

How to respond to Jesus rightly

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[0 : 00] And there's an expression which I wonder, well, I'm sure you've heard in English. It's called moving the goalposts. It goes like this. You ask someone a question. Sorry, someone asks you a question.

You give them an answer. And then they say, yeah, but I need more. And so you give them another answer. Then they ask you a different question. You answer that as well. And then they ask you another question.

You give them another answer. And so on and so forth until very quickly you realize they're not really interested in the answer. They're just trying to be difficult. It's very frustrating. We experience moving the goalposts when we're filling in forms or applying for big things at Centrelink or Medicare, perhaps even a mortgage with the bank.

They say, fill in this form. And so we do. And then they say, oh, no, no, now you need to complete this other documentation. And so you do. And then they say, oh, wait, wait, can you please go and get us some references?

And so you do. And then they say, no, no, wait, we also need you to provide a stat deck as well. And so you do. It's very frustrating. It feels like they're moving the goalposts.

[1 : 05] We've seen this as well with the different strategies to COVID. We will ease you out of lockdown when the vaccination, sorry, the infection rates are low.

And so they got low, but nothing happened. And then they said, well, no, actually, it's about hospitalization rates. But, oh, OK. And then that was pretty low. And then it became about vaccination rates.

It was very frustrating. It felt like people were moving the goalposts. And we see this in the Christian life as well. Have you ever had a conversation with someone about Christianity and they say to you, I'd like to believe in Jesus.

I just can't trust the Bible. And so you say and point out the historical reliability of the New Testament. And then they say, well, I still can't believe in Jesus because there are starving children in Africa.

And then you say, well, look, even Jesus suffers. He comes to end all the pain. And they say, oh, but I still can't believe in Jesus because of all the terrible things his people have done.

[2 : 06] And they throw the Crusades at you. And then you point out that, look, even Jesus hates that. In fact, he gives his life to atone for the wickedness of his people.

And then they say, I still can't believe in Jesus until he shows up in my lounge room with my own private miracle. At which point you realize they're just moving the goalposts and that more evidence isn't the issue.

And in that way, moving the goalposts is the opposite to certainty. Because even if Jesus did appear, they still wouldn't be convinced. You see, last week, the claim was that Jesus went to a funeral.

And while he was at the funeral, he made the dead man rise, death to life. From the grave. Yet no one who saw it tried to move the goalposts. Instead, they were certain about what they'd seen. They were so certain they said, wow, death to life. God must have come to help his people. In fact, they were so certain about what Jesus had done that they spread the news about him throughout Judea and the surrounding countryside.

[3 : 16] And that is where we left last week. And the surrounding countryside is interesting because that's exactly where we find John the Baptist in our passage today.

John or John the Baptist, he's in the wilderness and the news about Jesus has finally reached his ears. So everyone have a look at verse 18 at the top of your page.

Verse 18. John's disciples told him all about these things. Calling two of them, he sent them to the Lord. Are you the one who is to come or should we expect someone else?

And that is the right question. In fact, he asks it again verbatim just to underline it. Verse 20. Are you the one who is to come or should we expect someone else?

You see, all Israel were expecting a savior. Their Old Testaments kept telling them so. But is Jesus the guy? Does he fit the profile?

[4 : 15] Look at verse 21. At that very time, Jesus cured many who had diseases, sicknesses and evil spirits and gave sight to many who were blind. So he replied to the messengers.

Go back and report to John what you have seen and what you have heard. Jesus, are you the one who is to come? He says, what do you reckon?

How many more different things can I save people from? You should be able to figure it out from the evidence, from the eye and ear testimony. The blind receive sight.

The lame walk. Those who have leprosy are cleansed. The deaf hear. The dead are raised. And the good news is proclaimed to the poor. You see, these miracles, they're the Old Testament expectation of what the Savior will do.

Don't move the goalposts on him. And throughout Luke's gospel, every time Jesus is in action, he always conjures up two different responses from the people.

[5 : 19] Some people accept the evidence and they believe that he is the one. They are, verse 23, blessed. But other people, verse 23, stumble or are offended on account of what Jesus is doing.

Because no matter what he does, they refuse to believe. But why do people react to Jesus so differently? Why is it that when you see his death and resurrection, you think, wow, that is genius.

Whereas your family and friends look at the same thing and think, wow, that is stupid. One reason later in chapter 8 is about listening.

Whether we've got hearts that want to hear what he says. But the answer today depends on how they treat John the Baptist. John the Baptist.

And that seems like a bit of a strange thing to say, that our attitude to Jesus depends on our attitude to John. But throughout Luke's gospel, Jesus and John are tied very closely together.

[6 : 21] In chapter 1, John's birth is foretold and then Jesus' birth is foretold. John's mother, Jesus' mother, they're cousins. The two men are related.

John baptizes with water. Jesus baptizes with the Holy Spirit. How we respond to Jesus depends on how we respond to John the Baptist. And this is our second point.

Look at verse 24. After John's messengers left, Jesus began to speak to the crowd about John. His argument here is very dense.

I'll just do it quite quickly. Essentially, he talks about how special John is. Verse 26. John is not just a prophet. He is more than a prophet.

Verse 28. I tell you, among those born of women, there is no one greater than John. John is very special. And you can see that in verse 27. John is the one about whom it is written, I will send my messenger ahead of you who will prepare your way before you.

[7 : 24] He's quoting Malachi 3, our Old Testament reading. You see, Malachi 3 says the coming Savior will have a special messenger. The messenger will prepare the way.

The two are tied closely together. When I was living in London, very rarely, once in a blue moon, you would see the queen on the road.

And what she has is about 10 police motorcycles that ride ahead of her. But these aren't regular motorcycles. These are very special because these are bright white with no, you know, the police stickers, the blue and white.

None of that. These motorbikes are bright white. And what the motorbikes do is they, two of them ride ahead and stop the traffic lights. And then another two ride ahead and stop the next traffic lights.

And then a further two, stop the next traffic on and on and on until about five intersections are cleared. And then behind them all comes the biggest Rolls Royce you've ever seen. And in there is a little old lady who you can barely see her hand.

[8 : 25] That's the queen that you just, if you blink and you'll miss her. But those motorbikes are very much like John the Baptist. He prepares the road ahead of Jesus.

Only John doesn't use motorbikes and sirens because he famously uses baptism. You see, you can tell who loves Jesus and who is offended by Jesus depending on how they treat John the Baptist.

You see, when John was first on the scene, can I have a slide, please? When John was first on the scene, this is what happened. He went into all the country around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

Next slide. John said to the crowds coming out to be baptized by him, you brood of vipers who warned you to flee from the coming wrath, produce fruit in keeping with repentance.

Next slide. He says tax collectors don't collect any more than you're required. Soldiers don't extort money and don't accuse people falsely. You see, John's baptism is about repentance.

[9 : 36] Repentance is a 180 degree turn away from our sinful lives and back towards the Lord.

You see, very simply, if you believe Jesus is the one, you'll acknowledge that the right way to meet God begins with repentance.

You'll be very pro-John the Baptist. Look at verse 29. All the people, even the tax collectors, when they heard Jesus' words, they acknowledged that God's way was right.

Why? Because they'd been baptized by John. But if you're offended by Jesus, you won't want to repent. You'll be very anti-John the Baptist. Verse 30. The Pharisees and the experts in the law, they rejected God's purpose for themselves because they'd not been baptized by John.

You see, repentance is the key when it comes to meeting Jesus. It was signified by John's baptism.

In fact, even today in the Anglican Church, our baptism is very similar or is about very similar things.

So in baptism, I know lots of you will have been baptized. The priest will ask the candidate these questions. Do you turn to Christ? Do you repent to Christ?

[10 : 55] Do you repent of your sins? Do you reject selfish living and all that is evil? Do you renounce Satan and all that is unjust? They're public promises about doing a 180 degree turn away from our sinful pasts towards the Christ.

And while we might expect that it's only the good people who will make promises like that while the bad people shy away, in verse 29, it's the tax collectors and the sinners who are coming out in droves to be baptized.

Whereas verse 30, it's the religious types who are too self-righteous to be bothered. And verse 29 and verse 30, they will play themselves out next week at a dinner party where Jesus will have dinner with a Pharisee and a tax collector.

Sorry, and a sinner. One of them will love Jesus. The other will be very rude to him. And the difference between the two depends on how sinful they think they are. You see, if you think Jesus is the promised Savior, you'll acknowledge that the right way to meet God begins with baptism.

But if you're not certain, perhaps you just need more evidence. And this is our third point. Look at verse 31. Jesus went on to say, To what then can I compare the people of this generation?

[12 : 23] What are they like? They're like children sitting in the marketplace and calling out to each other. We played the pipe for you and you did not dance. We sang a dirge and you did not cry. Our story today started with two questions to Jesus.

He finishes with two of his own about the people. He says, To what then can I compare the people of this generation? What are they like? And his answer is that they are like spoiled brats.

Do you ever see a spoiled brat when you go to Westfield or the shops? Horrible creatures, aren't they? Spoiled brats. Little kids who've been given everything by mum and dad and they stomp their feet.

Never satisfied. Having tantrums. Jesus describes this generation as being like children in the marketplace at Westfield. Verse 32.

We played the pipe for you. We played a happy song. But you did not dance. All right then. You're not in a happy mood. How about we sing you a dirge? Something more somber.

[13 : 27] Oh, but you don't even cry. In other words, nothing will please you. You're behaving like spoiled brats. You see, the question today is, Jesus, are you the one who is to come?

Let's see. I healed the blind, the lame, the lepers, the deaf, the demon possessed. Is that enough? No. All right then. What about I raise a dead man at his own funeral?

Will that do the trick? No. What about I send you the greatest prophet the world has ever seen who comes with baptism? Will that do the trick? No.

Nothing will please the Pharisees. They're behaving like spoiled brats. Verse 33. When John the Baptist came, he did not eat or drink.

Yet you called him evil. That is, you said he is a demon. All right then. When the Son of Man came, he did eat and drink. But you still said he is a sinner.

[14 : 24] That is, he's a glutton and a drunkard. You're like spoiled brats. Nothing will satisfy you. We play you a happy song. You're not happy. We sing you a sad song. You're not sad.

You keep moving the goalposts because you're not willing to be convinced. You see, it was never an issue of eye and ears, but everything to do with their heart.

They were offended by Jesus because deep down they did not want to repent of their sins. Verse 35 says that wisdom is proved right by her children.

You see, wise children are willing to be convinced by the evidence. They realize how much Jesus has done for them. But the opposite is a spoiled brat who will not be convinced, who will not budge, no matter how much evidence Jesus gives them.

And maybe you are relatively new to Christianity. Maybe you wouldn't call yourself a Christian and you still need more answers.

[15 : 29] No worries. No worries. Please stay with us. Please keep digging. Please keep asking your questions. Perhaps you still haven't seen everything Jesus has done in his life.

No worries. Please keep reading the pages of Luke's gospel. But it won't take many more pages of Luke's gospel until you know just as much as the Pharisees knew.

And if by then you still say you need more evidence, Jesus would want to say, be careful not to move the goalposts on me. We all have different levels of proof.

But if after all you've seen and heard from Jesus, you still demand more, he'd want to caution whether you're being like a little spoiled brat. And the reason why that's a problem is this.

Because it's possible to be a churchgoer, to come here for years and years, yet still refuse to acknowledge Jesus as Lord and Savior. Your repentance has nothing to do with eyes and ears and evidence, but everything to do with your heart.

[16 : 39] And I hope that makes sense of where some of our family and friends are at. Possibly they need more evidence. No worries. No worries. Bring them along to church.

Tell them what you've learned on Sunday or what you've learned in your midweek Bible study groups. But ask them if their attitude to Jesus is really one of evidence or whether it's deeper down and a problem in their heart.

You see, being certain, that's about evidence. But moving the goalposts, that's about refusing to repent. People who aren't willing to be convinced, they've got a deeper issue in their heart.

And there will be some Christians here today worried about their own level of repentance. They rightly want to repent of their sins before they meet Jesus.

They worry to themselves, they worry, how repentant can I be if I keep making the same mistakes over and over again? But sinning and then repenting and sinning and then repenting and sinning and then repenting over and over again.

[17 : 50] To me, that seems just part and parcel of the Christian life. Yes, by the Spirit, we will be sinning less. But the danger with meeting Jesus and our repentance is not poor repentance.

All Christians are like that to some level. The danger with meeting Jesus is unrepentance. It's that we get to a point in our lives and we just think, I can't be bothered anymore and I don't want to repent.

I've got nothing to say sorry for. The danger with meeting Jesus is not poor repentance, but unrepentance. That we get to a point, we say, I just don't care anymore.

And so here is a carrot and here is a stick from Luke's Gospel. The carrot first. If we repent of our sins, Jesus will forgive us.

Repentance means facing up to the root cause of death. That means Jesus will say to our corpses one day, I say to you, get up and we will arise.

[18 : 52] That is what repentance is. Verse 28. Jesus says that John is the greatest, but the one who is in the kingdom of heaven, the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

In other words, even the least repentant person is in the kingdom of heaven. And that is an infinitely better place than being the greatest person down here on earth.

That is the carrot. Here is the stick. In Luke chapter 3, John, when he's preaching, John says this. He says that Jesus comes with the Holy Spirit and with fire.

He will gather up the repentant grain and store it safely in the barn, but he will burn the chaff with unquenchable fire. You see, Jesus is coming.

He's on his way. He'll either come as our judge or our saviour. He can give us the Holy Spirit to wash us clean on the inside or fire to burn.

[19 : 52] The difference depends on whether or not we've repented of our sins. And that is the right way to meet God when he's on his way.

So will we be wise and repent, be convinced by the evidence, or will we behave like spoiled brats stomping our feet, moving the goalposts?

Because deep down, there's a problem in our hearts. So I'm going to stop there. We're going to pray now quite similarly to last week. I'm going to leave a space for you to name loved ones who haven't repented of their sins.

Only a work of the Holy Spirit will soften their hearts to proper repentance. Only a work of the Holy Spirit will enable us, Christians, to get serious about repentance.

So a moment of quiet. Start naming before the Lord, everyone on your heart, and then I'll lead us together as we pray. Father God, we pray that by your Spirit, you would help us in the area of repentance.

[21 : 06] Thank you that Jesus gives us so much evidence that he really is the Christ, that he really is on his way. Father, please help us, therefore, to get serious with repentance.

Help us not be unrepentant and not care. Please, Father, keep us in the battle with sin every day. And we especially commit to you our loved ones.

Please name them in your hearts. Father, we pray that by your Spirit, you would soften their hearts, that they would repent of their sin, because Jesus loves to forgive.

Please, would they call on his name and be saved? Please, Father, would we tell them what Jesus has done for us in our lives? Would we share things about Sunday sermons and midweek Bible study groups?

Please, Father, would we give them Jesus' words, so that they would listen rightly? We ask all these things in his name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.