

The saviour who brings salvation

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Preacher: Simon Dowdy

[0 : 00] Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me. And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple, and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight.

Behold, he is coming, says the Lord of hosts. But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears? For he is like a refiner's fire, and like fuller's soap. He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the sons of Levi, and refine them like gold and silver.

And they will bring offerings in righteousness to the Lord. Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the Lord, as in the days of old, and as in former years.

Then I will draw near to you for judgment. I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, against the adulterers, against those who swear falsely, against those who oppress the hired worker in his wages, the widow and the fatherless, against those who thrust aside the sojourner, and do not fear me, says the Lord of hosts.

[1 : 24] The disciples of John reported all these things to him. And John, calling two of his disciples to him, sent them to the Lord, saying, Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?

And when the men had come to him, they said, John the Baptist has sent us to you, saying, Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another? In that hour he healed many people of diseases, and plagues, and evil spirits, and on many who were blind he bestowed sight.

And he answered them, Go and tell John what you have seen and heard. The blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear.

The dead are raised up, the poor have good news preached to them, and blessed is the one who is not offended by me. When John's messengers had gone, Jesus began to speak to the crowds concerning John.

What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? What then did you go out to see?

[2 : 41] A man dressed in soft clothing? Behold, those who are dressed in splendid clothing and live in luxury are in king's courts. What then did you go out to see?

A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. This is he of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before your face, who will prepare your way before you.

I tell you, among those born of women, none is greater than John. Yet the one who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he.

When all the people heard this, and the tax collectors too, they declared God just, having been baptized with the baptism of John. But the Pharisees and the lawyers rejected the purpose of God for themselves, not having been baptized by him.

To what then shall I compare the people of this generation? And what are they like? They are like children sitting in the marketplace and calling to one another.

[3 : 55] We played the flute for you, and you did not dance. We sang a dirge, and you did not weep. For John the Baptist has come eating no bread and drinking no wine.

And you say, he was a demon. The son of man has come eating and drinking. And you say, look at him, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.

Yet wisdom is justified by all her children. Well, we are two weeks, barely, into the new year, and already I've read at least two articles saying that New Year's resolutions are a complete waste of time.

The most recent in SU22 magazine, which arrived on our doorstep, along with everyone else who lives in East Dulwich, proclaiming that January is undisputedly the worst month of the year.

So why make life even more miserable by depriving yourself of the things that you enjoy? It adds that since you failed to achieve your New Year's resolutions last year, what makes you think you will do any better this year?

[5 : 06] In other words, behind every New Year's resolution lies the recognition that my life is not what it's meant to be. Which I guess is why the idea at New Year and within the first month or so of the year of a new me is so appealing.

Indeed, there's one whole page article in SU22 simply which has the heading New Year, New You. And yet, I guess it's more than that, isn't it?

Because behind that longing for a new me lies the even bigger longing for a whole new world. Just think about the newspapers and other media outlets that we use.

Think of the articles in a typical day. And then cut out all the stories of broken families, divorce, alcohol abuse, sexual abuse, violent crimes, chaos, disease, fraud, debt, war, corruption, and greedy materialism.

Well, there's not much left, is there, of the newspaper? Cut them out and we are left with very little. A new me, a new world.

[6 : 21] Well, the great news about this passage we're looking at this morning in Luke chapter 7 is that Jesus tells us that he has come to bring the very things that we long for.

So you'll see an outline on the back of the service sheet. Do please turn to it. Do take notes if you find it helpful. First of all, consider the ministry of Jesus. Verses 18 to 20.

The disciples of John reported all these things to him. And John, calling two of his disciples to him, sent them to the Lord, saying, Are you the one who is to come or shall we look for another?

And when the men had come to him, they said, John the Baptist has sent us to you, saying, Are you the one who is to come or shall we look for another? Notice verse 18.

The disciples of John the Baptist report these things to John. That is the two miracles we saw last week as Jesus saved the centurion's servant from dying and then raised the widow's son from the dead.

[7 : 29] And so you see it leads to this question, verse 19, Are you the one who is to come or are we to look for another? It's an important question.

It's a question that Luke wants us to think about carefully, which is why he then repeats it in verse 20. But I guess at first glance it's a rather odd question, isn't it?

A rather odd question for John to be asking at all. But flick back a few pages to Luke chapter 3. Luke chapter 3, verse 3.

Where we are told that John went into all the region around the Jordan proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. John's is a message of salvation, salvation, but it's also a message of getting ready for the judgment to come.

Verse 9, Even now the axe is laid at the root of the trees. Verse 17, His winnowing fork is in his hands to clear his threshing floor. And yet by the time we get to Luke chapter 7, John is most likely in prison.

[8 : 43] And it must look to John at least that perhaps Jesus has only done half the job. He has proclaimed salvation and forgiveness. But what about the judgment?

What's happened to that? And so perhaps John's question is something like this. I've put my trust in Jesus Christ, but now I'm in prison and it doesn't seem to be working.

Is this it? Is Jesus the one or should I be looking for another? Now I take it that is a question that almost everyone in this room will find ourselves asking at some stage or another.

Those looking in on the Christian faith, I guess most obviously, the key issue is the identity of Jesus Christ. Who was he? But many Christians as well will at some stage find ourselves asking the question, have I made a mistake about Jesus?

So notice really that Jesus doesn't simply reply by saying yes, I am the one. Instead, have a look at verse 21.

[9 : 54] In that hour he healed many people of diseases and plagues and evil spirits and on many who are blind he bestowed sight. This is a one hour summary if you like, a one hour condensed summary of everything Jesus has been doing since he launched his manifesto back in Luke chapter 4.

And then verse 22. And he answered them, Go and tell John what you have seen and heard. The blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear.

The dead are raised up, the poor have good news preached to them. It's what you might call a compilation playlist of the new creation all taken from the book of Isaiah in the Old Testament. The blind receiving their sight, the lame walking, the deaf hearing are from Isaiah chapter 35 where God says he will come to save his people. He will lead them in triumphal procession to a place where the effects of God's judgment and the effects of human sin are no more.

Good news preached to the poor is a quote from Isaiah chapter 61. The proclamation of a saviour, a king, God himself who will come for those who recognise they are far from him.

[11:17] The climax in Isaiah is Isaiah 65 verse 17. A whole new creation, a new heaven, a new earth where sin and the effects of sin are no more.

And you'll see there are other references there on the outline that you can look up later on. Imagine for a moment that you go house hunting and imagine that you go into the estate agent and the estate agent says well look this is a wonderful new development which we know about, why don't you go and have a look at it?

The estate agent talks the talk of course, it sounds fantastic, it sounds like everything you ever wanted but can it really be true? We better go and have a look and see.

So you go to the building site and frankly it is just that. It is simply a building site. It is a mess and you think to yourself how on earth am I going to believe all these wonderful things that I've read about in the brochure?

Until that is you turn round and you see the show home. You go inside. It is beautiful. It is perfect.

[12:31] It is the finished article. It's everything you ever dreamt a home might be just as the brochure described it.

A glimpse if you like of the future of the whole development as in due course every home is completed. Well that in a sense is what happened in this one hour in verses 21 to 22.

a glimpse of the future as Jesus does all these healings it is if you like a show home for the new creation. Because you see Jesus' miracles are not simply demonstrations of power not like a fireworks display when we say wow isn't that amazing.

Yes they obviously do demonstrate his power and his authority but they are far more than that because you see put them all together as Jesus does here in verses 21 and 22 and what you get you get a whole new creation.

It shows us what heaven itself will be like. No disease no illness no death no evil a whole new world without any of the things that spoil this world.

[13:52] At which point I guess we might say to ourselves well hang on a moment if Jesus has come and if this is true then why is the world still broken?

Why are we still broken people? Well the answer is because Jesus has not yet finished his work just as when you go to a show home and the rest of the development isn't finished.

Yes Jesus came 2,000 years ago yes Jesus died so we can be forgiven and right with God he rose from the dead never to die again to show there is life beyond the grave he is now Lord but he will return he will return a second time and when he does so at the end of history why he will usher in this whole new creation this perfect world and notice really as well that unlike the building site where you simply have to trust the word of the developer the new creation is guaranteed by God himself did you notice verse 23 blessed is the one who is not offended by me it's a quote from Isaiah chapter 8 in the Old Testament verses 14 and 15 where it's a warning against rejecting God and can you see what Jesus is doing here he takes that verse and he doesn't say blessed is the one who is not offended by the God of Israel by the God of Isaiah but instead he said blessed is the one who is not offended by me is that not very striking

Jesus identifies himself as the God of the Old Testament the one who will bring the new creation consideration consider the ministry of Jesus but secondly consider the ministry of John the Baptist because the point here is in verses 24 to 30 that if you can work out who John is then you can work out who Jesus is have a look at verse 24 when John's messengers had gone Jesus began to speak to the crowds concerning John what did you go out into the wilderness to see a reed shaken by the wind what then did you go out to see a man dressed in soft clothing behold those who are dressed in splendid clothing and live in luxury are in kings courts what then did you go out to see a prophet yes I tell you and more than a prophet John was not a reed shaken by the wind verse 24 not a spineless crowd pleaser but a man of conviction nor verse 25 was he a pawn in the pocket of the establishment who'd never experience real life no verse 26 he was a prophet and no ordinary prophet at that rather the most significant of prophets with the task of preparing the way for God's

savior king

Jesus and that is then the significance of the quote there in verse 27 from Malachi so let's just turn back if we may to that first reading which we had from Malachi the very last book of the old testament on page 969 and I'm just going to read verse one Malachi chapter 3 verse 1 Malachi of course the final book of the old testament written in the 5th century BC and in particular will you notice the two people who are mentioned and the time frame of who is going to come when so Malachi 3 verse 1 God speaking behold I send my messenger and he will prepare the way before me and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight behold he is coming says the

[18:05] Lord of hosts two people first of all a messenger who will come then the Lord God himself who will come John's the messenger he's been calling people back to God to repent to prepare for God to come so if John is the messenger who then is Jesus why he is God himself and that is why back in Luke chapter seven in verse twenty eight despite John's great privilege of being the ones who heralds King Jesus despite his greatness in that sense nonetheless he is beaten in the great mistakes by the Christian isn't verse twenty eight extraordinary I tell you says Jesus among those born of women none is greater than John yet one who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he because of course every Christian lives after the death and resurrection of

Jesus we experience what John could only herald and look forward to we experience those of us who belong to Jesus and his disciples we experience the forgiveness of sins we experience life with God we experience knowing him as our heavenly father a new me remember John's question verse twenty shall we look for another it's a question isn't it about certainty it's a question about confidence so you see what has Jesus done while he's taken us back to the hard facts if you like of history the facts of his own ministry the facts about John these are public facts public events at the start of the gospel some of us will remember Luke makes much of the fact that he's collected together eyewitness evidence the facts are credible there was an article in the paper recently with a headline trust the experts not the online reviewers and the article as I read it was all about a journalist who had exposed the chicanery of online reviewing by claiming to have set up an appointment only restaurant so you had to book in by phone or online you couldn't just walk up it was in fact the shed in his back garden aided by photographs of what he called mood inspired food which was in fact shaving foam and bleach tablets he then posted breathtaking reviews on TripAdvisor and apparently within no time at all the shed as it was known was classed as one of London's top restaurants by TripAdvisor well you might think that's a handy way to make some money but the article concluded don't put your faith in online reviews but in the facts which of course is just what Luke wants us to do maybe maybe you're not a Christian maybe you have yet to be convinced about the facts why not read through Luke's gospel ask the question who was Jesus was he simply a prophet a great man or was he so much greater was he God himself don't be one of those people who claims to be searching for spiritual truth but never really seriously investigates the truth or maybe you are a Christian perhaps you're lacking certainty you're wondering whether you've made a mistake following

Jesus perhaps doubting even whether it's true I think most Christians experience those kinds of doubts at some stage or another because remember what this whole section of Luke 7 and 8 is about I put our New Year maths equation just at the top of the outline there as a reminder it's about having a big view of Jesus a big view of Jesus a big view of the salvation that he offers which leads in turn to a big life transforming discipleship but what does doubt do doubt shrinks my view of Jesus it shrinks my view of the salvation that he came to bring and I end up with a discipleship which is at best superficial and at worst non-existent which means you see when we do have doubts it's absolutely vital that we address those doubts I think the temptation perhaps is sometimes to shy away from them and to fear that if we look too closely and dig too deeply then actually we'll find the foundations just don't exist and the whole thing collapses perhaps just as we might shy away from going to the dentist or the doctor because we fear the worst we'll discover something which we don't really want to know and so we stay away make the most of doubt don't lose heart in the darkness if you are doubting at the moment go back and check the foundations the facts of history as Luke gives them to us here and then come out of your doubt rejoicing that there is indeed no need to look for another

Jesus died on the cross to bring the forgiveness of sins to those who trust him he rose from the dead three days later life beyond the grave to know him really is to have a new me to be forgiven to

declare right with God to be part of his family and to be confident of a new world a new creation when he returns consider the ministry of Jesus consider the ministry of John thirdly consider your response now have you noticed that both the sections we looked at so far they both end with a warning did you notice that in verse 23 blessed is the one who is not offended by me and then verse 30 the Pharisees and the lawyers rejected the purpose of God for themselves not having been baptized by John a warning both of them against those who reject

[24 : 54] Jesus remember that John's baptism is a baptism of repentance is how you receive the forgiveness of sins repentance is a decisive radical turning away from living life on my terms with me being in charge of my life with me deciding what is right and what is wrong to acknowledging that Jesus Christ is Lord and living his way to refuse to repent is to refuse to accept that I need a savior it is to refuse to accept that I need forgiveness it's what the Pharisees so sadly the religious establishments do in verse 30 but notice really it's not just them have a look at verse 31 to what then shall I compare the people of this generation and what are they like Jesus speaks of this generation I take it that he's talking about the majority response the way which so many people most people even responded to him why well not because of a lack of hard evidence but because they refuse to repent have a look at verses 32 to 35 notice

Jesus says this is a moral issue not a lack of evidence issue he takes us to the playground verse 32 they are like children sitting in the marketplace and calling to one another we played the flute for you and you did not dance we sang a dirge and you did not weep for John the Baptist has come eating no bread and drinking no wine and you say he has a demon the son of man has come eating and drinking and you say look at him a glutton a drunkard a friend of sinners and tax collectors it's what you might call the parable of the brats it is addressed to the refusers Jesus says think of the school playground for a moment and there's a group of children over there in the corner and regardless of what game you suggest you play whether it's weddings or funerals whatever the game is you suggest that you play they don't want to know I'm sure we've all met children like this not our own of course but the spoiled children who belong to other families and there they are they stand petulant their arms crossed defiant refusing to play the game that is suggested they are never satisfied they want a

Jesus who gets with their program who runs with their agenda no matter how much hard evidence there is they will not be satisfied and so rather than saying up front our hearts are hard and so we won't repent they either blame John or Jesus because they won't dance to their tune now I take it we have all met people like this perhaps the person who says if God really exists why doesn't he prove it to me in some dramatic way or if God really exists why does he allow such and such to happen or I only believe in a God who approves of my chosen lifestyle or perhaps it's the person who is endlessly trotting out second hand arguments now you can't trust the Bible all religions are the same why does God allow suffering now of course for some those are genuine questions but so often and for so many they are not they are just lazy excuses for unbelief says

Jesus now it may be that Jesus is describing someone here this morning in which case would you heed the warning the warning against dictating terms to Jesus having a small view of Jesus who fits in with what you think he should be like a Jesus perhaps who won't interfere with your life a Jesus who won't challenge your world view or the way in which you think of yourself or the way in which you think of others like these children in the parable perhaps you go off in a sulk when you encounter the real Jesus the Jesus of the Bible and actually you realize that he is not the Jesus of your imagination instead Jesus is challenging us isn't he if that is us to accept him as he is to have a big view of Jesus

Jesus who is Lord Jesus who is God yes Jesus who may well overturn our cherished beliefs and assumptions a Jesus before whom we are indeed willing to change willing to repent and willing to seek and accept the forgiveness that he offers but I take it to this final little section of this passage is also a great encouragement because it is saying that we can be confident about Jesus Christ in the face of rejection after all throughout the world today countless people are putting their trust in Jesus in China there are more Christians than there are members of the Communist Party just last week I was reading about the enormous growth of churches new churches existing churches in countries which used to be part of the Soviet Union and yet of course in much of secular western

[30 : 46] Europe the picture is very different isn't it and how easy we can be discouraged we can find ourselves asking am I deluded of course the narrative we so often hear in the media is that we are in contrast to those who reject Jesus who portray themselves as progressive tolerant inclusive

in short superior but Jesus reveals rejection for what it is it is a willful arrogance a refusal to believe the hard evidence be encouraged let's have a few moments of reflection I'll then lead us in prayer and then as we often try and do there'll be time for questions if anyone would like to ask a question go and tell

John what you have seen and heard the blind receive their sight the lame walk lepers are cleansed the deaf hear the dead are raised up the poor have good news preached to them blessed is the one who is not offended by me heavenly father we praise you very much indeed for this one hour which we have looked at this morning in the life of the lord jesus thank you for this show home so to speak of the new creation as disease sickness illness and death were in that moment banished we thank you that jesus is lord thank you that he will return to establish that new creation at the end of time and we pray heavenly father for each one of us please would you help us to trust his promises and please help us look forward eagerly to that final day and we ask it in his name amen we go to and we ask■