

The Call To Meet With Jesus

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[0 : 00] It's this idea about sharing good news and proclaiming, proclaiming Jesus in all that we do and all that we say.

There was a vicar, a new vicar in a church, and he thought on this thought it would be a good idea to actually encourage people to proclaim the name of Jesus.

So he said, just at the beginning, let's shout out a word, shall we? And then Doris on the organ will find something suitable to play with regards to the thing that you shouted out.

So first of all, we had this great shouting out, and it was shepherd. So Doris, Julie, well, shepherd, that was great. The next one, of course, is somebody shouted out grace. So we had amazing grace.

There was a young lad in the congregation who thought, this is good fun. So he shouted out sex, whereupon Doris played memories all alone.

[1 : 04] The thing is, we are called to proclaim. We are called to proclaim. And I'd like you to think maybe, have you ever been to a major concert?

Maybe the biggest concert that you've ever been to. We, maybe it's the O2, a big gig that you went to, where you wait for that main artist to come on.

You've waited, you've paid a lot of money, maybe you've had a hotel overnight, you've had transport to get there, you've paid a lot for your ticket. But there's an anticipation that grows within us all the time of the person that's going to come on.

Mandy and I, this year, as part of our 40th wedding anniversary, we went to see Ed Sheeran. Here's a little picture of us there. Whoa!

Ed Sheeran. And of course, what they do is you arrive, and already by the time you get there, it's building, isn't it? You've queued up, you've gone through security, you get in, and then as people, the stadium fills up, you get the first act that comes on, that's really warming up.

[2 : 15] Then the second act, there was a second act as well. And then, then you see all the roadies come on, and they start to change the stage around. And you think, this is it.

And there's an electricity amongst in there, you know, and then on comes, even before that, and you've got ladies and gentlemen.

And that is it, isn't it? Once you get ladies and gentlemen, and the place goes berserk. Maybe not with all the glitz and sparkle, John the Baptist comes to proclaim the greatest event ever.

He comes to proclaim that the Messiah is here. Not with all the glitz, not with all the glamour, but to announce Jesus's ministry to a waiting world.

And that's what we capture this morning. This idea of announcing and pronouncing Jesus to a waiting world. John has waited, he's been waiting a long time to do this introduction.

[3 : 22] He knew that Jesus was coming. He knew that Jesus' time was coming. And as he and the prophets have been preparing the whole community and the Jewish people, many of them who weren't listening, but he didn't stop pronouncing Jesus.

John had made many enemies in speaking the truth. And in fact, John would be decapitated at the behest of a dancing girl's mother who wanted his head on a plate.

He wasn't afraid to pronounce Jesus. This is the first reference. No wonder Matthew begins by introducing us to John the Baptist, who comes into this Judean wilderness in the middle of seemingly nowhere, and makes this amazing announcement for the world that this is Jesus's time. This is his ministry. This is the first reference to the kingdom in Matthew. Kingdom language signaled to John's listeners who had long awaited to hear this.

They'd long awaited to hear this kingdom is coming. The kingdom is now here. It heralds a person that they were waiting for. God's promises to restore God's people, as we heard in Isaiah.

[4 : 41] In Isaiah 40, it's no coincidence that Matthew then actually cites Isaiah 40. Described John as a voice crying in the wilderness.

A voice crying in the wilderness. Hold that picture for a moment of a voice that is crying in what seemingly feels like a wilderness.

What does John ask of the people that have been waiting? Does he ask for a round of applause? Does he ask for clapping and cheering?

Does he ask for streamers and party cannons? Pyrotechnics? No. He doesn't even ask for a big thank you. But what John is asking for something is far more for those who have been waiting to receive Jesus.

Is he asks for repentance. And as I read this chapter, that was the word that stuck out for me. Repentance.

[5 : 47] Repent for the kingdom of heaven is come near. Is what John proclaims. And for some people, that repentance is mostly about feelings. You know, feeling maybe sorry for your sin.

I'm sorry to say, but in these days there has been a whole industry that has been built around feeling sorry for your own sin. And the church in many ways sometimes has colluded with that as well.

When some people, you know, really don't really want to do anything about their sin. They just want to feel sorry about their sin. The thing is, is that repentance is a doing word.

It's not a feeling word. It says, repent. To do something. I think Jesus had a really great counselling technique when he was talking to people about sin.

You know, if your right eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away. You know, no messing. It's a doing word. If your right hand causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away.

[6 : 57] You know, it's not literal, of course, but those who heard it actually got the point. This is a doing word. I've got to do something about my sin. Because I'm being called, in that call, to repentance.

That's why repent is such an acting word. It means a shift. It means a shift in us in order to do something. Repent means to turn.

To turn away from your sin. Not merely to feel sorry for what you've done. Repentance means to speak of change. A change of direction. A change of heart. Repentance means freedom that Jesus brings.

Repent is what grace and coming to God is all about. And how can we engage what the kingdom of heaven is unless we leave our sinful ways and our self-seeking, maybe in selfish ways, and habits behind, and turn and face God?

That's what John was proclaiming. Turn around. Turn around. Repent. That's why I'm here, says John. Because this person is now here.

[8 : 08] Don't leave it too late. There's a little picture on the screen. I remember when I worked on the Broadmead in Bristol. In the place, there was a guy, not this guy here, but very similar.

Each day, he used to walk up and down the Broadmead. You might have seen him. And he would shout at people. And he would say, repent. The end is nigh.

Repent. You know, I'm not sure how many people actually really repented there on the spot. I'd like to think that they did. In fact, there are people, frankly, I thought at the time that he might have been a little bit unstable.

But I'd take my hat off to him, you know, and he was out there proclaiming, probably not in a way in which we would do. But many thought the same of John the Baptist.

There was no difference. John the Baptist was in a culture where he was calling people to repentance. The message is right in your face.

[9 : 12] You know, we know that we're called to turn from our sin. But most people will acknowledge that they've done wrong and fallen short. We all did. We've just repented at the beginning of our service.

Many people want to turn from their sin and seek a new life. Many people, you know, in that turning, want to turn. But this is where the rubber hits the road.

You see, if you're going to turn away from something, you need to know what you're turning to. That's the issue. If we're asking people to repent and to make a change, what are you actually turning from and to?

And they won't know what you're turning to until you actually introduce them to the person that they're turning to. It's that basic thing.

You know, this is your sin. This is Jesus. This is death. This is life and hope. It's that simple. But it means turning and facing.

[10:18] John was proclaiming that. John was wanting to do that. And we'll sing again over the coming weeks. A place where the hopes and fears of all the years are met in you tonight.

You know, I don't know about you. I'm meeting people with lots of fears at the moment. You know, fears of this, fears of that. Seems to be you turn on the news. It's all about fears. Turn to a place of hope where Jesus actually encompasses those and can actually meet us in that place.

And if I leave something behind, I want to know where I'm going to. Repent is central to the proclamation of John the Baptist. Repent is central to Jesus' message.

Repent was an essential element in the disciples' lives. Repent is a call which in many areas of his church today needs to heed if we are introducing people to Jesus, the person that we need to meet with.

We, the church, live by what it says in the book. And it's Matt Redman. I think that Matt Redman's song reduces me again and again to a place of emotion where it says, I'm coming back to the heart of worship.

[11:31] It's all about you. It's all about you, Jesus. And I'm sorry, Lord, for the thing that we've made it. I sing that to say I'm sorry Lord with the thing I've made it you know when it's all about you it's that turning that we're asking this is why John was so urgent in his call to repentance because he said the kingdom of heaven is at hand this week we heard the statistics you've probably heard them the same as I have on the television and on the radio that Christians now account for less than half of England and Wales's population for the first time in the census and in government figures the Christians are now less than half in our population the ONS results show that 46.2 percent of the population described themselves as Christian in 21 and this marks a decrease from 59 percent in 2011 people who declared that they had no religion or as somebody said on the radio this morning they're called nuns I think that's I don't think that's very helpful really but they said that people with no religion has risen increased to 37 percent how do you feel about that as a disciple do you feel like a voice crying in the wilderness personally I am fired and excited by those figures because if there are people who have declared themselves that they have no religion that they are nuns that is a great pool to fish in if we're going to go fishing and proclaim Jesus in what we do what a great pond to fish you know we are disciples we what could the church look like if we caught that renewed sense of urgency that was there in the desert with John calling people to repentance Jesus about to arrive the Holy Spirit comes on

Jesus and suddenly there's this explosion in Jesus his ministry and then at Pentecost we all get the same Jesus Messiah and Savior if we're asking people to turn away from something then let's be clear and proclaim what people are turning towards and let's get enthusiastic intentional and missional about that in the weeks and the months to come as we will hear again Jesus and scripture people left the safety of the ordinary to follow Jesus Jesus as we say in our creeds will come again that's worth turning away from sin because repenting may be of our apathy repenting of our love of our love of our love of our love of our love of our love of power and privilege in denomination maybe repenting of self-sufficiency rather than trusting fully in Jesus repenting of our lack of faith and trust in what the Holy Spirit is and can do through us and yes with a large majority of young people having little or no interest in who we are in this country what a great lake to fish in and maybe we need to throw our nets where Jesus is showing us where to fish rather than to fish in old waters from this week onwards as it was this morning this place will be filled with young people tomorrow there will be preschools then there will be scouts and cubs and everybody then there will be the schools that will come in hundreds and hundreds of young people will hear the message of Jesus at this time of the year

I think our challenge is is who is there to tell them about Jesus for the rest of the year and that is us and how will we do that what is our challenge to proclaim and to turn back you and me rising up proclaiming Jesus the urgency of the season to make him known in 2023 to a waiting world to the 37 percent of nuns who are lost the axe is ready to fall at the root of the tree and the tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire I baptise you with water for repentance for turning around but after me comes one who is more powerful than I whose sandals I'm not worthy to carry he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and fire his winnowing fork is in his

hand and he will clear his threshing floor gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with inextinguishable fire people are talking about warm spaces at the moment hell is amazingly warm let's introduce people to the warm space that Jesus invites us to and not the warmer place that the world is talking about let's make sure it's the right sort of place a place where Jesus is proclaimed a place where scripture and the gospel is upheld and lived out in love and peace a place where the power of the Holy Spirit is alive active and burning brightly in his people in the everyday a place where we acknowledge sin and a safe place to repent amongst ourselves and not be judged a place of grace a place where truth and love abounds how will we personally and as disciples proclaim Jesus in 2023 how will we do that during this Advent season what is the Holy Spirit saying to us personally about how we do that corporately as a church individually as individuals because it's a call on each of our lives

I talk about bringing five people to faith in 2023 2023 if each of us brought five people into relationship to meet with Jesus in 2023 we'll need a few more seats yeah wouldn't that be a great day yeah honestly you bought it let's do it let's do it because if we're moving in the power of the Holy Spirit we repent we turn how many will make an active commitment to bring friends to Alpha if you're turning from something you want to know what you're turning to bring people to Alpha they'll know what they're turning to about the Christian faith they're not buying into something that they don't know and I'm just going around with a picture I don't know whether you get pictures in your shower it's probably the only place that's quiet for me in the morning maybe

I don't know but I just sensed this morning of if this is your sin and you're backing away and suddenly you bump in to somebody that makes you turn I believe there's a whole load of people who are wanting to back away from their life of sin of money of everything and are suddenly going to meet with Jesus I pray that we will be there at that time to encourage support them enthuse them empower them and bring them into that place that Jesus calls and as John the Baptist calls us to to proclaim him in all that we do can we do that?

[20 : 17] we can let's pray Holy Spirit would you come Holy Spirit would you come on each and every one of us now I pray for maybe those who are here this morning or those listening now on the podcast for whom there is a real call away from maybe something but you haven't really yet engaged and committed to Jesus I pray Lord that maybe if that is a now moment now you would just say Lord I repent of my past and I'll meet with you and if that is for you this morning here or if you're listening now whatever you're doing especially if you're driving not on the motorway but if you're driving just maybe pull over at the next available time and just seal the deal with Jesus

Lord I'm yours I turn from everything that is wrong Lord I want to get to know you better just pray for that as an answer for a waiting world and the community that we're called to serve I pray now is maybe there are pictures coming to mind of people maybe three or five people that you are praying for for whom that you would long for that to be a moment for them to do that trust in the Lord with all your heart just trust in the Lord with all your heart don't lean on your own understanding fall into what the Holy Spirit wants to do in them and through them so Lord empower us and infuse us excite us and encourage us this Advent as we wait for that great event because Jesus is coming again and that's what we're getting ready for he will come again and let's be ready along with those who are coming to him whenever that moment is in Jesus name

Amen