

Jesus is God's Messiah

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[0:00] So, how do you feel about multiple choice? If you had to sit a test or an exam, would you prefer that it was a bunch of short answer questions? Or are you happy if it was a big multiple choice test?

Some people love multiple choice, don't they? Because you've got an outside chance of getting the right answer. It's either A, B, C or D. But then sometimes you do a test and you look and you think, well, hang on, I think there's two correct answers, but I'm only allowed to circle one.

That's a bit confusing. Sometimes you definitely know the answer is option B. But then you look back on your test and you think, well, I've circled B already so many times it can't be B again.

And you start to doubt a perfectly correct answer. Here's a funny story about multiple choice. When I was at first year university, 1995, we had to do an exam. It was 100 multiple choice questions.

I had a friend called Jimmy who was a bit lazy. He didn't want to do any study for the exam. He said, don't worry, I'm trusting in my law of multiple choice. He went in the exam and circled C 100 times and walked out straight away.

[1:05] Jimmy got 51% on the exam. Of course, he was hauled before the faculty review board. It was obvious he didn't know the material. But then he got their exam right, technically.

So what could they do? That was a story about a university test. The multiple choice test in our passage is much more serious. It's a test that everyone has to pass if they want to enter into the kingdom of God.

I'm going to, should we do the test right now? Let me do the test for you. Here it goes. If a man brings dead people back to life, if he calms a storm, if he heals terminal illnesses, if he forgives sins and exercises evil, who is he?

Is he A, John the Baptist? Is he B, Elijah? Is he C, a prophet from long ago? Or is he D, God's king? Who is this man?

You see, in previous weeks, when Jesus is in action, that is the question that the people ask. Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him.

[2:14] Who is this who even forgives sins? Are you the one who is to come? Or should we expect someone else? Whenever Jesus heals people, he's giving them a glimpse, a little taste of what the kingdom of heaven is like, the kingdom of God is like.

A place of no sickness, no suffering, no sin, no death, and of course, no evil. People have to weigh the evidence. They have got to consider what they've seen and heard and come to a logical conclusion about who they think Jesus is.

You see, there are tons of questions that we would want to ask God when we meet him one day. There's really only one question that God would want to ask us in return. Who do you think Jesus is?

If you want to enter his kingdom, you have to be right about his king. And he extends this invitation to the kingdom to everyone who's got a pair of ears.

And this is our first point. Verse 1. Where it says they're proclaiming the kingdom of God, that is Jesus' invitation to the kingdom.

[3:38] The same sequence of words are there at the end of verse 6 and the end of verse 11. I put them in bold on that printout so you can see them. The thing that advances God's kingdom is not healing, but the proclamation of the gospel, the words about Jesus.

It is his invitation via the apostles to everyone who's got a pair of ears. But notice how urgent the invitation is.

Verse 3. He told them, Did you notice that the apostles are deliberately empty-handed?

Which might be God making them reliant on him to provide for their journey. But I think it's about making the apostles dependent on the type of welcome they receive.

You see, if they knock on the door and are not welcomed in, they'll have to move on to the next house. Because they have to find somewhere to stay and something to eat. They travel lightly to force the issue about how urgent the welcome needs to be.

[4:57] Because if people don't want to listen, the apostles will leave. That's fine. But they'll also take the gospel with them. And that means they're taking away that house's only opportunity to enter into the kingdom of God.

The invitation of salvation, it's to everyone with ears, but it is an urgent invitation. For us today, our context is a little different to that particular mission then.

Jesus provides us with houses and jobs and money. We're allowed to settle in one suburb or one job for years and years.

We're able to give the same family members, the same colleagues, many invitations to respond to the gospel. But it is still an urgent invitation.

Did you notice in the passage it says, If a house doesn't welcome you, shake the dust off your feet as a testimony against them. Shaking the dust off, that was a thing that Jewish people did when they left an unclean area.

[6:02] It was a way that they would show a separation from that unclean place. If people don't want to hear the gospel, then there will be a separation, as it were.

An outside versus inside of the kingdom of heaven. I guess it's just like we do when we wipe our feet or take our shoes off at the door.

A separation from filthy outside to clean inside. There will be a separation of the kingdom of God if people don't want to listen. As the apostles shake off the dust of their feet, as it were.

It is up to our loved ones to respond rightly to the invitation. They have to use their ears if they want to be saved. It requires urgent attention.

But it is still on Jesus' terms. And that is what you get when you look at Herod in our next point. Have a look at verse 6. Verse 6 says, The apostles set out from village to village.

[7:08] They proclaim the kingdom of God. Then look at verse 10. They return and report to Jesus what they've done. They go out, verse 6. They come back, verse 10. And in the middle, the author jams this event with Herod.

You see, Herod is a model of how not to respond. Notice that Herod takes the test, the multiple choice test. Verse 9. Who then is this Jesus I keep hearing such things about?

Is he, verse 7, John the Baptist, raised from the dead? Is he, verse 8, Elijah? Is he, verse 8, one of the prophets long ago come back to life?

You see, Herod is in the exam room. But he's confused and perplexed about who Jesus is. Did you notice that Herod never considers option D on the test?

That Jesus is the Messiah? I wonder if that's because Herod is a tetrarch, which is like a ruler. And he won't tolerate any other competition to him.

[8:10] Perhaps he's trying to understand Jesus without repenting of his sinful life. Remember Herod slept with his brothers or took his brother's wife? You see, if the sign that you wanted to repent of your sins was to be baptized by John, at the very other end of that spectrum is Herod, who decided to cut off John's head instead.

Perhaps Herod is, here's what Jesus is doing, and thinks it must be one of the great prophets come back to life. But then he's confused. Because as far as he knows, dead people can't come back to life.

You see, either way, Herod can't figure out who Jesus is, because he won't fit within his box. He won't fit within his worldview. At the end of verse 9, it says, Herod tried to see Jesus, which I think is like saying, Herod tried to see Jesus by his own brains, in his own steam, within his own worldview.

It's no wonder he can't figure out who he is. The apostles go out, verse 6, they return home, verse 10, in the middle is a model of how not to respond to who Jesus is, not to put him inside your worldview.

And you can see that this is the case, because look over at verse 18 near the bottom. See, in verse 18, you've got the apostle Peter. The apostle Peter also takes the test.

[9:40] Is Jesus, he says, sorry, verse 18, Once when Jesus was praying in private with his disciples, and his disciples were with him, he asked them, Who do the crowds say I am?

In verse 19, is Jesus John the Baptist? Is he, option B, Elijah? Is he, option C, one of the prophets of long ago? It's the very same test, isn't it?

That everyone has to sit. But Jesus narrows his focus here. Verse 20, But what about you? Who do you say that I am? Peter answered, God's Messiah.

And of course, that is the right answer. You have to be right about the king if you want to enter the kingdom. And maybe Peter got the right answer, because he is the goody, and Herod is the baddy.

Do you think that might be the reason why? I'm not so sure, because later on in the gospel, Peter will make some terrible mistakes. When Jesus is on trial for his life, and really needs a friend, Peter's the one who disowns him three times.

[10:44] I don't think that seeing Jesus clearly is about who the good he is, and who the bad he is, per se. I think the answer is whether Jesus provides the right answer.

And that is what you get with the feeding of the 5,000 miracle in the middle. Did you notice it goes Herod, and then Peter, and a feeding of the 5,000 in the middle.

They both sit the same test. Only Peter gets the right answer. But in the middle, Luke has jammed this story about a heavenly provision. And so let's look at verse 12.

Late in the afternoon, the 12 came to him and said, send the crowd away, so they can go to the surrounding villages and countryside, and find food and lodgings. Because we are in a remote place here.

A remote place that literally means a wilderness. The idea is that they're miles away, from a supermarket, or the local cafe. It's a hopeless situation with that many people.

[11:46] Just to highlight how hopeless it is, verse 13, Jesus said to them, you give them something to eat. And they answered, well, we've only got five loaves of bread and two fish.

Unless we go and buy food for all this crowd, about 5,000 men were there. You see, humanly speaking, there's a big problem with the maths. 5,000 men, not to mention women and children.

Let's call it 10,000 mouths to feed. If they all have enough to eat, with some left over, let's just say that's two sandwiches a person. So 10,000 people, two sandwiches each, 20,000 sandwiches.

That is enough to scare any catering team. I'm making eyes at Sharon and Ann Worsum over there. 20,000 sandwiches in one hour, please.

That's enough to scare anyone. And it's enough to scare the apostles too. Because they asked Jesus, look, send everyone away. We've only got two fish and five loaves.

[12:48] We don't have the money to buy 20,000 sandwiches. It is a hopeless situation, humanly speaking. But after all they've seen Jesus do, do they really think that he would be scared away by the maths?

I guess it shows why Luke is so big on certainty. Certainty is not an easy thing when it comes to Jesus, even for the first-hand eyewitnesses who got to see it all with their very own eyeballs.

As we read this famous Sunday school story, the question for you, who do you think Jesus is? Verse 16.

Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke them. Then he gave them to the disciples to distribute to the people. They all ate and were satisfied.

And the disciples picked up 12 basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over. So we're not sure of the science of how this works. Probably it's the same power that was able to bring dead people back to life or calm a storm like it was a naughty puppy.

[14:02] Sit. But at the very least, you have to say that Jesus is someone who's in control of the laws of science, that he's someone with the power to create life with very rotten, raw materials, that he's someone who cares about people, who welcomes them in, who provides enough and satisfies their needs.

You see, you get Herod failing the test, verse 7 to 9. You get Peter passing a test, verse 18 to 20. And in the middle is a story about heavenly provision, which means even though it's up to us to listen and figure out who Jesus is, ultimately, it's up to Jesus to provide the right answer.

It's up to Jesus to welcome us in to the kingdom of God. It's on his terms and not ours. You see, every Christian has passed the multiple choice test.

Who do you think Jesus is? We all say option D. He is God's Messiah. That is the correct answer. But the fact that we got it right is not because we are better than everyone out there.

It's not because we're more compassionate or kinder or more middle class or more predisposed to becoming Christians than they are. On our own, in an exam room, trying to figure out Jesus, we'd all be like Herod, trying to put Jesus within our little boxes, fitting him within our own worldviews.

[15:30] We'd all be like the apostles who are flummoxed by the maths of it all. How is he going to help us? Five thousand people, five loaves, two fish. We'd all be flummoxed.

Only Jesus enables us to see him rightly. In our passage is a miracle about heavenly provision to prove that he's the one who provides the answers.

If you're not a Christian here today, you cannot enter the kingdom of God unless you get Jesus right. It's up to you to listen wherever Jesus' words are spoken.

But you won't be able to figure it out on your own unless Jesus provides you with the insight. Unless by his spirit, he opens your blind eyes first.

He's longing to do that. His invitation to the kingdom of God, it's for everyone with a pair of ears, which is everyone in this room. But it is up to him.

[16:32] We do come in on his terms and not ours. For us who are Christians, the apostles in this story, they go from place to place, proclaiming, sharing the gospel.

The thing that advances God's kingdom is not good deeds. It is not healing. It is the proclamation of the word. And so it is up to you, up to us, to tell our loved ones about Jesus, to invite them to respond.

If you're not sure what words to use, a couple of weeks ago, we saw a demon possessed man. Once he was healed and in his right mind, he ran around the countryside, telling people what Jesus had done for him in his life.

And I reckon that's a pretty excellent model for evangelism. See, if you're a Christian, you can speak about sins forgiven, about peace with God, about salvation from judgment, about a place in his family.

Just tell people what Jesus has done for you in your life. They can't argue with that. Just tell them what he's done for you. And ask people to invite Jesus to do the same for them.

[17:49] If you live alone, perhaps you're limited by health. Maybe you can't get out and tell people, have conversations with people about Jesus. The application for you is prayer.

Ask God to save the ones you love. It's up to him anyway. Ask God to bless the ministry of the church.

Basically, all we do here is keep talking about Jesus in one way or another. Ask people, ask God to bless the ministry of our church, that many more people would respond to him rightly and be saved.

In the story, getting Jesus right is the difference between separation. It's the difference between inside and outside the kingdom of God.

The last application today is for the Christians in the room to take the test again. Who do you think Jesus is? And let me ask that in a little more of a pointed fashion.

[18:54] Who does your life show you think Jesus is? Does the way we live our lives still show that we think Jesus is our king?

Or do our lives show that perhaps we've just relegated him to just one of the other holy prophets from long ago? Sit the test again. Ask yourself, who do you think Jesus is?

And while that might not feel like much of an application, next week, just to warn you, next week, I think is perhaps the hardest passage in the Bible to understand.

It's about following Jesus, losing your lives, taking up our crosses. You need to be clear about who you think Jesus is when you realize next week what it looks like to follow him.

So that's enough for me. We're going to pray now. And so do join me. Lord Jesus, we thank you that you have shown us, you have provided us with the right answer, that you have shown us that you are God's Messiah.

[19:59] And please, Lord Jesus, would we always see you as that? Would our lives align ourselves around the fact that you are our king? And we pray for our loved ones that they would listen, that they would listen and we would speak.

Please, Lord Jesus, give us opportunities to share the gospel, to invite our loved ones into the kingdom of God, the way you have invited us.

Please, Lord Jesus, open their blind eyes, provide the way, so that they too can be saved. We ask it in your name. Amen.