

Who do you say that I am?

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[0 : 0 0] Good morning everyone. Good to see you all. Welcome. I don't know whether you have ever been to a royal event.

If you have, you will know. Maybe the Queen or one of the members of the royal family that are opening something, a building or something similar. But it's something to behold. If you have been to one of those, and I've been to many, I've been paid for it as well, which is really nice.

But it smells of paint and polish. You know, everything is bright, sparkingly new. But there is something, something special about the crowd that gathers.

Many of them have been there. They want to sleep overnight. They've been there and there is this expectation. People have come along with their flags, whatever, because they want to be part of this event, just to get a view or a fleeting glimpse of royalty as they pass by.

And in the minutes and hours that precede this, the expectation and energy in the crowd grow and grow and grow.

[1 : 1 8] You know, the crowd are anticipating something amazing that's going to happen. And then having waited all this time, you get a police outrider with blue lights that come.

There's an energy that builds. This is about to happen. Then you get a couple of black Range Rovers that come through. What's all that about, people say. And then you get the outriders come and people start to cheer.

You hear the cheering from down the road where the cortege is starting to come through. And then for that moment, people will grab whatever they can, shout and scream and wave, because that's what they've been waiting for.

People are clamoring to get a glimpse of the person that they've been waiting for. The issue here is that this is a thing that people have been waiting for, not overnight, not for a few hours.

People have been waiting a lifetime and even more for the Messiah to arrive. And so as we read about this morning, they don't get the flashing lights from the Range Rovers, but their expectation is through the roof because the Messiah is coming.

[2 : 3 9] They've heard the stories. They've seen and also maybe some of them have brought back those stories. So all their friends have come out and they're looking, they're going to see this person who will make a huge difference.

Can you imagine what the atmosphere was like? Maybe we caught a glimpse of it on the clip. People ripping down whatever they could, palm leaves to wave and lay before Jesus.

The difference is that each one of them had a different expectation of who this Messiah was going to be.

They had already maybe in their own mind decided what they wanted Jesus to be before they'd even met him. You know, you see, some of these people thought the Messiah, Jesus, would come like a warrior who would come, raise up a revolution, get hold of the Romans, and we would chuck them all out and things would be totally different.

Some wanted him to be a political figure. Maybe some wanted him to be like a celebrity rabbi, to come along and just make people very, very happy and do well.

[3 : 55] Everybody had a different expectation. The leaders, of course, had decided that Jesus had to go. Because Jesus was there, they saw in their mind, to threaten the status quo.

They had the power, they had control, there was no change here. There was going to be no change at all, because that's the way they wanted it, to keep it nice and tidy.

Yet there's a clue in this story. There's a clue in this story that they didn't get because they didn't know Jesus. And that's the donkey.

You see, warriors come on a horse. They come with an army with them. They come with people that are trained. But this, this warrior, this Jesus, this King of Kings, comes on a donkey.

With a ragtag group of men around him, his disciples. Maybe it isn't already what people expect it to be.

[5 : 02] The King of Kings comes in humility and peace. You see, we've all got a decision to make. That's what the four-point gospel is about.

That's what the question is about. We have this question here. You see, to think, because Jesus asked his disciples before this very day, this very important question.

Who do you say that the Son of Man is? Who do you say that I am? They replied, some said John the Baptist, others said Elijah, and still others Jeremiah and one of the prophets.

You see, some people already write Jesus off before they know him. And that's the essence of the decision today. But what Jesus asked them is, said, what about you?

What about you? Who do you say that I am? And that's the important question that we have to ask ourselves at the beginning of Holy Week.

[6 : 04] Because Simon Peter, the one who thinks, who gets, I think Simon gets a really unfair press this week. You know, the one who tries to stay close to Jesus.

All the rest have gone. He's the one that goes up to that campfire on that night. Yeah, okay, he denies him when he's actually faced with the crunch of taking up his cross and following him.

But he stayed close. He tried to stay close. And it's him who says, you are the Messiah, the Son of the living God. He got it. Effectively, the question is, do you know me?

In those dark days 2,000 years ago and today, Jesus says, I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.

You see, on this day in Jerusalem, lots of people have made up their minds what they wanted him to be. And they became very quickly disillusioned because he didn't fit with how they wanted it.

[7 : 12] Without really getting to know him. Maybe that's still true today. Maybe that is true today. The people who say, Jesus, you are the Messiah, but do you really know me?

Do you really, really know me? In our four-part gospel, we ask the question, how well do I really know Jesus? Because there is a cost to relationship.

We all know that there's a cost to a relationship. You know, it's my 40th wedding anniversary this year. I know there's a cost to a relationship. We all do, for those of us who have been married.

It's not, you know, you work at it every day, don't you? It's true. But in this thing, Jesus calls us friends, but we've got to invest in that relationship.

You know, maybe there's many of us here who have done Easter and Lent many, many times. You know, and for us, it becomes a week. Oh, there's the week. We've done Lent.

[8 : 10] That's it. I've given up my chocolate, but now I can have it on Easter day. You know, that's fine. But maybe, maybe this year, for one year, just Jesus asks us the question and looks at us directly and said, who do you say that I am?

And what's it about our relationship? Where have we taken our relationship for granted with you, Jesus? Where has it just been maybe one-sided that we use you like a magic charm?

You know, when things go wrong, oh, I'll pray to you then when things go wrong. But where are we on Monday morning? Where are we at five o'clock this afternoon when we've all left here? Where are we?

We're in the mess of life. That is what builds the relationship, is the relationship isn't just all sunshine. As we know, it's about tough times as well.

And many people follow celebrities on social media. You know, people boast, don't they? Oh, I follow so-and-so on social media. In fact, celebrities themselves will boast to say, so many people follow me on social media.

[9 : 13] But does the celebrity know you? Do you know this celebrity? You know, we've got to be careful about who we follow.

And in that following, Jesus offers us not just to follow him, but to come into a deep, deep relationship if we choose to do that. The question doesn't go away for us.

Jesus died for me. This is a personal for many of us this week. Deeply personal. And maybe for many of us, it will be deeper still as we go deeper, deeper into our relationship with him.

You know, the question doesn't go away from every follower where Jesus says, who do you say that I am? Not who do we say corporately you are, but who do you say personally in your life?

You know, who do you say when I'm at work or shopping or raising children? Who do you say that I am when I'm starting a new relationship? Who do you say I am this afternoon? Who do you say?

[10 : 15] How much will you make Jesus known in our relationship to the community that we know and we share with every day? In our decision-making about how much, who do you say that I am when the conversation turns to religion in a pub or a social setting?

Do we shrink away as chameleon Christians? Or do we stand out there and say, you know, what did you do over the weekend? Oh, I went to church. What on earth do you do that for?

Because Jesus is my Lord and Savior and it makes a difference to my life and I know him. Do you want to know him as well? Because I can talk to you all day about him as I would talk to you about a friend.

We think it's so difficult, don't we? But when you're deeply in love with somebody, when you're in a relationship with somebody, if you know, if you remember that first love, you don't stop talking about them, do you?

Who do you say that I am? It's a nine-year-old chorister with my little white ruff. There I was, butter couldn't melt, totally angelic on Good Friday in church.

[11 : 30] There we were in the middle of what would have been described as a solemn mass. And through the incense, I could see in the front row a man.

Now, we were quite high church and people weren't given over to expressing much emotion openly. But there was this man in the front seat, gazing at the cross and openly weeping.

And I looked at him as a nine-year-old and I thought, you know who Jesus is, don't you? Because you're feeling the pain. You know the relationship.

Why? Because this is personal. And when it gets personal, it gets real. Who do you say that I am?

Who do you say that I am that makes it personal and makes it real? Well, God takes me back to that moment again and again and again.

[12 : 49] I don't know what your reminder is of that relationship with Jesus and the cross and everything that he did. We're very fortunate because we have the opportunity to know that Easter Day happens.

We know the glorious resurrection. which is why I think the relationship should be even deeper because we know what he has done for each and every one of us in our lives in different ways and the hope we have.

Somebody asked me this week, what do you feel when you press the button at a crematorium before the curtains come round? And the beauty is none of us have to judge one another, do we?

Because we all have the choice of that relationship with Jesus and what we make that relationship with Jesus on that great day when we will meet him face to face.

So, who do you say I am? Is it a Sunday fix? Here for the tough times? Maybe something else to do on a Sunday morning? No.

[13 : 57] Or are you so passionate about Jesus that you say I'll follow you? You know, I'll serve on the children's team on a Sunday morning.

I'll come an extra Sunday and be part of the children's team. We need people on the children's team. Put your hand up and volunteer. I'll join a home group because I want to know more and I want to know from other people.

I want to build that relationship with you, Jesus. When I do my finances, I'll make sure that the life and mission of Christchurch and what you're doing is at the top of my direct debits and standing orders rather than near the bottom.

I'll do what you want me to do, Lord, because I'm in a relationship with you and it's so important. I want you to know you more in every area of my life and serving.

That's why people come to Alpha. And that's more challenge to everybody here in the church. If we're so passionate about this person, I'd want you to meet my friend. I'd want you to meet the person who makes a difference to every part of my life.

[15 : 04] Wouldn't I want that for everybody that I know? The invitations are on there on the table. Take one. I would love everybody in the church to bring a friend to Alpha or two or three or even your street.

that might be even good. That's why people come. But it starts with us. Jesus asks, who do you say that I am?

Come and show me who you are so that I can know you better. There is no better week than this week to read your Bible step by step and come to know Jesus.

of everything that he did, everything he went through as a friend for each and every one of us. And then, and then, we know.

because everything he did for us makes me want to do more for him in our relationship. It's as simple as that. This could be a life-changing week.

[16 : 06] I think it's a Lent like no others, personally, to come and engage with Jesus. And instead of us just handing out a palm cross, when you're ready, when you are ready to come and pick up a palm cross for whatever you feel that that would mean for you this Lent and this year.

If it's going to go in your window, then a commitment is to tell people about Jesus in your street. If it's going to go in your Bible, it's going to be reading my Bible more and more. To ask myself, as I read it, I read Scripture every day, what does this do to build my relationship with you, Jesus?

If I put it in my car, probably it means I shouldn't speed. But it also, actually is a signal for people, you know, to talk about that, maybe at the garage, at the car wash, wherever we are.

Why have you got that in your car? Maybe it's in the office and you're going to pin it to the board or on the front of your desk. What does that mean for you? A huge opportunity.

Whatever we're going to do with these, it is about the relationship. Because the decision is, who do you say that I am? I can take advantage of it.

[17 : 26] Go into it.