know, is he going to the distant, uncouth nations?

The dispersion amongst the Greeks, you know, that the Jews had been sent off to different locations. It's called the Diaspora. And he says, is that where he's going?

[11:07] Is he going to the sort of expat communities all over the place? Is that what he means by saying, you will seek me, you will not find me. Where I go, you cannot come. So, it's confusion about his destination.

But Jesus is quite sure about it. He says, you don't know, but I know exactly where I'm going. I know where I come from. And I know where I'm going. He has a very definite destination.

And he even says this to his disciples. Just pick up, would you, in chapter 13, verse 33, where at the, that last supper, that last discourse with his disciples, chapter 13, verse 33, he says to his disciples, little children, yet a little while I am with you.

You will seek me. And just as I said to the Jews, so now I also say to you, where I am going, you cannot come.

So, it's a bit of a thread, isn't it, that goes through these chapters. I know where I come from. I know where I'm going. I'm going away. Where I go, you cannot come.

[12:24] But he does give us some more information about it. And in chapter 14, verse 2, he says, in my father's house and many rooms, if it were not so, I would have told you, sorry, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you?

There's some information. Why is he going? He says, I'm going to prepare a place for you. So, let's try and tease that out.

Jesus says he's going. And I want to sort of emphasize that and say, why did Jesus come? He came so that he could go.

See what I mean? What did he come for? He came in order to achieve this exit. And what is the exit that he came to achieve?

When he talks about going, he's talking about the cross, isn't he? He says, I'm going to go via death on the cross. I know where I'm going. I know what this destination is.

[13:37] And my journey takes me to the cross. He knows that he came so that he could go to the cross.

And this cross is an act of enormous, costly sacrifice. Isn't it?

He goes to die. I know where I'm going. He's going to the cross. It's an enormously costly and generous thing.

He's going to die under the wrath of God. He's going to die in pain that we can't work out.

It's going to cost him that to prepare a place for us. And I just think of the Lord's great generosity. very occasionally I've been I think this is almost fictional.

[14:46] Let's imagine it, shall we? Let's imagine that you're invited out and somebody says to you I'll take you for a meal and you're thinking McDonald's you're thinking pizza and they take you to this really posh restaurant and you think I didn't even dress properly and as you go in you see the price list and your eyes nearly pop out of your head and you say to the person taking you do you know how much this is going to cost us?

And they say don't worry I'll pay it's all on me. Jesus goes to the cross to spread us the most enormous sumptuous abundant meal of salvation and as we say to him do you know how much this is going to cost?

And he says absolutely it's all on me enjoy he came in order to go Jesus says I go and I'm going to prepare a place for you I'm going to prepare a place for you I don't know whether it's singular because I didn't look it up in the Greek but let's the implication of it is singular isn't it?

For you for you for you I go to prepare a place for you I think it's worth just trying to relish that thought isn't it?

What did Jesus have in mind when he went to the cross to prepare a place for us in the father's house and I have a little anecdote of this going we went to Exeter to meet my daughter's future husband's mum and dad and we said we'll meet you in the car park and walk up together and he says I'll tell you what we'll meet you in such and such restaurant in the grounds of Exeter Cathedral does Exeter have a cathedral I seem to remember it yeah and oh okay we'll meet you there and Maggie father-in-law I don't know whatever he is had gone ahead and we looked for him and he'd got there and he bagged the best seats in the upstairs bay window of the cafe so that we could overlook the grounds of the cathedral and he'd gone ahead to prepare a place for us we thought oh why can't we meet you in the car park is it a bit um you know um have you nipped off but no he'd gone ahead to get the best seats uh for our pleasure and he took pleasure in going ahead and doing that and the

[17:41] Lord Jesus says I haven't nipped off I haven't left you alone I haven't forgotten you I've gone to prepare a place for you and it'll be my pleasure to receive you in that wonderful place with a far better view than Exeter Cathedral and a far better company even I've gone to prepare a place for you he came in order to go um and how wonderful a saviour he is isn't it I know where I come from says Jesus I know where I'm going to let's uh just explore this theme still um in chapter 8 verse 28 Jesus says in the midst of this confusion I notice chapter 8 verse 28 is one another piece of certainty Jesus said to them when you have lifted up the son of man then you will know that

I am he or NIV says I am who I claim to be and I do nothing on my own authority but speak just as the father has taught me so this I found interesting because it says that um there will come a time there will be a situation where it will be possible for you to know with certainty uh what does he say I know with certainty I will do nothing on my own but speak as the father taught me you will know is all true and when that when I'm lifted up you will get it and in a sense they didn't get it up until that point and there's a number of references to that um the lifting up on the cross I'm sorry the lifting up that he spoke speaks of is of course he's lifting up on the cross isn't it as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert so when

I'm lifted up I will draw all people to myself he's talking about the cross his way of speaking about it and let's include with that the lifting up from the grave and let's include with that the lifting up to heaven in his ascension it's all part of his lifting up I know it might focus on the cross but it includes the rest as well and he says in your hangups about whether I came from Galilee or Bethlehem or whatever you will know who I am when I am lifted up you will look back at that and it will all make sense may we just look at a couple of verses which have the same sort of theme please look with me to chapter I told you how to work this morning chapter 2 verse 22 which is when

Jesus spoke when he did the cleansing of the temple and he spoke about destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up and in 3 verse 21 he was speaking about the temple of his body and verse 22 when therefore he was raised from the dead his disciples remembered that he had said this and they believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken it interesting is that they didn't understand it then after he was raised from the dead then they believed the scripture and the

word he had spoken so there's something about getting to that point when I am lifted up then you will know same thing in chapter 12 16 it's a little bit of a theme in

John this is about the triumphal entry his disciples did not understand these things at first but when Jesus was glorified then they remembered that these things had been written about him and had been done to him there's a sense that when you get to the end of the story everything else sort of makes sense you perhaps go back to the beginning and read it all over again the cross and the resurrection complete the jigsaw puzzle if we put it that way the last piece the cross and the resurrection is as it were the last piece and you click it in and you say I can see it all makes sense now or if you like to use an architectural illustration do you know how they make arches out of bricks and stones you get them in over in Lewis in the priory and if you do you make a wooden sort of frame and then you put round the top click click click bricks like that in an arc and it only is strong when you put the last one in which

[23:04] I guess is the middle one when you put the last one in you can take away the brick framework and it holds steady strong as a rock till you got the last one in it's all wobbly when you put the last one in bang it's all clear and strong and definite and I want to say we are in the privileged position that we can look back at the cross and the resurrection and we can know that he is who he claimed we can know that he is who he claimed to be and I say believer do you know that and I want to say believer be confident believer don't be doubting and wobbling and wavering you can know that he is who he says he is and we can be people of assurance and confidence and not people wobbling around all over the place in our lives because we know the last piece of the jigsaw has been put into place and the not yet believer if you are still wobbling around in your life and you still not sure and you still haven't put your whole weight on the promises of

Jesus I want to say you can put your weight on the promises of Jesus because his cross and his resurrection put us in the position where we can know that he is who he claimed to be and it all makes sense and I want to invite you if you've never done this to put the weight of your life on the promises of Jesus perhaps you've been coming to church I have a number of people I don't particularly know this morning so I can sort not quite sure maybe you're sort of tossing it up and sort of not quite committed to Jesus Christ and I want to say his cross and resurrection can make us so sure that we can lean the whole weight of our lives on him and he'll hold that weight think about his destination let's think just for a few minutes about their destiny because this is where the conversation moves over to his destination their destiny he has things to say about his audience I have things to say in judgment of you says Jesus in verse 26 I have much to say about you and much to judge and that theme will be developing I presume as we go in these next weeks let's just say a little bit about it his hearers are totally sure that they are spiritually okay and I know people like this I've met people like this and if you begin to suggest that maybe they're not on the right track they will say how dare you say to me that I don't know God or something like that can get quite stroppy about it but Jesus isn't afraid of stroppiness the way that I probably would be he says you don't know God and I'm not going to endorse you thinking that you do know God in verse 33 they say it is stroppy isn't it we are offspring of Abraham and we've never been a slave to anybody am I in the right verse

I think I am yes we're offspring of Abraham you know we're right look at our birth certificate you see they thought that their ethnicity as Jews meant full stop that they were right with God and Jesus says no you're not verse 41 this is not what Abraham did he says you were doing the works your father let me pick this up we are not born of sexual immorality we have one father even God and Jesus says no you don't verse 55 he says you have not known him I know him you don't know God and let's just ponder this the phenomenon of false spiritual security false spiritual security we know God don't you dare tell us otherwise and for them of course it was resting on their ethnicity but I guess in our society insofar as people would claim to be religious and I guess that's less so in Brighton than in Hove or in other places but people would say well I am basically a good person I'm basically a good person people do say this don't they in various ways I'm good virtuous and you think how little you know yourself you agree with that you're a Christian you've come to realise the horror and the abominable nature of your sin is that right you sort of surprise yourself because you

begin to have the eyes to see your motives your planning your background thoughts and you begin to see how the opposite of good we are

[29:00] Jesus said you being evil know how to give good gifts to your children that's the first humbling thing that we learn when we become Christians isn't it I'm not as good as I thought I was but people go around thinking they're good people and let me just say if you think you're a good person what you're actually saying to Jesus is well you're a waste of space because what Jesus came to do is die on the cross for sinners and if there aren't any sinners and if people are basically good you know what a waste of space Jesus was if righteousness could come by the law Christ died for nothing Paul says and I would just urge you to think twice because I I mean understatement I have an enormous respect for Jesus and his view of things and I think if he his view is that we're not good people

I think you need to reconsider if you think I'm alright because I'm a good person or things like we go to church we go to church that's less true in Brighton than it is in other parts of the world but you know say I'll go to church three times a year or something like that so that makes me a Christian I suppose the logic is that that's the same that if you go to a stable three times a year it makes you a horse you say we come from a spiritual family and of course these Jewish people say that you know par excellence we're Abraham's family so that means we must be spiritually right and well Jesus said you know from that most spiritual families you still don't belong to God I mean how much is that true of your family you might say well my mum and dad are Christians I was christened or baptised as an infant that makes me a Christian well it doesn't you need to be born again false spiritual security or you could say and people say this well we used to be very keen

Christians you know I was baptised when I was 15 years old or whatever and I want to say it's not what you used to be it's what you are now isn't it it's not what you used to be it's what you are now Jesus said if you were Abraham's children you would be doing the things that Abraham did and what's important is what are you doing now where are you now you know where's your praying now where's your commitment now where's your heart now false spiritual security beware the danger of false spiritual security security and let's just tweak that a little bit more the danger of false spiritual security Jesus tells them in verse 24 this is pretty horrifying isn't it I told you that you would die in your sins for unless you believe that I am he you will die in your sins

I think that's a horrifying thought there Jesus says to these people perhaps some of them quite respectable respected people unless you have the right answer to this big question who am I you will die in your sins it's a solemn serious thing isn't it just to be clear there are no further chances after you die all the chances are now in this life you know take the opportunity now don't put it off you don't know how much life you have left actually do you please don't put it off till you're on your deathbed and you can't even think straight you know you need to sort this out now don't you it's you will die in your sins dear sister

Colleen some of you will remember when she lived round in Hanover Hanover Crescent one of her family came and said I will decorate the room for you auntie granny or whoever it was and she said yes I'd love you to decorate the room and so whoever it was was somewhat inexperienced did a wonderful job of decorating the room but got paint all over the carpet there's no way of getting that stain out of the carpet it was in the carpet and it stayed there could not be removed and how about dying with the stain of sin still stuck in our lives can't be removed as deep a dye as can ever be you will die in your sins the stain not removed

[34:22] I don't fancy that do you? like a debt that's been incurred think of what it might be speeding ticket parking fine whatever it is whatever you do you ignore it and hope it goes away but it's still on your record and the police are still looking for you and the county court judgment is still against you on your credit card on your credit record rather and it can't be taken away it's still there it's still stuck there the guilt remains a penalty unpaid and to die with the penalty for our sins unpaid is horrific we go to meet with God you'll say ah hang on a minute we've got a record of this this doesn't seem to have been paid these sins don't appear to have been paid for you will die in your sins it's horrific

isn't it it doesn't bear thinking about like a penalty unpaid or a conscience uncleansed those horrible things but perhaps it's only me but I guess there might be other people in the room who can think back of awful things you did which you squirm with embarrassment for and wish

I hadn't done or said and it plays on your conscience and you think that that was wrong and I know it was wrong and I can't get rid of the fact in my conscience I know that was wrong and I have it's on me Jesus takes that away you know but to have it unremoved was an awful thing it's an awful thing in life isn't it you look back and think that's what I did but to get to your death bed and know that you're going to face God and that debt is still on your record to die in your sins I mean what a horrific thing and Jesus says you will die in your sins the old cowboy films I think about I used to watch the Lone Ranger when I was little

I don't have the Lone Ranger now it was very simplistic goodies and baddies and nearly always the baddies ended up in quicksand I don't know why this always happened a little bit like Lassie you know where the dog comes and goes oh really old Buster is in the quicksand we must go and get him right and quicksand is this phenomenon you get in but you can't get out again it sort of sucks you down and the thought of being sucked down and lost with no one to help and no one to pull you out just being lost and lost and lost to die in your sins isolated from God isolated from his goodness just being sucked further in and further down it's a horrible thought isn't it and Jesus says if da da da you will die in your sins so I'm just being clear about it this is why it's so important to know who Jesus is if you don't you will die in your sins and there's an unless isn't there in my

Bible it says unless something you will die in your sins I think the unless is important isn't it isn't there a way out of dying in your sins unless something would you like to know what the unless is I certainly would unless you believe that I am he says Jesus translated unless you believe that I am who I claim to be you will die in your sins but if you believe I am who I claim to be you will not die in your sins which to me is good news there is a remedy there's a way back to God from the dark paths of sin there's a way that the stain which is so deep can be washed clean there's a way in which the penalty which has to be paid is paid books balanced free there's a way in which that guilt on the conscience can be wiped away my sin oh the bliss of this glorious thought my sin not in part but the whole is nailed to his cross and I bear it no more praise the

Lord praise the Lord oh my soul isn't that good washed away taken away the state of sin the sort of lostness of it we're brought even as sinners from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light we're back home even imperfect us there's a wonderful good news here isn't there we won't have to die in our sin if we believe in Jesus eventually we'll be free of the presence of sin and what it says is do you believe you know it doesn't say you're going to climb a mountain doesn't say you're going to make your way on your hands and knees across hundreds of miles of desert doesn't say you're going to make yourself a better person it says will you trust him doesn't it will you trust his promises when he says my cross is sufficient if you put your trust in me I'll look after it and wipe all your sins away you're going to take that on trust because that's what being a Christian is if you believe me I'll do it why don't you do that this morning why don't you believe him believe that

[40:23] I am he all that he said he was is true when he says I am the light of the world if you follow me you won't have darkness are you going to follow him you know the next step he says follow me and you say okay I'm up for that I'm going to follow him I am the light of the world he underwent darkness to replace our darkness with light I think is what Daniel said very put it very well the other the other week and he in this chapter he says I am the water I give the water of life if you're thirsty come to me and drink we could just take that can't you are you dried up without him and he says I give you living water to quench the thirst of your soul to make you alive instead of dead will you come to me and drink I mean let's put it in those two simple terms will you follow him will you drink of him because otherwise you die in your sins and if you follow him and if you drink of him you don't die in your sins I think that's great personally there is a flowing river from his side flowed blood and water the flowing river that flows from the wounded side of the saviour let's drink from him we thought this morning folks about his destination that he comes from the father and that he goes to the father via the

cross we remembered that he says I go to prepare a place for you at enormous cost it's all on me says Jesus and I ask you whether you're a believer in this do you believe him and then we talked about their destiny the people who had false spiritual security and I say please don't go out of this place with your false spiritual security intact

I hope it's at least shaken at and this in extreme danger if you don't believe you will die in your sins please don't go from this room this morning with that written over you you're going to die in your sins what an awful thing to be your future your destiny and he says you know you don't have to die in your sin the remedy is to believe in him to believe in Jesus cost of living has gone up folks doesn't it you go to the supermarket you see a good deal on butter or whatever it is you take it and here I've described to you the cost not of living but the cost of eternal life and it's a free offer for those who believe don't go away without taking up this brilliant offer we're going to sing a song together we're going to sing a song about the future when he comes to take us to be with himself there is a day that all creation is waiting for a day of freedom and liberation for the earth on that day the Lord will come to meet his bride and when we see him in an instant we'll be changed a night of a night of a night of a night of a night of a night of a night of a night of a night of a night of a night of a night of a night of a night of