

# Get Noticed

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[ 0 : 00 ] When you see a high-vis jacket, what do you see? I mention it because it's fascinating. Even though you may not have a lanyard, or it might not say anything on that jacket, it might not have a badge or any kind of ID, the moment we see a high-vis jacket, we tend to assume that it represents some kind of authority.

And you don't have to spend very long on the internet to realise the number of fun, I might add, social psychology experiments that have taken place to see how the general public generally react to a high-vis jacket.

One particular lady decided to go onto a bridge, and she put hidden cameras around, and she had herself filmed, and she would go up to people randomly, giving all sorts of bizarre instructions. She'd give exactly the same instructions without the high-vis jacket, and she would either get ignored, questioned, laughed at, or called words that I won't repeat right now. Or, when she was wearing the jacket, people, not entirely, but on the whole, generally did what they were asked. So, for example, she would walk along to people and find a group of people, and she would say, I'm sorry, but you need to walk on single file. It's a bridge policy.

[ 1 : 25 ] And groups would just start walking in line. She would walk up to a certain area and say, sorry, but you're not allowed to stand on that particular area of pavement. Could you just walk around it, please?

Or she would say, sorry, you're going to have to take your backpacks off as you're walking across the bridge. She even went up to one person who was standing there, looking over the bridge, enjoying the view, and said, I'm sorry, sir, but we have a no-standing policy on the bridge. Could you move on, please? And he did. Even more outrageous examples include the instruction given to dog walkers that dogs had to be picked up and carried, including one person that had an Alsatian.

Another experiment, or set of experiments, were two guys in Australia who decided that it would be fun to experiment what kind of places they could gain access to, unquestioned. just by putting on a high-vis jacket. They got into the cinema, they got into the zoo, and on one occasion, they even got into and sat through an entire Coldplay concert.

[ 2 : 31 ] Somebody said in a blog, go and get yourself a high-vis jacket, and that's all you need to know about life.

Now, I'm going to take this off because it's boiling hot, but I want to leave you with that question.

That question, when you see the high-vis jacket, what do you see?

It opens up another more serious, more fundamental question. What makes you sit up and pay attention?

What is it that would make you assume that a certain voice carries with it authority? See, I can't read about John the Baptist, which is what we did this morning, without asking myself the question, what was it that would make you sit up and pay attention to him?

He was pretty eccentric. He was strange. He was downright weird. And I wonder how many of us would take him seriously if he appeared among us today. Clearly, a lot of people did take him very seriously indeed.

[ 3 : 49 ] The reason why I want to suggest that we need to ask ourselves the questions, what things do we listen to? What claims to authority do we listen to?

One reason why we need to listen to the things that John had to say and the things that he then points forward to has to do with one particular word that stands out. If we could just move forward to verse, I think it's four onwards, where it says that the prophecy of Isaiah, that here will come a voice of one calling in the desert, prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.

And so it continues, every valley shall be filled in, every mountain and hill made low, the crooked roads shall become straight, the rough ways made smooth. In other words, those are all things that can block things out, things that can get in the way, obstacles.

And so this message is saying that all of those obstacles are going to be moved to one side, because for one time in human history, we're going to be shown the one thing that we need to sit up and pay attention to, and it's in that verse that is on the screen right now.

And all mankind will see, and there's one word here, God's salvation. Now when we hear that word salvation, I want to suggest that it's a word that people tend not to sit up and pay attention to, a word that doesn't carry authority, but people tend to think that if it means anything at all, well, it's probably a word, a bit of a dated, culturally irrelevant word to describe the things that some people that call themselves religious believe about what happens to you when you die, about an afterlife. [ 5 : 36 ] That's not what it means at all. It does partially mean that, but if we think that's all it means, then we're way off mark. Salvation, it means being saved, but it means something far bigger than just what we're saved from.

Salvation means wholeness. It means the very thing that we hope for, not just beyond death, although it is that, and we'll come on to that in a moment, but the way in which we are transformed for life in the here and the now.

This is going to seem like a weird question. Don't worry, I'm not going to ask you to answer it out loud. Just list some of the things that you're worried about right now in your mind.

Things that you would regard as challenges, problems, worries, fears, things that bother you. Some of them might even keep you awake at night. Some things might be lingering concerns, anxieties that you've had for as long as you can remember.

Some of them might be new. Some of them might seem distant, some of them might be very close, but I just want you to think, just right now. Now, I've asked you to do that in just a few moments.

[ 6 : 52 ] Imagine that I asked you to actually spend a whole week writing at length and in detail of every single last problem, challenge, concern, worry you could possibly think of.

Now, get this. Salvation equals God's answer to every single one of those things that you could list. And not only all the things that would be on your list, but would be on the list of everyone else, not just in this room, but in the world.

And then some. Salvation means that God looks at a world that is broken, a world that is full of angst and fear and tragedy and pain, comes to that world in the form of Jesus.

Lives, dies on a cross, is raised, and leaves us with a promise that he will return and he will make things new. And it's because we live in the light of that promise that we can talk of this sense of salvation, of being saved.

We still live in this world with all its suffering and its pain, but we have this hope that every single last concern and worry will be addressed and the world will be transformed and we will live forever with him.

[ 8 : 04 ] That is something that seems so extreme that to the vast majority of the world's population it will be written off as absurd. But that's the one thing that should make us sit up and pay attention.

salvation. So what, what will salvation be like? What does the future actually look like?

Because as I was thinking this through I'm not sure it's something that we talk about that often.

Certainly we don't talk about it enough. So let's just take a snapshot and this is going to be really whistle-stop tour stuff.

Just a snapshot over these next few minutes as to what the promises of God, of what the future looks like, is actually like. In the book of Revelation, can we have the passage on the screen?

We have the book of Revelation right at the end of scripture, at the end, towards the end of the book of Revelation, we have this sort of summary of what the future will look like when Christ returns, when the dead are raised and when God makes his dwelling among us and transforms the whole world forever.

[ 9 : 16 ] It says this, Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away and the sea was no more. I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them and be their God. They will be his peoples and God himself will be with them.

He will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more. Mourning and crying and pain will be no more. For the first things have passed away.

Let's just take a few moments to think about why that should make us sit up and pay attention to it. What will it look like? Well, here are just a few things and this is just scratching the surface. The first thing that it means is that there will be no more death and dying.

[10:28] The promise is just as Jesus was raised from the dead and he was the same Jesus that was raised but he was transformed in that the body he had was the same one but it was radically transformed to be free of pain and death for all eternity.

That same resurrection body that we see in the resurrection of Jesus is the same thing that we are promised. It means that there will be no more mourning.

We will live forever. There will be no fear of losing loved ones and there will be no anxiety over our own life ending. Now that itself is enough to make us sit up and pay attention but it's only the beginning.

See, the second thing that it means is not only that there will be no more death and dying but there will be no more sickness or pain. The bodies that we have will be transformed as such that we will carry the same identity just as the risen Jesus carries the same identity but our resurrection bodies will be free of pain and suffering.

We will have complete healing of body, mind and spirit. There will be no more hurting. The image I think of is when Jesus appeared before Thomas and the other disciples and he showed him his scars.

[11:47] Now, it was the same Jesus who had gone to the cross. We see that by his scars. But the scars themselves have been healed. There was no more any pain. It means that the things that we experience that represent pain for us in this life won't be just swept away under the carpet as though they don't matter, as though they're insignificant and meaningless.

No. But they will be transformed, given a new meaning and the pain and the suffering that they represent will be a thing of the past. Gone.

There will be no more sickness or pain. Zero pain. And I doubt there is anybody, any of us, who really knows what the experience of zero pain is like.

Because it just becomes part of our experience. It may be the slightest, slightest little thing, whether it's a back pain, a bit of stiffness here or whatever. It just becomes part of our regular experience and it becomes absorbed into us.

The experience of being completely and absolutely free of pain forever. is something that we can only imagine. Third thing, there will be no more human evil.

[13:01] War will be no more. Violence will be no more. Crime, hatred, cruelty, abuse, injustice and oppression, they'll all be overthrown once and for all.

No more lying, dishonesty or cheating or theft. Everything that is evil will be gone. And whilst we may shirk at the notion of judgment and destruction that are real, live, biblical themes, we need to remember that to understand them properly, these are the things that will be judged and these are the things that will be destroyed.

But salvation means that even though all of that evil will be destroyed, we are saved by God's grace. There will be no more human evil.

The next thing is that they were told there will be no more tears. Now in this life it's healthy to cry. Sometimes we don't cry enough. There is such a thing as catharsis whereby we actually find a sense of release through tears.

We need to be able to cry just as we need to be able to laugh. And there's lots of tears in the Bible. Frequently we're told of people both in the Old Testament and in the New who wept, even Jesus did.

[14:14] But God's last word on tears is the words that we have in Revelation 21 that every last tear will be wiped away.

All mental and emotional suffering will end once and for all. Can you imagine looking back at the old order and saying that was tears but now we just don't know them.

It's not part of our experience. The next thing is that there will be an infinite supply of everything that we need for all eternity.

What that means in practical terms is that all resources will be a never-ending supply. Now we only know of a life in which things are limited. Time, money, food, drink, everything.

But that will not be our experience in that new life. abject poverty now in this world is the shadow of a fully healed creation then in the future.

[ 15 : 19 ] Any sense of anxiety of running short in this life is our homesickness for our future home in God where there will be everything that we need forever.

And associated with that the next thing is that there will be riches beyond our comprehension. That this new life for all eternity will be one that is abundant.

And in the book of Revelation we're giving this very graphic imagery of the new Jerusalem as a symbol of what life will be like. That it will be adorned with precious jewels and with gold.

The imagery there is to talk about how life will not only be everything that we need but it will be gloriously gloriously full till it's overflowing.

There's that old joke that's told about a guy who was stinking rich and before he died he wanted to take everything that he had with him so he left instructions in his will that his entire estate was to be sold off and they were to buy the purest gold that they could possibly get and to put the gold into blocks and tuck them under his arms in his coffin and bury him with that gold.

[ 16 : 36 ] And the story goes that he was buried in this way and eventually resurrection day came. He was raised from the dead and as he sat up and felt these blocks of gold under each arm he looked over and he saw somebody else who had just been raised and they said what are you doing with the paving stones?

He said when we have that imagery of the new Jerusalem paved with gold it's a symbol to say that think of the greatest riches in this life and it will just be ordinariness in the next.

It's going to be awesome. Seventh there will be perfect peace and harmony and untold intimacy between peoples and between individuals.

we will be his children we are told that when God makes his dwelling among us that the whole of the human race will be completely united.

Now that doesn't just mean the absence of war and fighting and conflict although it does mean that it means absolute unity it means perfect intimacy among all relationships.

[ 17 : 55 ] Jesus they tried to catch him out the religious authorities of his days tried to catch him out. There were two groups of religious authorities there were the Pharisees who did believe that there would be a resurrection and there were the Sadducees who taught that there was not and it was the Sadducees that were trying to catch Jesus out because they knew that he taught the resurrection and they came to him with a question and they said answer us this what happens then if there's a husband and a wife and the husband dies and the wife remarries and then the second husband dies and then she remarries again and this goes on and on and there are several husbands.

Resurrection day comes who will she be married to? Won't that be slightly awkward? That last bit was not in the original version in the Gospels. It was a trick question of course but Jesus came back and said you misunderstand the nature of life and relationships.

I'm paraphrasing the nature of life and relationships in the new kingdom. You see we will not the new order will not be like this one because we will neither be married nor unmarried.

You see there will just be one marriage and that is the marriage between God and his people. The bride and the church. Now this is so hard for us to get our human mortal minds around but I think what Jesus was saying there is that because every human relationship will be so completely and utterly and radically transformed into perfect intimacy the best marriage.

The best way to imagine that right now is to think of the most perfect happy intimate marriage in this world. Imagine that. Every human relationship in eternity will be even more intimate than that.

[ 19 : 59 ] In other words it's not denying that we'll see our loved ones in eternity. Of course we will. We'll be there together. We'll still have our identity. We'll still have those relationships but every single relationship will be so completely and utterly transformed forever that every single last one will be even greater than the most intimate experience that you can possibly conceive of in this life now.

And while we're on that subject of relationships the notion of resurrection teaches teaches us that all generations will be raised at once.

Now have you thought about that? During the course of our lives we form different relationships.

Firstly we have that network of relationships when we're children. As we go through life and we get older people die and we make new friendships new relationships such that the people that we knew

when we were young children are probably going to be almost a completely different set of people that we know and love and interact in midlife and then by the time we get to the end of our lives the chances are it's another group of people again.

God's promise of eternal resurrection life together brings all of that together. All of the generations that we've known from the cradle to our last years will be together as one in perfect intimacy. And the last one I'm going to mention is that we will be lost in wonder, in love and in praise. You see eternity is not just an image of rest because rest suggests that it's just an everlasting sleep that you just sit back and put your feet up.

[ 21 : 56 ] Now sometimes I think that sounds quite nice. better be serious. The vision that we have in scripture, the things that Jesus spoke of, the abundance of life in eternity is so much more than just rest.

It's about a sense of inexhaustible joy. We will be perfectly satisfied and yet it will only ever get better. Now that seems to be a contradiction according to our within the constraints of our mortal minds but that is what Jesus is, that is what the promises of Jesus, that is what the promises of scripture point towards.

A life of never ending, never exhausted joy where everything will be perfect but there will always be more and it will always be getting better.

Where we simply delight in being totally alive. Now that's just a surface scratch at the theme of salvation.

Why don't we pay attention to it more? Why don't we take it more seriously? Why don't we spend more time thinking about it? Back to the high vis jacket.

[ 23 : 08 ] What sort of things grab your attention? What sort of things make you sit up and obey? What sort of things make you take them seriously and afford authority to them?

salvation? That word salvation is the greatest thing that humanity has ever heard. John the Baptist was God's high vis jacket pointing us towards the most amazing thing.

I'm going to share one last image with you as we come to pray. And it's not to do with high vis jackets but it is to do with a form of identity and it's a passport. I've got mine here.

A passport is not the same thing as a ticket. Sometimes when people hear the language of salvation they think in terms of a ticket to heaven.

A ticket is something that you hand over and it gets you in. Salvation is not about that. Salvation is much more about the idea of holding a passport. Why?

[ 24 : 14 ] Because a passport is something that makes a statement of who you are, your identity. It means no matter where you are in the world, no matter how foreign surroundings you may have around you, you can look at this and it reminds you where your citizenship lies.

As we've been thinking about that future promised home that is ours forever, when God returns, when Jesus returns and when God makes his dwelling among us, when everything is perfect, that is where our citizenship lies.

So, as we journey through Advent, as Christmas approaches, as we hear that story told that we've heard told a thousand times before, let's open it up to the possibility that there just might be something inside that is bigger than what we know on the outside.

Let's remember where our citizenship is. Salvation, the one thing we need to pay attention to is that identity that is ours, that citizenship that is in that promised future that will be here on earth, but on earth transformed.

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