

Tell Us Plainly

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[0 : 00] This is the evening service at Holy Trinity on the 6th of February 2000. The preacher is Phil Muleman.

His sermon is entitled Tell Us Plainly and is from John chapter 10 verses 22 to 42. Father, please open our hearts and our minds to help us understand your word.

And we pray, Lord God, that your spirit would speak through us tonight and that it would indeed cause us to grow out and serve you more fully. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Well, have you ever noticed how skilled politicians are very good at ducking questions?

In order to avoid a direct yes or no to a question, they will give a long-winded speech about the subject but never answer it directly. To do so, I think, would be catastrophic for them.

[1 : 08] Now, I think one of the best TV shows which illustrates this is probably before some of your time is Yes Minister, where Jim Hacker never really answers a question directly when asked of him or Humphrey, his advisor.

You ask him a question and the rest of the show is basically taken up with his answer, which is never directly answering the question. Well, why do politicians avoid telling the plain truth?

I think it's for a number of reasons. Firstly, they're trying to save their own neck. It's a case of self-preservation for them. Secondly, telling the truth is too hard perhaps for us to hear.

We just couldn't bear hearing the truth. And thirdly, it's perhaps to maintain some semblance of power and so on. Don't tell them everything.

That way I'm still in control and all those sorts of things. Well, the question I want to ask you tonight is whether Jesus was just another skilled political leader or was he something more?

[2 : 16] And this passage from John 10 seems to raise this question as Jesus is confronted in the Jerusalem temple during what they call the festival of dedication by the Jewish people who want to know plainly who he is.

Verse 24 of this passage chapter says, How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly. It's a pretty straightforward question, isn't it?

Well, how will Jesus tackle this question? Now, we as readers of John's Gospel already know that Jesus is the Messiah, the question that they ask him, as he has spelled that out on at least one occasion in this Gospel.

Back in chapter 4, when we know the story of Jesus who meets the Samaritan woman at the well and he tells her everything that she ever did and so on, then she makes this claim later on in the chapter, at the end of chapter 4, I know that the Messiah will come, or words to that effect.

And Jesus says plainly to her, I who speak to you am he. In other words, he's saying I am the Messiah. In the other Gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke, we see the turning point in Jesus' ministry is when his disciples declare privately to him that he is the Messiah.

[3 : 45] I was at a men's Bible study group the other day and I was speaking to them about Mark's Gospel and in Mark chapter 8, the turning point there is when Peter, who answers on behalf of the disciples, answers the question of Jesus.

Jesus says, what do the people say about me? And then he says, who do you say I am? And Peter says, you are the Messiah. You are the Christ. So in private, Jesus has been identified as the Messiah.

But here in this chapter, in verse 24, he is being told by the Jews, the Pharisees and the Jewish authorities to publicly state whether or not he is the Messiah.

How is Jesus able to answer that? He is able to state it privately. Why can't he state it publicly?

Well, let me give you a reason.

It is all to do with the Jewish understanding of Messiah, the word Messiah. Now the popular understanding back then of the Messiah was of a political and a military figure sent by God to overthrow the Roman rule of Jerusalem and restore God's kingdom.

[5 : 01] Now at the time of Jesus, the rule that ruled the area was the Romans. And the Jewish thought about the Messiah was that it was someone who would come in and would bring about a physical restoration of God's people rather than a spiritual restoration.

And it's this political and military understanding of the Messianic role which made it impossible or very, very difficult for Jesus to make the claim about being the Messiah public knowledge.

You see, if he did claim publicly that he was the Messiah, it perhaps could have led to a revolt by the people against the current political regime of the time.

Furthermore, if Jesus had claimed his Messiahship publicly during this particular feast of dedication which we're told about here in verse 22, it would have caused an even greater sensation amongst the people.

Let me tell you why. This festival of dedication celebrated the rededication of the temple as the sanctuary of the living God under the heroic leadership of a guy called Judas Maccabeus who is a Jew who had led a successful revolt against the Syrians some 160 years prior to this particular occasion.

[6 : 33] And so now these, their ancestors now here at this particular time celebrate in this festival of the rededication of the temple. And it's very much on their mind about this revolt and so on.

And perhaps they too, just perhaps, are looking for the Messiah to lead them into this new revolt where they could overthrow a regime or something like that.

So it's against this backdrop that we see how Jesus answers his critics. And it is vital that he chooses his words carefully so that he doesn't create a riot and so on.

So what does Jesus do? How does he answer the people here? He points them to the witnesses that they have already had that he has already supplied.

The first one that he has supplied is his works. That is, the miracles that have been done in his father's name in verse 25. Though these people, these Jews and the Pharisees and so on were perhaps not present at all the miracles that we read about in John's Gospel, it's highly likely that they've heard about them.

[7 : 52] For example, the story about the healing of a blind man which we heard last week. The story of a paralyzed man in chapter 5. And the miracle of the feeding of the 5,000 in chapter 6.

It's more than likely that they've heard of these stories if not been present at some of them. So his works, Jesus' works, the miracles that have been done in his father's name are his first witness.

The second witness that he points them to is his words. In verse 27 he says, My sheep hear my voice. I know their voice and they follow me.

The people present that he's talking to have rejected Jesus' words because, as he goes on to say, they do not belong to my sheep.

They've rejected Jesus' words because they do not belong to my sheep. Now these works and words ought to be enough to help these people see that Jesus is indeed the Messiah.

[8 : 57] But because their hearts and their minds have been tainted with this popular belief of the time about the nature of the Messiah, that he would be some sort of warrior and so on, they are unable to see Jesus' divinity and they are unwilling to take heed of his words despite some, what I think, is pretty compelling evidence.

Well the sad situation for these people who will not believe in the works done by Jesus and the things said is that they show themselves to be not only against him, against Jesus, but also by implication against God.

It shows that they belong to the devil as we read about in chapter 8 and that therefore eternal life with God, the Father, is not within their grasp and it's because they do not hear his voice, Jesus' voice.

They do not follow. They do not believe in him. Well in contrast to this rather gloomy picture of people who reject Jesus, we see him refer to some of the supreme privileges for those who do believe in him.

Let me go through some of them. The first one is that they are his sheep and he is their shepherd. For those who believe in Jesus, they are his sheep and he is their shepherd.

[10:30] He knows them and they follow him, as verse 27 says. They respond to his call. Now when I was on holidays at Christmas, we went down to Phillip Island and we took our kids out to the Seal Life Centre at the Nobbies and you go on a little boat ride which is all part of the excitement of the day and one of the rooms that you go into is this theatre room and what it has beaming into that theatre is live pictures of the seals that are out on the rocks a little bit further out.

Who's seen that? The seals on the rocks. They have these pictures beaming in. Now on this rock there's four and a half, five thousand seals at any time.

And earlier on about twelve weeks before or perhaps a little bit sooner all these seal pups had been born. Now if you've ever seen a seal pup they all look the same.

But they all know who their mother is because when they are born we are told that the mother makes a sound and they know the mother seal's sound.

And the mother would access. Thank you very much. And they also are able to tell their mother's smell as well and the mother's able to likewise be able to pick up their smell.

[11:55] They learn this from birth. Now Jesus too knows us when we respond to his call in our lives.

We learn more about him and his ways as we seek to understand him through his word. So that's the first thing about those who believe in Jesus.

We are his sheep and he is the shepherd. The second thing is for those who believe in Jesus those who respond to him are a gifted people.

The gift that they receive is eternal life. All who believe will live. And therefore the new life of the kingdom, the kingdom of God, the kingdom of heaven, is theirs.

They are no longer a part of this passing world. Sure, they're still in it, but they are no longer under the power of the evil one.

[12:55] They're no longer under the power of the devil. Verse 28 says, they will never, they will never perish. Now the word eternity, which he talks about eternal life here, the word eternity was written around the streets of Sydney years and years ago, and it was inscribed on the Harbour Bridge on New Year's Eve this year.

And the word eternity is a reality to the follower of Jesus Christ. And Jesus said earlier in this chapter that he came so that we may have life and have it abundantly.

Will we enter into that abundant life the moment that we respond to Jesus' call on our life. It's a present and a future reality, but it's something that we're able to grasp right now.

Well the third thing that happens for those who believe in Jesus Christ, we are told is that they are a secure group. They are a secure group. Verse 29 says, no one can snatch it out of the Father's hand.

Jesus' people are his possession. Nothing can take it from them. He has committed himself to them even as they for their part have however falteringly committed themselves to him.

[14:25] He is committed to them. Now if you've ever worked around toddlers or you've got kids, you often see them snatch toys out of each other's hands.

And then what follows, what follows when a kid snatches a toy out of someone's hand? A loud howl usually. And there's fighting and someone has to intervene.

Usually it's mum, sometimes it's dad these days. Well as followers of Jesus, no one can take from us what he has given to us.

It's impossible. No one can snatch Jesus from us. Now it seems that like a skilled politician, Jesus has avoided answering the question about whether or not he's the Messiah.

But he hasn't. He wants these people to judge for themselves as to who he is. The evidence is there for them if they are willing to open their eyes.

[15:33] And if they open their eyes to the works and the words of Jesus as I've talked about, then they too will have this true understanding of the nature of the Messiah. And the same applies for us today.

There are many people who are seeking yet unwilling to listen to Jesus' words as written for us in the Bible. people. They accept the moral teachings of Jesus.

Oh yes, he was a good bloke. But they don't accept the spiritual truths about salvation and eternal life as we see them here written in the Bible. But friends, that does not lead to eternal life if you accept just the moral teachings of Jesus.

You see, following Jesus is a job lot. It's not just whatever we want to believe or add to the things that we already believe. The person who believes only Jesus' moral teaching is no closer to eternal life than the person who doesn't.

They must believe and obey fully everything that Jesus has said and done. Well, Jesus hasn't answered them plainly as they have requested, but he has pointed them to the works that he has done in his Father's name and told them they do not believe because they do not belong to God.

[16:59] And now he qualifies, he goes on to qualify why he can say that they do not belong to God with a startling comment in verse 30. He says, the Father and I are one.

The Father and I are one. Now, these are words which are hard to understand. But in the context of this passage, it means, I think, a complete unity between the Father and the Son.

In other words, what the Father thinks, the Son thinks also. So those whom Jesus says are his is also what God would say.

And the reason this is what God says is because Jesus is God in the flesh. The beginning of John's Gospel tells us that the Word was with God and the Word was God.

And later in chapter 1 verse 14 we're told that the Word became flesh. The Word referring to, of course, Jesus Christ. Now, these Jews, these people, have asked for a plain statement that would clarify whether or not Jesus was the Messiah.

[18:26] In verse 30, Jesus has given them far more information. The Father and I are one. Now, however we may understand this verse today, it is clear here how Jesus' audience understood it.

In verse 31, the Jews took up stones again to stone him. Jesus goes on to remind them of his many miracles.

But it's too late. They will have none of it. They don't want any of it. They're fed up with this guy and Jesus' crime in their mind is clear.

Blasphemy because you, though only a human being, are making yourself God. Well, the punishment for blasphemy in the Old Testament, Leviticus chapter 24 says, is death, stoning.

The whole congregation gets involved in it. Go out and stone them. That's the punishment for blasphemy. Well, what's the problem here?

[19:36] The problem here for the Jews is that they see only Jesus' humanity. He's a mere human being.

They will not consider for a moment his divinity. They won't look at that at all. The irony is, though, is that Jesus is not seeking to become as God.

He's not trying to do that. This was the sin of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. There in the Garden of Eden, you know the story. God says, don't eat from that particular tree.

And later, this serpent comes along and says, if you eat from this tree, you won't die. He virtually says, you will be like God.

That's the serpent deceives them. And Eve and Adam, they are tempted and they eat it because they want to become like God. Well, Jesus isn't seeking that. In becoming a human, Jesus has renounced any claim for himself so that he may carry out his father's will.

[20:45] And that is to bring about salvation for his people. He's not bent on his own glory, but seeks only the glory of the father.

In the New Testament, in the book of Philippians, the letter to the Philippians, the apostle Paul tells us that Jesus did not grasp equality with God. If you could think of it as a parabola, I know we've got to think about maths for a moment, but just think of it as a parabola.

Jesus is there in heaven and he's in glory with his father. He descends to earth as a human being. He becomes one of us and he's humiliated.

He's put to death on a cross at the hands of human beings, but he rises again and he reascends or he ascends into glory, into his rightful place.

Well, this charge of blasphemy that Jesus is accused of is a serious one and we see how Jesus deals with it by referring them to their scriptures.

[21:57] What is our Old Testament? And he goes on to quote from the Psalms in Psalm 82, verse 6 says this, in the NRSV it says, I say you are gods.

In this passage it says, I said you are gods. And he's referring, Jesus is referring to those who were the writers of God's word I think.

And that means he's referring to the prophets and so on who wrote God's word, penned it down and so on. And in that Psalm, these writers are virtually given the status of gods.

And then Jesus goes on to say in verse 35 and 36, and I'm going to paraphrase it because I think these are hard words to understand. He goes and says this, if scripture calls your ancestors, referring to the writers of the Psalms and so on, if scripture calls your ancestors gods, and he goes on and says, and scripture doesn't lie, why do you yell blasphemer at the unique one the father has set apart, or as the NRSV version says here, sanctified and sent into the world just because I said I am the son of God.

The irony here is that Jesus is the word made flesh. He is God. Yet they, these Jewish authorities are wanting to stone him.

[23 : 27] They are wanting to stone the true and living God. Now the word that we see there in verse 36 sanctified means and has the idea of holiness, setting apart or dedication.

Now in the past weeks we have seen how Jesus has been the fulfiller of the feasts of Israel. So a couple of weeks ago when I preached I talked about the Feast of Tabernacles and at the Feast of Tabernacles which is a festival using water and light as symbols he tells the Jews there that I am the light of the world and a little bit further back he says that he is the one who can provide living water.

Well here again in this feast Jesus is the fulfiller of this feast of dedication remember I said earlier that the feast of dedication celebrated the rededication of the temple as the sanctuary of the living God Jesus is the one whom the Father whom God has dedicated from all eternity as the meeting place of God and humanity he is the sanctuary in and through whom the living God may be approached and worshipped in other words he is the means the one and only means by which we have access to God the Father again Jesus encourages his audience to look back to the works that he has done in the name of his father and it is the works that he has done that point clearly to the father's presence with him but his audience won't tolerate it they won't have a bar of it the end of the road has been reached they've had enough they want him gone so they try to arrest him they want to get rid of him and they want to get rid of him now what do we find out verse 39 he escaped from their hands why it's because his hour has not yet come you see it's not the authorities that are in control of everything as much as they would like to think that they are but it is

God who is in control of all things Jesus time where he will be handed over to the way of humans is fast approaching it's only a matter of chapters away really but it's not at this time and God is going to be the one who declares that time the last three verses of this passage tell us where Jesus goes to and it's worth noting the reception that he receives there verse 40 he went away again Jesus went away again across the Jordan to the place where John had been baptised in earlier and he remained there many came to him and they were saying John performed no sign but everything that John said about this man was true and many believed in him there the people there where Jesus went to remembered John the Baptist and the things that he said about Jesus now John the Baptist performed no miracles no signs there but they remembered what John said about the one who was to come Jesus the Lamb of God that he will perform many miracles and so on and they remembered that and as a result many believed in Jesus not just some many believed in Jesus now this is in stark contrast to the reception of the Jews here in Jerusalem in this portico of Solomon in the temple at this feast of dedication they drive him out of the temple virtually but where Jesus goes many believed in him well I asked earlier if Jesus was just another skilled political operator or political leader and my answer to that is no he would make a good politician

[28 : 16] I think because he knows how to speak skillfully and he is honest and these I think are essential qualities that we need in today's political arena but I'm not here to talk about politics you see Jesus is far greater than any other political leader any political leader that has been or ever will be he's far greater than that he is the son of God he is God in the flesh he is the word made flesh and to his audience he challenges them to believe in him because of the works that he does in his father's name any glory that comes his way any glory that comes to Jesus goes directly to his father to God but these people are unwilling to respond to him they will not believe because they are blind to who he is and therefore they are blind to

God the evidence for Jesus to us who live this side of the cross I think is even more compelling than it is for those whom Jesus spoke to in this temple you see Jesus is risen from the dead isn't he yet so many people will not believe in him they reject him the Bible tells us that if we reject him in this life then he will reject us in the life to come but there are also so many people out in this world that have not heard of Jesus can you believe that they are like sheep without a shepherd they have no one to guide or to direct them now I don't think that any of us here have to look too far to see that

this passage is a challenge for each one of us who are God's people to know what we believe about Jesus Christ and to continue on believing that because eternity eternal life is there for us it's waiting for us it's also a challenge for those who do not believe in him to look at his life and to come to a decision about him and finally it is a challenge to each one of us to tell others about him so that they too may have the chance to respond in faith to the Lord Jesus Christ what say what do the the the the