

How to respond to Jesus rightly

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[0 : 00] I wonder if you've heard that expression in English. It's called moving the goalposts. Have you heard that? It's very frustrating, isn't it? It's when someone asks you a question, you give them the answers, and then they say, oh, but what about this?

And so you give them the answer to that. And they say, well, what about this then? And you give them the answer to that. Until eventually you realize that they don't really want answers. They just want to be difficult. It's very frustrating.

And we experience it when we're applying for things at Centrelink or Medicare with the government, filling out forms with the bank.

Fill in this form. And so we do. Oh, no, but we need these other documents as well. So you give them those other documents. Oh, but now we need some referees from you. So you give them that.

Oh, but we still need a stat deck as well. It's very frustrating, isn't it? It feels like they're moving the goalposts. We've experienced that as well. With the way the government has handled COVID.

[1 : 00] We were told we'll come out of lockdown when our infection rates are down. And so they were down. But then they said, no, no, it's about hospitalization rates. That are OK.

No, no, it's about vaccination rates as well. It was very frustrating, wasn't it? It felt like the goalposts were being moved on us. And actually, we see this in the Christian life as well.

Have you ever talked to someone about Christianity and they say to you, I just can't believe in Jesus because I don't trust the Bible. And so you point out the historical reliability of the New Testament.

And then they say, yeah, but I still can't believe in Jesus because there are starving children in Africa. And you point out that, well, even Jesus suffers unjustly, that he wants to end all the pain.

And they say, yeah, but I still can't believe in Jesus because of all the terrible things Christians have done, you know, like the Crusades or something. And you say, yes, even Jesus hates that too.

[2 : 04] In fact, he gives his life to atone for the wickedness of his own people. And at last they say to you, I just won't believe in Jesus until he shows up in my living room and gives me my own private miracle.

At which point you realize they're just moving the goalposts and evidence isn't really the issue. In that way, it's the opposite to certainty and evidence.

Because even if Jesus did show up in their lounge rooms, they'd move the goalposts and demand something more and more and more. You see, last week, Jesus did an outrageous thing.

He turned up to a funeral and raised the dead man to life. And everyone around, sorry, no one around moved the goalposts. Instead, they were certain.

They were so certain, they said, wow, God has come to help his people. In fact, they were so certain about what they saw that they spread the news about Jesus throughout Judea and the surrounding country.

[3:10] And the surrounding country is where we find John in our story today. John or John the Baptist, he was in the wilderness. And the news about Jesus had reached his ears.

Look at verse 18. Right at the top, verse 18. John's disciples told him about all these things. Calling to them, he sent them to the Lord to ask, Are you the one who is to come or should we expect someone else?

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

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

Look at verse 21. At that very time, Jesus cured many diseases, sicknesses and evil spirits and gave sight to many who were blind. And so Jesus replied to the messengers, go back and report to John what you have seen and what you have heard.

[4:21] Jesus, are you the one who is to come? Well, 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 their 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, all of these miracles, they were the Old Testament standard, the Old Testament sign of what the Savior would do.

Don't move the goalposts on Jesus. And throughout Luke's gospel, when Jesus sort of is in action, he keeps meeting two different responses to him.

Some people accept the evidence and believe that he's the Savior. They are, verse 23, blessed. But other people, verse 23, stumble or are offended on account of what Jesus does.

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

[5:42] But our family and friends think, wow, that is gullible and stupid. One reason will come later in chapter 8. It's about listening, whether our hearts are willing to listen to Jesus.

But the answer in our passage today is bound up with John the Baptist. That seems like a very strange thing to say, doesn't it? The way people respond to Jesus depends on how they respond to John the Baptist.

But in Luke's gospel, John and Jesus are tied closely together. In chapter 1, John's birth is foretold. Then Jesus' birth is foretold. John's mother, Jesus' mother.

They're related. John baptizes with water. Jesus baptizes with the Holy Spirit. How we respond to Jesus depends on how we respond to John.

And this is our second point. Look at verse 24. After John's messengers left, Jesus began to speak to the crowd about John. And his arguments in the text are quite dense.

[6:43] But basically, in a nutshell, he keeps telling them how special John the Baptist 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. See, John is very special. And you can see this most clearly in verse 27.

Look at verse 27. John is the one about whom it is written, I will send my messenger ahead of you who will prepare the way before you. And that is a quote from Malachi 3, our Old Testament reading.

You see, Malachi says that the coming Savior will have a special messenger who will prepare the way before him. The two are closely linked together.

When I was in London, when I used to live there, once in a blue moon, you would see the Queen driving on the road very rarely. And what she has are these police motorcycles that go before her.

[7 : 46] But these are special motorcycles. Because unlike regular ones, these ones are bright white, with no blue and white checkered stickers on them.

Just bright white. And what the motorbikes do is they ride in formation. Two of them go ahead and they stop the intersection. And then another two stop the other intersection. And then another two ride and stop the next intersection.

So on and so forth until about five intersections are clear. And behind them all comes the biggest Rolls Royce you've ever seen. And you can see a little old lady inside. That is the Queen.

If you blink, you'll miss her. But those motorbikes are kind of like what John is to Jesus. One goes before the other to prepare the road.

Only John doesn't use motorbikes or sirens. Because famously he uses baptism. You can tell who loves Jesus and who is offended by him based on whether or not they were baptized by John.

[8 : 47] You see, when John was first on the scene in Luke chapter 3, can I have a slide please? When we first met John, it says, he went into all the country around the Jordan preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

Next slide please. 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 please. He said, tax collectors don't collect any more than you're required. Soldiers don't extort money and don't accuse people falsely.

John's baptism, thank you, John's baptism is about repentance. Repentance is a 180 degree turn away from your sinful life and back to the Lord.

The right way to prepare for Jesus' arrival begins with a repentance of our sins. Verse 29. All the people, even the tax collectors, when they heard Jesus' words, they acknowledged that God's way was right because they'd been baptized by John.

[10 : 00] But the Pharisees and the experts in the law rejected God's purpose for themselves because they had not been baptized by John. And very simply it goes like this.

If you believe that Jesus is the one, you'll acknowledge that the right way to meet him is to repent of your sins. You're going to be very pro-John the Baptist.

But if you're offended by Jesus, you won't want to repent of your sins. You won't get baptized by John. Repentance is the key to meeting Jesus when he comes.

It begins or is signified with John's baptism. In fact, in the Anglican Church today, repentance is still the heart of our baptism today.

So the priest will ask the candidate getting baptized, and I'm sure you've all been asked this when you were however old you were, or maybe they asked it of your godparents.

[11 : 00] Do you turn to Christ? Do you repent to Christ? Do you repent of your sins? Do you reject selfish living and all that is false and unjust? Do you renounce Satan and all evil?

They're public promises about doing a 180 degree turn away from your sinful life towards the Christ. And we might expect that only good people will respond like that, whereas the bad people will shy away.

But in verse 29, it's the tax collectors and the sinners who are coming to be baptized. But in verse 30, it's the religious types who reject baptism.

And verse 29 and 30, they will play themselves out next week at a dinner party where Jesus will have dinner with a Pharisee and a tax collector. One of them will love Jesus.

The other will be very rude. The difference depends on how much they think they need to repent of their sins. Later on, we'll meet King Herod.

[12:06] King Herod. Remember Herod? He was famously sleeping with his brother's wife. John the Baptist said to Herod, will you respond rightly to God by my baptism of repentance?

And Herod says, no thanks, John. I'd rather cut off your head. You see, if you think Jesus is the Savior, you'll prepare yourself by repenting of your sins.

That is the right way to meet God before he arrives. But if you're not certain, perhaps you just need more evidence. And this is our third point.

Have a look at verse 31. Jesus went on to say, to what then can I compare the people of this generation? What are they like? They are 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. We started with two questions about Jesus. He finishes us off with two questions of his own about the people.

[13:09] To what then can I compare this generation? What are they like? And his answer is that they are like spoiled brats. Did you ever see a spoiled brat at Westfield or the shops?

Horrible creatures, aren't they? Little kids. Little kids. I've got little kids. Little kids who've been given everything by mum and dad and stomped their feet.

Nothing will satisfy them. Making a mess. And Jesus describes this generation as being like children in the marketplace. Verse 32.

We played the pipe for you. We played you a happy song but you didn't even dance. All right then. You're not in a happy mood. Why don't we play you something more somber? We sang for you a dirge but you didn't even cry.

In other words, nothing will please you. You're behaving like spoiled brats. Jesus, are you the one who is to come? Well, let's see. I healed the blind, the lame, the lepers, the deaf, the demon possessed.

[14:13] Is that enough? No. All right then. I turned up to a funeral and raised a dead man from death to life. Will that do the trick? No. What about I send you the greatest prophet in the world with baptism for repentance?

Will that do the trick? No. Nothing will please the Pharisees. They're behaving like spoiled brats. They still don't believe. Look at verse 33. When John the Baptist came, he didn't eat or drink.

Yet you called him evil. You said, he is a demon. All right then. When the son of man came, he ate and drank. But then you said, he's a sinner.

That is, he's a glutton and a drunkard and a friend of tax collectors. In other words, you're behaving like spoiled brats. Nothing will satisfy you.

We've played you a happy song. You're not happy. We sang you a sad song. You're not sad. You keep moving the goal posts. You're not willing to be convinced. You see, for the Pharisees, it was never an issue of evidence, of eyes and ears, but always an issue of unrepentance down in their heart.

[15:28] Verse 35 says, wisdom is proved right by her children. You see, wise children know how good they've got things. They're willing to be convinced by the evidence.

But the opposite is a spoiled brat who no matter how much Jesus does for them, they stomp their feet and demand more evidence that he jumped through their hoops.

They're never satisfied. And maybe you're relatively new to church again. Maybe you wouldn't call yourself a Christian.

Maybe you still need more answers. No worries. Please stay. Please keep digging. Please keep asking your questions. Perhaps you haven't yet seen everything Jesus has done in his life.

No worries. Please stay listening for the sermon series. We've all got different levels of proof. But it won't take many more pages of Luke's gospel until you've got just as much information as the Pharisees.

[16:31] Make sure you're wise and willing to be convinced by the evidence. Because if by that stage you say I still want more, Jesus would say stop moving the goalposts on me.

because it's possible to be a regular churchgoer for years and years yet still refuse to let Jesus be your saviour.

Your repentance sorry your unrepentance has nothing to do with eyes and ears and evidence and everything to do with a problem in your heart. And I hope that makes sense of where some of our family and friends are at.

Possibly they need more evidence. No worries. Invite them to come along on Sunday. Tell them what you've learned in the sermon or in your small group Bible study. But ask them if their attitude to Jesus is really an issue of evidence or is it that deep down no matter what answers you give they'll just move the goalposts because they refuse to repent before him.

And there will be speaking of repentance there will be some Christians here today worried about their own level of repentance. They rightly want to get that in check before Jesus comes.

[17:52] They worry how repentant can I be if I keep making the same mistakes over and over again. But sinning and then repenting and then sinning and then repenting and sinning and then repenting that seems to me to be part and parcel of the Christian life.

By the spirit he's making us more like Jesus we should be sinning less but the danger with meeting Jesus is not poor repentance but unrepentance.

It's that we get to a stage and we turn into a Pharisee and say I can't be bothered to repent anymore I just don't care. The danger with meeting Jesus is not poor repentance all Christians are like that at some level the danger is unrepentance that we just don't care like the Pharisees.

And so to finish here is a carrot and here is a stick. Here's the carrot if we repent of our sins Jesus will forgive us.

Repentance means we're facing up to the root cause of death. If we hand our sin over to Jesus in repentance he will say to our corpses I say to you get up and we will arise.

[19:12] Verse 28 says John is the greatest but the one who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. In other words even the least repentant person is in heaven which is infinitely better than being the greatest person down here on earth.

That is the carrot here is the stick. In Luke chapter 3 John himself his message is this that Jesus comes with the Holy Spirit and with fire.

He can give us the Holy Spirit to wash our hearts clean or fire to burn us. The difference depends on how we respond to him rightly and whether or not we repent of our sins.

Will we be wise and repent? that is the right way to meet God or will we be like spoiled brats who keep moving the goal posts because deep down we just don't want to repent.

The choice is ours washed by the Holy Spirit or fire when it comes. We're going to finish there. We're going to pray like we did last week.

[20 : 25] We're talking about unrepentance about responding to Jesus. We're going to name our loved ones in our hearts. I'm going to leave space for you to do that. That they would take unrepentance seriously.

We're going to pray that we would take our repentance seriously as well. Both will require a work of the Spirit. I'm going to stop there. We're going to pray a moment of quiet.

Start naming people in your hearts who need to repent. And I'll lead us. Call on you and your Spirit.

Help us take our repentance seriously. By your Spirit, Father, help us to sin less. Father, we pray and ask that by your Spirit, you would soften the hearts of our loved ones.

We name them now. Father, by your Spirit, please would they repent before Jesus arrives. Please soften their hearts so they wouldn't stop moving the goal posts.

[21 : 35] Please would they respond to our words rightly. Please would they come to church. Please Father, would they call on Jesus name as their Lord and Savior.

And we ask it for his sake. Amen.