

A questioning Baptist

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Date: 16 February 2025

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[0 : 00] Let's share our prayer together. Heavenly Father, we humbly bow in your presence. May your word be our rule, your spirit, our teacher, and your great glory, our supreme concern.

Through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen. I wonder if you've had this experience. Perhaps you're walking along Prince's Street and someone comes out of a shop in front of you and they turn to go in the same way you're going.

And all you see is the back of their head and the shape of their shoulders and the way they walk. And you think, oh, it's Jim. And you shout out, oh, Jim. And it's not Jim at all. Except in Glasgow, it might just be a different Jim.

But I see you've had this experience. It's not just me. Or you're watching the telly and there's some film or some series comes on and you go, oh, that's so-and-so.

Oh, that actor. They were in such-and-such. And the rest of the family look at you like you're daft.

Now, that's not so-and-so. They weren't in such-and-such. Somebody else altogether. Recognising folk is a key skill that we learn as we grow up.

[1 : 27] We get to recognise faces and the way people stand and how they hold their arms and what they do and what they say.

And to guide us on mission, the Lord Jesus would speak to us in these verses in Matthew 11 about recognising. Recognising who he is. Recognising who John the Baptist is. Recognising who we are. How do we know people? Jesus and John. They were cousins, we remember. Mary went off to visit Elizabeth when they were both pregnant.

And the baby in Elizabeth's womb leapt as the sound of her greeting came to Elizabeth's ear. It's not that long since we had the Christmas story.

We remember these things. We remember Jesus coming to John at the Jordan to be baptised. And the Gospel writers telling us how John recognised him.

[2 : 42] By the revelation of God, John was able to know who Jesus was. But here is John.

He has been called by God. Equipped by God. Filled with the Spirit by God. Serving God in mission.

To which he was called. And as a result of this, he gets slapped in prison. The persecution of the sheep by the wolves.

Which we read of just a week or two ago. Is the actual experience of John's life. And so there he is locked in a dark dungeon.

And we can imagine how easy it is in the dark. For your mind to begin questioning. Did I get it right?

[3 : 43] Did I really recognise in Jesus who I thought I recognised? Is Jesus really the one? How can I know?

Now if you're sitting there this morning and thinking to yourself. Well, I'm doing better than John the Baptist.

Because I've never had those questions arise in my mind. Just hold on to that thought for a minute or two. Because if it hasn't arisen in your mind yet.

It will do one day. And then you'll find the questioning Baptist. To be a great companion. When the questions come in your mind.

How do we know who Jesus really is? How do we recognise him? John begins wondering who Jesus is.

[4 : 42] Now when John heard in prison about the deeds of the Christ. Did you notice when Jill read through. This is the only place in the whole passage.

The word Christ is used. And it's one of the few places in Matthew's Gospel. Where the word Christ is not accompanied by Jesus. Or Lord.

John has been hearing about the deeds of the Christ. Which is the one he'd been waiting for. The one who's coming he'd been announcing. And he sent words by his disciples to Jesus.

Are you the one who is to come? Or should we look for another? This is the key question in the New Testament.

Who is Jesus? This is the key question. In our life. In our faith. In our discipleship. Who is Jesus?

[5 : 50] The way John asks the question. Makes it clear. That he hopes. Jesus is the one he's been expecting. But in his dark prison.

He's become unsure. Did I really recognize him? And so he asks Jesus. Did I get it right?

Did I recognize who you are? Are you really the one? Sometimes it's easy to recognize someone.

See a man in a dark uniform. With a radio here. And a truncheon here. You can kind of have a good guess.

It's a policeman. You see someone in a white coat. With a stethoscope. You're lucky. But if you see someone. In a white coat. In a stethoscope. We can have a good guess.

[6 : 52] That they're a doctor. Sometimes we look at people. And we just know who they are. John is looking at Jesus.

And he wants to be sure. Because that guy in the white coat. In the stethoscope. Could be an actor. It could be a television thing. They're filming. And he's not a doctor at all. How does Jesus respond to John's question?

How does he comfort John. In his troubled thoughts? Well Jesus alludes to the Old Testament. Now you don't need to read that.

I couldn't get it big enough. To get it on the screen. But I just wanted you to look at the colours. You see. On the right there. We've got the Matthew passage.

And on the left there. We've got Isaiah. Two passages from Isaiah. And look. Almost all the words. That Jesus said.

[7 : 56] Red and red. Green and green. Blue and blue. Yellow and yellow. Are taken directly. From the passages in Isaiah. When Jesus.

When Jesus. When Jesus. Wanted to demonstrate. Who he was. He said. Let's read the Old Testament. Here are some verses. That will help you know.

Who I am. The next time. You wonder. Or someone asks you. Why do we bother.

With the Old Testament. Wouldn't it be cheaper. Just to cut it out. Of our Bibles. And all we needed to print. Was the New Testament. Why do we keep going on.

And on. About these Old Testament. Prophets. And laws. And wise people. Well here's the answer. We recognise.

[8 : 54] Jesus. Because he fulfils. The Old Testament. And if we don't have. The Old Testament. We'll never know. That Jesus is fulfilling it.

We'll never recognise. Jesus. Unless we recognise him. As the one. Whom God promised. In the Old Testament. The things that Jesus.

Was doing. When he served. In mission before us. Were not. Random things. Jesus was not. Wandering.

Aimlessly. Around Galilee. And Judea. Going. I think I'll. I'll fix someone's eyes. Today. I think I'll. Fix someone's legs. Tomorrow. These were things.

That God had said. That Christ. When he comes. This is what he will do. And this is how. You will know him.

[9 : 53] They are much more useful things. For a king to do. Than pulling a sword. Out of a stone. But in this. They serve the same function.

To enable us. To recognise. The king. Jesus. When he came. Did the things. That God's promised. King. Would do.

He cared. He cared. For people. He helped. People. At their point. Of need. God's word.

In the old. Testament. Gives us. All that we need. So that we can. Recognise. Jesus. And know. Who he is. Not that we can.

Recognise. The shape. Of his face. The colour. Of his hair. How he held. His shoulders. Nowhere. Does the New Testament. Give us those marks. Of recognition.

[10 : 53] Only. The works. Of grace. And mercy. And salvation. Which Jesus. Did. We know him. Because he. Did the things. That God's. Promised. Christ. Was foretold. To do. Jesus. Said.

Blessed. Is the one. Who is not. Offended. By me. Same word. That he used. In the Beatitudes. Remember the Beatitudes. Blessed are the poor.

Blessed are those. Who mourn. Blessed are the. Peacemakers. Blessed. Is the one. Who. Recognises. Jesus. And is not.

Offended. By him. It's one. Thing. To expect. God. To keep. His promises. And to see.

[11:48] To one another. We really hope. That God. Will keep. His promises. It's a whole. Other thing. When God. Does keep. His promises. And they're not. Exactly.

Like we thought. They would be. To continue. To trust. In God's promises. Too many. Are offended. By miracles. In our. Intellectual. Superiority. We see. To ourselves. Such things. Can't happen. Jesus.

Doesn't care. About our. Intellectual. Superiority. He just. Went around. Fixing people's. Legs. And fixing people's. Eyes. And helping people. And we need.

To get over. Being offended. At the miracles. Because that's. How Jesus. Is made known. Too many. Get offended. And stumble.

[12:41] Over. Change. When God. Keeps his promises. And his. King. Shows up. Everything's. Going to change. And it did. And all the people.

Who liked. The status quo. The Sadducees. And the Pharisees. Who were doing. Quite well. And who didn't. Want anything. To change. Got upset. And offended.

We need. To let God. Keep his promises. The way God. Wants to keep them. And not be offended. When he does it. And not stumble.

Over them. We recognize. Jesus. Through the words. Of the Old Testament. When Jesus. Does the things. That God. Spoke about.

We recognize. We recognize. Who Jesus is. When we recognize. Jesus. We need to. Welcome him.

[13:41] We need to. Submit. To his. Fulfillment. Of God's. Promises. In short. We need to. Trust Jesus. And follow him. Having.

Answered. John. Sent his disciples. Back to him. And said. Well. Tell John. What you see. Is happening. And you know. Because he knows. The Old Testament. Jesus.

Then. Turns. To the crowd. Time. To recognize. Who John is. What then. Did you go out. To see a prophet.

Yes. I tell you. More than a prophet. This is he. Of whom it was written. Behold. I send my messenger. Before your face. Who will prepare. Your way. Before you. The crowd.

To went out. To see. John. And there were great crowds. Had their own ideas. About who he was. We can. Misunderstand.

[14:41] Someone. By miscalling them. Misnaming. Them. John is a prophet. But that word.

Is not big enough. To tell us. All that John is. The descriptions. We set upon John. Can limit.

Our grasp. Of God's revelation. Through John. Be careful. About imagining. That we. We can. Entitle things.

And know everything. About them. Because God. Is always. Bigger than that. When Jesus. Makes John. Known to us. We can accept.

His revelation. Because Jesus. Knows more about John. Than we do. Once again. We see that. The ways. Jesus. Makes John. Known.

[15:35] Are through. Through the Old Testament. More red and blue. Right. We've got. What Jesus said. Over here. Behold. I send.

I will prepare. And Malachi. Over here. Red and blue. Red and blue. You see. Jesus. Takes.

Verses. From the Old Testament. And says. If you just read it. You would be able. To recognize. Who John is. John is the messenger.

Of God. The one. Who had been promised. In the Old Testament. God is at work. Keeping his promises. And when John arrives. You should be able.

To recognize that. God is doing. All that he said. He would do. When the one. To announce. The kingdom arrives. We should recognize.

[16:31] God at work. In him. John is that. Promised. Messenger. Who announces. The coming. Of God's king. And God's kingdom.

Jesus is the. Promised king. Who comes. To rule. And to reign. In God's kingdom. But there's no way.

We can know this. Unless we learn it. From God's work. God. The mission. The mission of God. Is directed. By the word of God.

God's word. Is what. Sends us out. To serve. In God's mission. The mission of God. Is announced. By God's word. God himself.

Declares. His word. And sends. His servants. To announce. The time. For mission. The mission of God. Is achieved.

[17:27] By God's word. It is through. His word. That God. Makes Jesus. Known. And calls us. To faith. And life. In him.

We need. God's word. So that we can. Act. And serve. In mission. John. John the Baptist. Is a transitional.

Figure. Before John. There was the Old Testament. After John. The rule. And reign. Of Christ. In God's kingdom. And John.

Stands. As the messenger. Between the two. The time. Of promise. Is coming. To an end. Because the time. Of fulfillment. Has now.

Arrive. John. The in between. Prophet. Is greater. Than all. Who went. Before him. But even.

[18:22] We. We. Who believe. In Jesus. Long years. After John. Even. We. Who have. Entered. God's kingdom.

Through faith. In Jesus. Are greater. Than John. Because. We get. To enter. God's kingdom. John. John's.

Transitional. Ministry. His. Preparing. The way. For Jesus. And God's. Kingdom. Was. And continues. To be. Violently. Resisted. We don't.

Want. Change. And so. Anyone. Who suggests. We're. Transitioning. To change. Is rejected. We don't. Want. God's. Kingdom. Because. We.

Quite. Fancy. Being. Our. Own. King. And we. Reject. Any. Messenger. Who. Tells. Us. That. Jesus. Is. The. One. King. In. God's. Kingdom. Jesus.

[19:16] Spoke. To. Us. About. The. Persecution. That. His. Mission. Would. Face. That. Persecution. Is. Seen. In. The. Violence. With. Which. God's. Kingdom. Is. Opposed. That. Violence.

Which. Results. In. The. Imprisonment. Of. John. God's. Messenger. Has. Come. God's. Kingdom. Is. At. Hand. We. Are. Called. To. Enter. God's.

Kingdom. Or. Else. We. Will. Be. Found. Violently. Rejecting. God's. Kingdom. You. Are. Either. In. Or. You. Are. Violently. Rejecting.

There. Is. No. Third. Way. If. You. Have. Years. To. Hear. Hear. The. Good. News. Accept. The. Mission. Which. John. Fulfills. For.

You. In. Making. Jesus. Known. And. Rush. To. Jesus. Come. To. Him. And. He. Will. Bring. You.

[20:09] Safely. Into. God's. Kingdom. But. How. Do. We. Recognize. Ourselves. In. All. This.

Our. Bard. Has. A. Line. About. Wishing. That. Some. Divinity. Would. Give. Us. The. Gift. To. See. Ourselves. As. Others. See. Us. And.

I'm. All. For. That. I'm. All. For. Someone. Outside. Of. Ourselves. Shining. A. Little. Light. On. Us. And. Saying. This. Is. What. You. Really. Like. I. Would. Prefer. It. Wasn't.

Loudmouth. American. Politicians. My. Primary. School. Teacher. Was. A. Great. Fan. Of. Sayings. Which.

She. Bombarded. Us. With. Daily. One. Of. Her. Favourites. Directed. At. Me. Was. Empty. Barrels. Make. The. Most. Noise. Forgive.

[21:06] Me. Talking. Unkindly. About. American. Politicians. But. If. They. Dealt. With. Their. Own. Problems. With. Religion. And. Left. Us. To. Ours. I. Think. We. Got. On. A. Lot. Better. But.

We. Don't. Need. Burns. Prayer. God. Already. Has. Shown. Us. What. We're. Like. The. Gift. Has. Already. Been. Given. In. Jesus. Words. To. What. Shall. I. Compare. This. Generation. It's. Like. Children. Sitting. In. The. Marketplace.

And. Calling. To. Their. Playmates. We. Played. The. Flute. For. You. And. You. Didn't. Dance. We. Sang. A. Dirge. For. You. And. You. Didn't. Mourn. For. John.

Came. Neither. Eating. Nor. Drinking. And. You. Said. He. Has. A. Demon. And. The. Son. Of. Man. Came. Eating. And. Drinking. And. They. Said. Look. At. Him. Look. At. Who. He. He. Hanging. Out. With. We.

[22 : 02] Are. That. Childlike. Generation. When. John. Came. And. Said. Okay. Let's. Play. Funerals. Then. Let's. Get.

Mournful. And. Repaint. About. Our. Sin. Turn. To. To. God. Because. The. Time. Is. At. Hand. We. Said. Nah. We. Don't. Want. To. Play. That. And. When. Jesus. Came. And. Said. Okay. Let's. Have. A. Feast. All. The. Blessings. And. Grace. Of. God.

Wide. Open. And. We. Will. Invite. Everyone. In. We. Said. No. We. Don't. Want. To. Play. That. Either. We. Don't. Want. To. Sit. Here. In. Our. Child. Like. Patience. And. Reject. Everything. That. God. Is. Doing. For. Us. We. Love. Our. Liberty. More.

[22 : 55] Than. We. Love. God's. Call. To. Repentance. We. Don't. Want. To. Hear. God. Saying. To. Us. You. Have. Done. Things. Wrong. And. You.

Need. To. Change. How. You. Living. But. That's. What. God. Has. To. Say. To. Us. That's. What. We. Need. To. Hear. And. We. Need. To. Get. Up. Off. That. Marketplace. And. Join. In. With. John. And. Weep.

As. We. Repent. And. Be. Broken. By. The. Things. That. We've. Done. That. We. Shouldn't. Have. Done. And. The. Things. That. We. Should. Have. Done. That. We. Left. Undone.

When. Jesus. Comes. And. Says. Okay. There's. A. Big. Party. And. There's. A. Great. Feast. And. Everyone's. Going. To. Get. Invited. In. How. Dare. We. Turn. Around. And. Say. Yes. But. Not. Them. They're.

[23 : 52] Not. Like. Us. And. We. Don't. Like. Them. And. If. They're. Coming. We. Are. Not. Joining. In. We. Are. Just. Going. To. Sit. Here. And. Whinge. The.

Kingdom. Of. Heaven. Is. Not. Only. For. Us. It. Is. For. Us. But. It. Is. For. Everyone. And. We. Need. To. Celebrate. Jesus. Open. Welcome. We.

Need. To. Serve. Him. In. Making. His. Invitation. Known. And. Gathering. Others. In. Oh. To. Have. The. Gift. To. See. Ourselves. As. God. Would. See. Us. We. Recognize. Neither. The. Messenger. Nor. The. Message. And.

We. Reject. The. God. Who. Made. The. Promise. And. The. God. Who. Is. Fulfilling. The. Promise. And. The. God. Who. Is. Welcoming. Everyone. In. That.

[24 : 57] Which. Is. Right. The. Right. Way. To. Live. Together. With. God. Which. Is. Wisdom. Is. Recognized. In. Her. Deeds. The. Right. Way. To. Live. With. God.

Is. To. Say. Okay. There's. A. Time. For. Mourning. There's. A. Time. For. Being. With. John. And. Repenting. And. We're. Going. To. Join. In. There's. A. We.

Need. To. Do. The. Things. That. God. Calls. Us. To. Do. Through. His. Servant. John. And. His. Christ. Jesus. You.

Who. Have. Years. Here. God's. Grace. Is. At. Work. Among. Us. God. Is. Revealed. As. Righteous. By. His. Own. Works.

Even. Now. You. Can. Open. Your. Eyes. Even. Now. You. Can. Open. Your. Ears. You. Too. Can. Recognize. Who. Jesus. Is. Who.

[26 : 00] John. Is. For. You. What. God. Has. Been. Doing. In. The. Gospel. In. His. Grace. And. His. Mercy. For. You. For. Everyone.

Else. And. For. All. Creation. You. Can. Know. These. Things. And. You. Can. Be. Changed. No. Longer. The. Child.

Like. Sitting. In. The. Marketplace. Whinging. Generation. But. The. Up. On. Our. Feet. Coming. To. Jesus. Receiving. And. Being. Sent. On. Mission. Generation. We.

Need. To. Recognize. Who. Jesus. Is. What. He. Is. Calling. Us. To. And. We. Need. To. Come. To. Him. And.

Let. Him. Be. The. Christ. Let's. Pray. Together. Our.

[26 : 53] Father. Have. Mercy. Upon. Us. That. Mercy. You. Promised. Us. May. It. Flow. Over. Us. Mercy. For. All.

Those. Times. We. Rejected. You. Mercy. For. All. Those. Times. We. Turn. Away. From. You. When. We. Stopped. Our. Ears. To. Your. Word. Have.

Mercy. Upon. Us. We. Pray. That. By. Your. Spirit. Within. Each. One. Of. Us. We. Would. Rise. Up. And. Rush. To. Jesus.

That. At. The. Right. Time. For. Mourning. We. Would. Mourn. That. We. Would. Repent. Of. Our. Sin. At. The. Right. Time. For. Feasting. We. Would. Celebrate. And. Rejoice. And. Welcome. In. All. Whom. You. Would. Call. Give. Us. Grace. Jesus.

[27 : 51] And. To. Follow. Him. We. Ask. It. In. Your. Name. And. For. Your. Glory. Amen.