

How unique is your Jesus?

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Date: 16 January 2022

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[0 : 00] The reading from the Bible is John chapter 12, verses 44 to 50. If you've got the church Bible, it should be on page 1084.

So John chapter 12, verse 44. And Jesus cried out and said, Whoever believes in me, believes not in me, but in him who sent me.

And whoever sees me, sees him who sent me. I have come into the world as light, so that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness.

If anyone hears my words and does not keep them, I do not judge him, for I did not come to judge the world, but to save the world.

The one who rejects me and does not receive my words has a judge. The word that I have spoken will judge him on the last day.

[1 : 04] For I have not spoken on my own authority, but the Father who sent me has himself given me a commandment, what to say and what to speak.

And I know that his commandment is eternal life. What I say, therefore, I say as the Father has told me. Well, good morning and thanks for having me.

Let me add my welcome to Simon's tea this morning at Grace Church Ellich. As you said, it's been nice to be with you these last three weeks. Some people I know, some of you I don't know, all of you. So it's been very nice to have met some new people these last three weeks.

Please do say hello to my wife and children and I if you don't know us and you'd like to. We're thinking this morning in our third of the talks in John 12 of the question, how unique is your Jesus? Pretty uncontroversial that Jesus changed the world, had a positive impact on society throughout the centuries. I guess most people you know would probably say that Jesus' contribution to the world was kind of more good than bad.

[2 : 20] Maybe he's irrelevant now, they would say. But on the whole, he had probably quite a good influence on things in the world. And of course, if you're a Christian, you'd go much further than that. And wouldn't you, Jesus is everything.

He's the Son of God. He's the supreme revelation of the Father, the saviour of the world. All the songs we've been singing this morning already. Maybe if you've been reading through John's Gospel from the beginning and just got to this point, you might have even come to that conclusion yourself.

Many of the disagreements, the arguments in John, they kind of converge on this question. How unique is Jesus really? You might be convinced that Jesus has a lot to offer you and that he challenges you in all kinds of ways to live differently, to live your life better.

You might even be convinced that he's trustworthy and the things that he did in his life and said are astonishing. But how convinced are you that there are no alternatives to him?

Which turns up the heat a bit, doesn't it? I sometimes listen to Thought for the Day on Radio 4.

Prides itself on diversity, doesn't it? You have Christians, Muslims, Sikhs, secularists, and all these different perspectives on how to kind of orient yourself at seven in the morning.

[3 : 42] All their different contributions. But how unique is Jesus really? Is he just one voice among many? Very key question for John. And it's a crucial question for us as well.

And how we understand God. How we understand ourselves. And the verses we're looking at this morning, they're not narrative like we saw two weeks ago. And they're not commentary like we saw last week.

The genre has changed again. And this week we have speech. And the verses we're looking at, they're all words that Jesus speaks about himself really, aren't they?

And there are only seven verses. And yet there are 19 times that Jesus says the words I or me or a verb in the first person. And it's one thing to believe that Jesus is important.

But it is another thing altogether to believe that he is utterly unrivaled. Unique. We're going to jump around a little bit. You'll notice on your handouts there'll be some points to help you follow along.

[4 : 43] First point on your handout there. Jesus uniquely reveals the Father. Let me read again from verse 44. Jesus cried out and said, Whoever believes in me believes not in me but in him who sent me.

And whoever sees me sees him who sent me. Anyways, I think you could probably say it's a bit of a summary of the gospel so far. Everyone who encountered Jesus had their lives turned upside down one way or another.

And think of Nicodemus in chapter 3. Pharisee of Pharisees. Expert in religion. Thought that he knew everything. Until he met Jesus. Or the Samaritan woman in chapter 4.

An outsider. Divorcee of five husbands. No hope of a life in the presence of God. Until she met Jesus.

A man who had not walked for 38 years. Holding on to empty promises of a magic swimming pool that did nothing. Helpless. Until he met Jesus.

[5 : 50] Lazarus in chapter 11. He wasn't even alive was he? And his body was rotting in a tomb. Until he heard the words of Jesus. And each of these people. As they encountered Jesus.

And John wants us to be clear. Jesus wants us to be clear. That they were encountering none other than God himself. Whoever believes in me. Believes not in me.

But in him who sent me. Whoever sees me. Who sees him who sent me. And the Samaritan woman believed. The blind man saw. Lazarus heard. And now Jesus he turns to address anyone. Everyone. Anyone who hears. Anyone who sees. Anyone who believes. And the central claim of this book. Is as you encounter Jesus. You are encountering God himself.

It is a staggering claim. And it's a claim of total uniqueness. And Jesus did not see it possible. That you could have God. Without having him.

[6 : 52] And he wasn't just. One among many valid ways. To understand who God is. You know. One among many. Equally valid expressions. Of God. I was. When I was growing up. I was introduced to this image.

You might know. It's quite popular. Of ten or so people. In a pitch black room. With an elephant. In the middle of the room. And they're all kind of describing. This elephant. And one of them says. You know. The elephant is.

Like this. It's long and thin and wavy. And you know. Another person says. No. No. No. The elephant is. Thick and solid. It's you know. So one person maybe has the trunk. And describing it. Another person has the tail or something. And they're all sort of saying different things. And the point is. None of them are like wrong. It's just they have different perspectives. They're all saying different things. And they're all kind of equally valid.

It's a very popular image. Of how different religions of the world. Make claims about God. And none of them have a. Sort of. Monopoly on truth. They're all just sort of.

[7 : 47] Saying their own unique perspectives. Except Jesus. Has not come to give us his perspective. In a dark world. He has come to turn the lights on.

Verse 46. I have come into the world. As light. So that whoever believes in me. May not remain in darkness. Jesus. He. He uniquely. Reveals the father.

And you cannot be positive about God. Without being positive. Positive about Jesus. And it means that. If you want to know what God is like. And if you want to walk in fellowship with him.

If you want to orient yourself in the world. To make sense of reality. To find your place. Well you only. Need to come to Jesus. Or if you're.

If you're tired. Of the endless kind of scanning of bookshelves. Or listening to podcasts. That are kind of trying to help you get a grip on your life. And tired of. Just all the competing claims about God.

[8 : 46] Well Jesus has come to make it. Clear. For us. Verse 46. To believe in Jesus. Is to come out. Of the darkness of this world. And to walk in the light.

Whoever believes in me. Believes not in me. But in him who sent me. And whoever sees me. Sees him who sent me. And it might be. I know some of you here at Grace Church College. But I don't know all of you.

And it might be. That you wouldn't call yourself a Christian this morning. Well can I suggest. That this might be an excellent morning. To resolve that. It's not very English of me to say this. But from what I know. Of Grace Church Dulwich. It is an incredibly loving community. Of people. And people here that I've met. People that would be willing. To talk about their faith. Talk about. What it is that captured them. About Jesus. So this would be a great morning maybe. And if it's. If you've never really taken Jesus seriously before. And please.

[9 : 44] I commend Jesus to you. And I commend this church to you. Jesus he makes the Father known. And. But actually. These aren't just verses.

That show us what God is like. Right. And it's one thing to tell us. That Jesus uniquely reveals God. But then the obvious. And logical question is. Well. Well how do I access Jesus. And in fact. That's exactly how the next few chapters. Of the book unfold. And the disciples. They were about to have Jesus leave. And the question. They were confronted with. Was how they were going to continue. Without him.

And the answer is. Well second point on your handouts there. Jesus' words. Uniquely. Reveal. Him. Look at verse 49 with me. I have not spoken on my own authority.

And by the way. Actually. As I read these verses. And just listen out. For how many of the verses. Are about words. And speech. For I have not spoken on my own authority.

[10 : 40] But the Father who sent me. Has himself given me a commandment. What to say. And what to speak. And I know that his commandment. Is eternal life. What I say therefore.

I say as the Father. Has told me. And it's Jesus' words. That give us access. To God. And as I say. In the next. Three or four chapters. He's going to lay out.

This program. Of fruitful ministry. That will reach to the ends of the earth. As the Spirit leads his apostles. Into all the truth. And their testimony about him. Is preserved. In the words of the New Testament.

And Jesus' words. They're how we have access to him. And there's no other God. But Jesus' version. And there's no other Jesus. But his words version.

And some people think. Don't they. That being into the Bible. Is just kind of a matter of. Personal taste. Right. So you might have churches. That focus on the Bible. And other churches. That focus on. You know.

[11 : 36] Other aspects. Of the Christian faith. So. Some focus on the Bible. Others focus on discipleship. Maybe. Others focus on worship. Or whatever it could be. I was actually. I was talking to a church leader.

Not long ago at all. Very recently. Who was giving me his top tips. On hearing God's voice today. And sometimes in the Bible. Sure. And but sometimes. Maybe in a dream. Or in a film.

Or in a sentence. That kind of just comes into your head. Well that is. To hugely misunderstand. What these words are. And the Bible's not. It's not just a kind of add on.

For people who like doing theology. And Jesus. Has come as the full. And final revelation. Of the God of this world. And he has revealed God to us.

By his words. 49 again. I have not spoken on my own authority. But the father who sent me. Has himself. Given me a commandment.

[12 : 32] What to say. And what to speak. And of course. How you treat somebody's words. It's very much. It's very much. How you treat them. Isn't it? If I write my wife. A love letter.

And she tears it up. In front of me. And I can assure you. That has not happened. Well it would be very. Appropriate for me. To be quite offended by that. And how you treat somebody's words.

It is how you treat. Them. And when you encounter. These words. When you encounter. Jesus's words. You are encountering him. And when you encounter him. You encounter.

The father. And let me tell you a story. I was. In this last year or so. I've been part of a group of people. That meet regularly. To discuss. Elements of the Christian faith.

As part of. A process. I'm going through. In the Church of England. And. One of the weeks. It was a Zoom call. So we went around the screens. And the question. We had to all ask. Was. What does God mean.

[13 : 27] To you? I think they're different categories. So. What does the. You know. What does church mean to you? And what does worship mean to you? All these. Interesting. Exercise. We all went around the circle. And.

We all said. You know. What is it. What is it. What is it. What is it. What is it. Except. The problem is. We missed. We missed out. A key perspective. No one.

We were never encouraged. Really. To ask. What God's perspective. Is. On himself. But the reality is. We don't have to guess.

What God is like. It's an immensely freeing thing. Isn't it. We don't. He's not left us. In the dark. And Jesus. Has come to. Uniquely. Uniquely. Reveal the father to us.

So that whoever encounters him. Encounters God himself. And it means that it's okay. To say no. To some versions of God. And I guess we don't like to do that.

[14:23] Do we. But he's not unclear. He's not silent. He has spoken. We have access to him. He's told us who he is. He's told us what he's like.

And we don't need to wander into this. Bottomless pit of subjectivism. To find out. And however humble it might seem. To do so. And Jesus words. They uniquely reveal him.

Because those very words. Are the words of the father. And I have not spoken on my own authority. But the father who sent me. Has himself given me. A commandment.

What to say. And what to speak. And no God without Jesus. No Jesus. Without his words. And we can go even further than that. And it's not just that Jesus's words.

Are how we know what God is like. Right. Like I might know kind of. Information about something or someone. Impersonal. And maybe uninteresting information. Data. About God if you like.

[15:19] No. But it's that these words. Thirdly on your handout there. And on the screen. And these words. Are a matter of life. And death. Verse 47.

If anyone hears my words. And does not keep them. I do not judge him. For I did not come to judge the world. But to save the world. The one who rejects me.

And does not receive my words. Has a judge. The word that I have spoken. Will judge him. On the last day. Of course if you think the Bible. Is just kind of general revelation.

About God. And that may or may not be interesting. Words that kind of. Offer some perspective. On who God is. Well then of course. You can take it or leave it. And of course. It's just a matter of personal preference.

You know. Information that belongs in history books. But that is not the case. These very words. They are a matter of life and death. And they are calling us.

[16:14] Out of darkness. Out of uncertainty. Into the light. Of life. With him. Even as we hear them. This morning.

They are words that call for a response. His words. They are a matter of life and death. Verse 48 again. The one who rejects me. And does not receive my words. Has a judge.

The word that I have spoken. Will judge him on the last day. And in other words. It's not just. That when we encounter these verses. These words. We encounter God.

That we experience him speaking. I hugely privileged. When I was first introduced to this idea. And that I can actually experience God speaking. As I read these words. But it's that these very words. They encounter us. And they address us. They invite us. They judge us. I had my booster jab recently.

[17:14] Very painful process. Just basically for waiting for it. Was much more painful than the actual jab. I want us to imagine for a second. That I took the view. In the waiting room. That medicine. Was just a matter of personal taste.

Right. So. Imagine the doctor says. You know. Okay. Can I have your arm please. And I say.

Actually. You know what. Could I have the meningitis jab instead please. I mean. Her reaction. It wouldn't be very impressive.

She'd probably say. You know. Sorry. That's just not how this works actually sir. If you want to be safe. From this particular vaccine. Then you're going to need this particular jab. Now imagine if I said to her.

Gosh. You know what. Some people are just so narrow minded. Widen your perspective. I mean. It's absurd. Medicine. It's not a case of personal preference. The words of Jesus.

Are not a case. Of each to their own. I'm the one who rejects me. And does not receive my words. Has a judge. Interesting isn't it. If you have three guesses on the question.

[18:11] Who is the judge of all the earth. And I asked my one year old this. And she's two now. Once he was one. I asked this question to her. And she said mummy. I think. You know. Closer. Closer. There are worse candidates.

But. You know. Give her a chance. She's only one year old. No. Of course. God is the judge. Actually no. No. Look again. Okay. Fine. Jesus is the judge. No. Actually. Look again. It is his words. That judge. And Jesus words. Are the words that judge. Well they judge each of us.

As we encounter him. And judgment is scary. It's not popular. Is it. We don't like to think of Jesus words. As words that judge. Judgment.

It's not a very nice word. Except that. I think judgment is kind of trendy again. Isn't it. We're very good at judging people today. And toppling over statues. And removing Twitter accounts.

[19 : 07] Of people that hold the wrong opinions. And judgment. It is back in fashion. Especially when it comes to people who reject offers. Last year. The snooker star. Mark Allen.

Was about to shake hands with his opponent. After their game. Against Rhian Evans. Who also happened to be his ex. Which I guess is quite awkward. And she rejected his handshake. Right. Super awkward. And these headlines the next day.

Where Mark Allen's offer of a handshake. Is rejected. But I guess probably a more serious example. Is the way. The take on people who reject the vaccine.

We've even got a name for them. Haven't we? Anti-vaxxers. People who reject. And these tragic headlines that we see. You know. Person dies. Because they reject the vaccine.

A tragically sad thing. Except imagine a headline that read like this. Person dies. Because they reject. Jesus Christ.

[20 : 06] It's not so trendy. But I mean rejecting a handshake. Is one thing. Rejecting a vaccine. That is much more serious. Rejecting the only son.

Of the father. Is far more serious. Far more illogical. Far more dangerous. Because your response to him.

Is your response. To God. And the one who rejects me. And does not receive my words. Has a judge. The word that I have spoken. Will judge him. On the last day.

And he addresses us. Like he was standing in the room. Of course. Huge privilege to know. Isn't it? That you can hear God's voice. By reading these words. It's immense privilege. But also a terrifying reality.

Isn't it? That the God who fashioned the stars. And breathed life into dust. In the beginning was the word. That word.

[21 : 06] Confronts us. And he's confronting us this morning. He's confronting you. He's addressing you. And with the offer. Of life.

In chapter 11. When Lazarus heard Jesus' words. He was raised up. Out of the tomb. Well at the end of history. On the last day. We will hear.

The same voice. That he did. We will all be raised up. To give an account to God. And what will happen to us. On that day. It will have nothing to do. With how much money we made.

It will have nothing to do. With how well our children did at school. How far. Up the career ladder we got. And how successful. We were. No. What will happen to us.

On that day. Will be to do with. How we responded. To these words. Because our response. To these words. It is our response. To Jesus. And our response.

[22 : 03] To him. Is our response. To the father. 48. Again. The one who rejects me. And does not receive my words. Has a judge. The word I have spoken.

Will judge him. On the last day. And how unique is Jesus. Well he's the. He's the final. And sufficient. Last word. Of the father. He makes him known.

There's no other God. But Jesus's version. And there's no other Jesus. But the bible's version. And as you read. And encounter.

These words. You encounter him. And he encounters. You. And he. Weighs. And judges. The hearts.

Of anyone. Who hears. His voice. They're words. That speak to each of us. And confront us. To put our trust. In his life giving message.

[22 : 57] And John's purpose statement. From the end of the book. These are written. So that you may believe. That Jesus. Is the Christ. The son of God. And that by believing. Have life in his name.

Verse 45. Whoever believes in me. Believes not in me. But in one who sent me. And whoever sees me. Sees the one who sent me. I have come into the world. As light.

So that whoever. Believes in me. May not remain. In darkness. Let's pray. Gracious. Heavenly father.

We thank you. That you have spoken. We thank you for your son. The Lord Jesus Christ. The eternal word of the father. Who has made you known.

And made you knowable. Speaking truth. Shining the light of the world. Amidst the darkness.

Please father. Help us. Grasp the uniqueness.

[23 : 51] Of your son. Help us treasure his words. So that we might. Have the life. That is in his name. And walk in fellowship. With you we pray.

Amen.