

Call to Repent; Invite to Come

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[0 : 0 0] And I will pray for us. Lord our God, we ask for your mercy now that we might have fresh eyes to look at Jesus and see him in all his greatness and see new angles of his wisdom and of his power.

And that would have a big impact in our lives, I ask in his name. Amen. Please have a seat, friends. Yes. I was once running an evangelistic book table at Melbourne University in a public place where we knew there'd be traffic, students walking back and forward in the hope that they would come and take a Christian book or a gospel.

And a Muslim man came up to the table at a time when I was there by myself, so I was a bit afraid, and he said to me, asked a few questions, and he began to fire up a bit at me, and he was saying, he had this really kind of what I thought was a weird question at the time.

He said, why are there four gospels? Why four? Why are there four gospels? Why do you need four? Why do you have according to Matthew and according to Mark and the other ones?

Why do you have to have four? And I had no idea really what he was getting at. Eventually I figured it out. He was a Muslim man, and his view was that the gospels were corrupt documents, historically corrupt, and the fact that there were four is indicative of their corruptness or their insufficient on their own, and maybe they contradict.

[1 : 3 3] And that was what he was getting at. But a crowd gathered and was listening to him sort of say, why are there four? Now, if I could answer him today, many years later, I think I know now what I would say.

So I'm going to tell you. Jesus Christ, being fully God and fully man, being the promised Messiah and King of the universe, the mighty, mighty King, because he is such an important and glorious figure.

One document is not enough for Jesus, because he's too glorious. He is too great that you just have one biography of his earthly ministry. You need four gospels.

It's a little bit like, I think, listening to music on AM radio and then getting a CD player. The quality is much better. The depth is better in stereo compared to mono.

There was more detail, more texture, more depth of the music. We recently moved from having a very old mono TV to a stereo TV, and we noticed that there was this much more definition of the audio of the TV shows.

[2 : 5 1] Some of us have home theatres with 5.1 Dolby surround sound. Some of us even have 7.1 Dolby surround sound. If you don't know what that means, it means you have eight speakers with different things going on them while you watch Star Wars, and you were in the movie at that point.

And that is basically why I think God has given us four gospels, that we have this kind of stereoscopic depth into the glory of Jesus Christ, into the different angles of who he was and what he came to do, of the complexities of his personality.

I think we are very good at thinking we know Jesus. We know him. Of course we do. But we actually don't know him to the level of detail and granularity that God would have us by giving us four gospels of his earthly ministry.

In fact, the whole Bible, I think, shows the glory and wonder of Jesus. He is a great and excellent and worshipable man. And so we need to come to the Bible looking for new angles on who he was, new insights, new texture and depth of his personality.

And today is one of those chapters that I think shows aspects of the personality and mission of Jesus that we don't really have much of a grip on, a handle on.

[4 : 14] Today you should expect to see surprises as we look at Jesus together. The whole Bible shows his greatness, his beauty, his glory. And today we want to look for surprises, so be ready for that.

And so we'll begin with what appears to be a disillusioned Baptist in verse 2. Not denominationally, but John the Baptist.

When he heard in prison what the Messiah was doing, he sent word by his disciples and said to him, Are you the one, Jesus, who is to come or are we to wait for another?

What's going on here? Because this is very tricky. John the Baptist is questioning, is Jesus the Messiah? He's the man who baptized Jesus and saw the Spirit come down like a dove and a voice from heaven.

What's going on in John's own world that he's become, it seems, doubting, uncertain? I think there are two main reasons why he's doubting, and they will shape the way we read the chapter.

[5 : 19] Firstly, John's in prison. He's demoralized because a corrupt ruler, Herod Antipas, who's involved in a very incestuous marriage.

The family tree is very complex. John the Baptist was preaching against that, and John the Baptist has been violently thrown in jail. And he'll be wondering, Well, I was saying the Messiah would come and the kingdom would come.

And now all I'm being is violently treated. I'm being violently thrown in prison. I'm being forcefully and roughly treated. What's going on? Where is the kingdom of God if this is happening to me?

So he's demoralized. And secondly, I think John the Baptist is really weighing on him his own message about what Jesus would be like. And he's wondering whether what he said Jesus would be like is actually what's happening.

Earlier in Matthew's Gospel, Chapter 3, here are the kind of things that John said Jesus would be like. John said, Flee from the wrath to come.

[6 : 25] The axe is lying at the root of the trees. His, that is the Messiah's winnowing fork, is in his hand. He will clear the threshing floor and gather the wheat, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.

John the Baptist promised blessing and judgment. He promised the wrath of God, the kingdom of God to come in awe and in power and for people to be judged, for people to be confronted with their own sin and to be judged by it.

And so John has heard, it says, what Jesus has been doing. And he's asking, you know, and we've been looking the last few weeks at the past few chapters of Matthew where Jesus does a lot of miracles.

And he's been wondering, is the Messiah only going to do miracles? When is he going to do the judgment that I said he would do? Is he really the Messiah? And so this whole chapter is going to answer John's question.

The initial answer he gives to the disciples of John is this. In verse 4, Jesus answers in part from prophecies of the Messiah saying, Yes, I am the Messiah.

[7 : 54] You read Isaiah 61 or Isaiah 35. That's a checklist. The kind of things, good news to the poor, a healing of the sick, the blind receiving their sight, the lame walk, all those things are things that the Messiah would do in Isaiah.

He is the Messiah. He has come to restore the reign of God. But then he says, verse 6, I think alluding to the theme of where is the judgment, he says, Blessed is anyone who takes no offense at me.

Now that sounds a bit soft, but actually I think it's stronger than that. The word for no offense is like, Blessed is anyone who doesn't stumble because of me. Blessed is anyone who doesn't fall or meet their downfall because of me.

Jesus is saying to John, It's better for you to know me and be blessed than to have me as your stumbling block and your downfall and to be out of prison.

Jesus is kind of saying, Up his sleeve, he does have a judgment card and he will play it in due time. And he'll talk about it later in the chapter.

[9 : 06] In Malachi chapter 3, the last book of the Bible, the book that predicted that John the Baptist and Jesus will come, sort of John would prepare the way, it says that when that day comes, it will be the terrible day of the Lord.

There will be lots of judgment when the Messiah comes. And Jesus is saying, Yeah, that's coming. Blessed is anyone who knows me now before they meet their downfall because they don't know me or they don't like me.

And so John's disciples leave and Jesus goes on to keep answering the question. You know, Where are the judgments that the Messiah would do? And does Jesus stand with John now that he's in prison?

Or does Jesus distance himself from John? Here's what Jesus says. What did you go out in the wilderness to look at? When you went to see John the Baptist, he was a crowd puller.

When you went out to see him, what did you go to look at? A reed shaken by the wind? Did you go out to see a wimp? Did you go out to see someone who changed their message based on popular opinion and the winds of whether people like it or not?

[10 : 16] No. That's not what John the Baptist was like. He wasn't a reed shaken by the wind. He wasn't a wimp. He was a hard man. What then did you go out to see? Verse 8. Someone dressed in soft robes.

Look, those who wear soft robes, they're dressed in royal palaces. See, John didn't wear soft robes. John wore robes of camel's hair. John the Baptist wasn't a soft, weak, effeminate kind of leader.

He was a hard man. He was rough. And he was not the kind of person that wears soft clothes. Jesus, I think, is giving a slur at Herod Antipas, who has John in jail.

Herod Antipas is a man who has married his half-brother's daughter, who, by the way, his other half-brother had already married. It was very complicated and incestuous and shameful.

And John the Baptist spoke against it. And Herod was so weak in his soft robes and pandering to popular opinion, he didn't want someone to preach against him.

[11 : 21] So he put John in jail to silence him. That's the kind of man that Herod was, but not what John the Baptist was. He was hard. He was tough.

He held the line. What then did you go out to see? A prophet. Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. This is the one about whom it is written, See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you.

Jesus quoting the last book of the Old Testament, Malachi, saying this is true. He was the one that Malachi predicted. John is not just a prophet who points to Jesus.

He is the prophesied prophet that the other prophets said would come before the kingdom of God came with the Messiah. Jesus saying, This is it.

This is really happening. This is the kingdom of God. You know, John may be doubting it, but he shouldn't, because this is the kingdom of God. Truly I tell you, verse 11, Among those born of women, no one has arisen greater than John the Baptist.

[12 : 27] So he's saying, I stand by John the Baptist. He is the greatest person in the Old Covenant. Yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. Why would he say that?

Why would John be greater than all the other prophets of the Old Covenant? Why would John the Baptist be greater than King David or King Solomon? The reason is because only John the Baptist points to Jesus.

John the Baptist is the greatest because Jesus is the king. He's the Messiah. He's the awaited one. He's going to bring the kingdom of God. It's really quite an incredibly crass and egotistical thing for Jesus to say.

I mean, if I were to say, This church service now is the best church service happening in Australia this Sunday morning because of who's in the pulpit, that would be crass and egotistical.

I wouldn't say that. But that's what Jesus is saying. He's saying, John's the greatest because he points to me. And then he says, Anyone who's in my kingdom is greater than him. You are greater than John the Baptist because you can tell people of Jesus, the Messiah, died for sin.

[13 : 33] You can tell people that he rose to life. John the Baptist couldn't do that. He was beheaded before he got to see that. But we can point people to Jesus. And so we have a greater position, even the least in the kingdom, than John the Baptist.

You are greater than anyone in the Old Testament. It's an amazing thing because Jesus is the king. He's the Messiah. So we're going to need to get this right.

Jesus stands by John. Even though things are going badly for him, he stands by John the Baptist. He was not weak. John the Baptist was not weak or soft. He was a rough nut prophet.

He ate bugs. He lived in the desert. And Jesus says, He was my man. He pointed the way for me. Now to those who doubt, has God's kingdom really arrived?

Is this how it looks? Jesus gives verse 12, which is the key verse today, but the hardest verse. From the days of the John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and the violent take it by force.

[14 : 42] The kingdom of heaven is advancing violently, and it's both suffering violence, and advancing forcefully, I think.

It's advancing in rough ways, in ways that are unexpected. Its preachers are being thrown in prison. Its Messiah is being rejected.

There's a growing opposition to him, and yet it is advancing. And violent men are trying to fight their way in. Violent men are trying to snatch it. Like Herod, he's trying to break into Jesus' kingdom, but he cannot do it.

You know, the violent will not get in. But the kingdom of heaven is advancing. Even if John the Baptist is in jail, the kingdom is advancing. See, friends, the greatest thing that happened in the world this week was not on the news, not on the radio, not really even on the internet, and everything's on the internet.

The greatest thing that happened this week in the world was that the kingdom of heaven advanced in rough and surprising ways. And violent people this week have tried to stop the kingdom of God around the world.

[15 : 57] They've tried to stop Christians preaching and stop people converting to Christ, but it has been advancing. And you won't read that on the cover of The Age or The Herald Sun, but that is what has been happening.

And violent people are trying to invade it or subvert it, but they will not succeed. The kingdom of God is spreading. Jesus goes on.

13. For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John came. And if you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah who was to come. Let anyone with ears listen.

Again, Jesus is making the same point. Don't doubt like John did. This is the kingdom of God. Everyone expected Elijah to come before the Messiah came, the prophet Elijah.

It's in the end of Malachi. It's in the last chapter of the last book of the Old Covenant. And Jesus says, He's come. John the Baptist was Elijah to come. This is it.

[17 : 01] This is the kingdom of God. This is the end of days. This is the last days. Now is the time. If you have ears, listen. Repent and trust in me.

Repent of your sins and your idols and trust in me because this is the kingdom of God. Now, Jesus now, he's getting angrier because he's beginning to think about his own ministry.

John has questioned it and now we see Jesus question or assess his own miracle and preaching ministry that we've been looking at. And he doesn't give his audiences a good report card.

Verse 16 onwards, But to what will I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in marketplaces and calling to one another.

We played the flute for you and you did not dance. We wailed and you did not mourn. For John came neither eating or drinking. And they say he has a demon.

[18 : 07] The son of man, that is Jesus, he comes eating and drinking. And they say, Look, a glutton, a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners. Yet wisdom is vindicated by her deeds.

Jesus judges his audience for not responding to him as the king, for not admitting and not repenting of their idols and turning to him as the God's son, God's Messiah.

Jesus is getting angry and as he speaks, the kingdom of heaven is forcefully, angrily advancing. John the Baptist, he says, came wailing, came preaching repentance and you did not repent.

I came, Jesus says, preaching kingdom, preaching celebration and you didn't dance, you didn't party with me. Wisdom is vindicated by her deeds.

What can God do when they reject John because he drinks and they reject Jesus because, oh, John doesn't drink alcohol and they say he has a demon. Jesus does drink alcohol and they say he's a drunkard.

[19 : 14] He can't win. People just want to rebel against God for contradictory reasons and wisdom is proved right by her deeds. You see the foolishness of people as they reject the gospel for incoherent or inconsistent reasons.

It's sort of the same today. People will say, there's no evidence for Jesus. There's no evidence. No historical evidence. You show them the four gospels and they say that's three gospels too many.

Or you might say, the people will say there's no evidence for the resurrection and then you show them all the evidence for the resurrection and they'll say oh, it's a conspiracy. There's too much evidence.

Or you say Christians are too moral. You know, I couldn't be a Christian. I'm not good enough. You know, they're too moral for me. And then in the same breath they'll say you're all hypocrites.

You're the scum of society. Or they'll look at the suffering of the world and say God has done too little. He hasn't done enough. And then in the same breath they'll look at the incarnation and say oh, God would never do that.

[20 : 24] He's done too much there. Contradictory reasons that people hold for rejecting the gospel in the same breath. They say Christianity is too irrelevant. And then in the same breath they'll say oh, it's too demanding.

You know, it asks too much of us. Is it irrelevant or too demanding? That's contradictory and yet people will hold to both as excuses to rebel against God.

You know, Jesus could say the same things to us today or to Australia today. He could say or even to the world today He could say to Australia I gave you material comforts.

I gave you blessings and you did not thank or trust me or honour me or worship me for it. And then I sent you suffering. I sent you cancer.

I sent you pain. And still you did not cry out to me. What can God do? What can God do? Jesus says to those people who will not turn to Him in good times or in times of warning and suffering He has nothing left but anger and judgment.

[21 : 33] He has nothing left for such contradictory ways and foolish ways of rejecting Him. And so then He begins to talk about the judgment that will come on those who will not turn and worship and repent and trust in Him.

Verse 20. Remember, He's still assessing His ministry over the past few weeks. He began to reproach the cities in which most of His deeds of power had been done because they did not repent.

So these are the places He's been travelling doing miracles and preaching. places like Chorazin and Bethsaida. And He says, Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the deeds of power done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon and they are pagan cities from the Old Testament that were typical cities that were preached against as being like they worshipped Baals or atrocities that happened and God's prophet said those cities are going down in judgment.

And Jesus says, If my deeds of power had been done in those cities they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I tell you on the day of judgment it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon than for you.

So Tyre and Sidon will still be judged but it will be more tolerable for their judgment than for the places where Jesus did His miracles because the people did not receive Him they did not repent.

[23 : 05] and you Capernaum now we know in Capernaum that was where Jesus set up a base for ministry in Matthew 4 and so people in Capernaum could say well I didn't really kind of get into that Jesus thing but at least we were the place where He set up His base you know on the day of judgment we will be the town where Jesus set up base.

Jesus begs to differ and you Capernaum will you be exalted to heaven? No you will be brought down to Hades you will be brought down to hell for if the deeds of power done in you had been done in Sodom it would have remained until this day.

Sodom that's the pinup city of evil in the Old Testament that's the place that God burned down in Genesis 19 burned down from heaven judgment of fire and sulfur in a painful judgment on the whole city and Capernaum will be worse than Sodom on the final day of judgment.

Capernaum will be brought down to Hades I tell you on that day on the day of judgment it will be more terrible for the land of Sodom than for you. See these are these are harsh words what Jesus is saying is that John the Baptist was right Jesus does come to bring both a blessing and judgment he does come with a winnowing fork in his hand and he is planning the eternal punishment of those who reject him he does come to separate the wheat and the chaff but here's the trick or here's the kind of secret of the kingdom I think of the New Testament the tasks Jesus' tasks of judgment are reserved for his second coming for when he comes back his first coming is to die as saviour to rescue his second coming will be to judge and especially judge those who rejected him to punish eternally those who aren't saved those who aren't forgiven those who aren't redeemed just because there's two comings doesn't mean that we make

Jesus to be a kind of split personality it's the same Jesus in both comings so when Jesus walked the earth he got angry at sin we see him angry today and we see him drawing up judgment we see him planning it levels and proportions of culpability we see him getting ready for that final day of judgment as he walks the earth you see and there's an important lesson here about culpability because we it's true to say that without Christ if you are a sinner you are facing God's judgment if you have sinned against the almighty God if you have rebelled against him and refused to worship and worshipped things he made then you will face eternal punishment there is hell without Jesus but this is a sort of slightly different message today Jesus is saying some people will go to hell because of

[26 : 25] Jesus some people will go to hell because they knew something of Jesus they saw his miracles or they heard his message or that you know they knew something of the gospel even today but did not accept it their judgment will be worse their judgment they are more culpable and so on that final day the terrors of hell will increase for them because of the insult to the Lord Jesus that they saw him but did not receive him I think today in the church we've picked up a bit of a Roman Catholic view of God's mercy that goes like this God's grace and it's not even Roman Catholic really but in a popular sense people think God's grace is a kind of magic dust and as long as you've been somewhat involved in a church or you've heard a Christian or something you have a bit of the magic dust on you and on the day of judgment that will somehow be enough to get you through

Jesus is saying the exact opposite he's saying the more exposure you have had to Christianity and yet do not repent and trust in Jesus and worship him then the more judgment you will get on judgment day you will be worse off you will be more culpable because of the insult to God's gospel that you saw it and then turned away from it do you see the logic of that because sometimes you know I've heard people say you know 30 years ago at Holy Trinity we had 300 kids in our Sunday school and wasn't that great but I think well unless we go and preach the gospel to those people now and see that they are worshipping Jesus that time in Sunday school will be held against them because they have not worshipped or trusted in Jesus they've actually gone on to live for idols and not for the Lord Jesus when I take when I take funerals

I look for some scraps of faith so I'll say to them did he ever go to church did he have a bible did he ever talk about God I'm looking for some hope in a person's life but actually Jesus teaching is that those scraps may be used against them to increase their judgment if you do not worship Jesus if you know something of Jesus and yet turn your back on him Jesus says your judgment is worse on the day this is exactly what Jesus said earlier in verse 6 when he said blessed is anyone who can know me and I don't become their downfall I don't become their scandal or their offense because you either know Jesus and are blessed by him because you trust and repent or he becomes your downfall he becomes your means of judgment because you did not receive him

Jesus is the king he does stand by John the Baptist and the kingdom is advancing John the Baptist was doubting he's sort of saying where is the kingdom where is the fruit of it Jesus answer is the kingdom of heaven is forcefully advancing it's advancing in rough ways messy ways that you won't be able to read easily but God knows what's going on and you see that in the prayer verse 25 it's an amazing prayer insight into the son's prayer life with his father at at at that time Jesus said I thank you father lord of heaven and earth because you have hidden these things from the wise hidden them from the intelligent and have revealed them to infants yes father for such was your gracious will God's plan is happening and those whom the father has chosen to reveal the gospel to are receiving it it looks messy on the outside but

God is in control of his kingdom and in his gracious wisdom he's hiding it from those who should receive it and revealing it to infants and babes revealing it to outcasts like John the Baptist all things have been handed over to me by my father says Jesus and no one knows the son except the father and no one knows the father except the son and anyone whom the son chooses to reveal him people think they know Jesus but only the father knows the son and those whom together they reveal it to this is basically Jesus talking about predestination about God's electing mercy saving us from our deserved wrath because of our hardness of heart in the end of the day only the mercy of God can open our blind eyes to see the glories of Jesus and to fully trust in him and him I know I would not be a

[31 : 32] Christian I was too stubborn but God opened my eyes and so if you have a taste of the glory of Jesus hold on to that because it is God's mercy opening your eyes don't take that for granted but treasure it and fan it into flame and Jesus ends with this beautiful invitation which I'll end with verse 28 come to me so hear speaking to you now in these words from the Bible come to me all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens I will give you rest take my yoke upon you and learn from me for I am gentle and humble in heart and you will find rest for your souls for my yoke is easy and my burden is light Jesus says I will give you rest

I will give you protection for your souls I will protect you from the judgment against sin I will give you mercy take my yoke upon you Jesus says make my kingdom what you live for you know leave behind the things of this world the toys and the idols and the treasures of this world are a burden to collect and they're a burden to maintain and they weigh us down all the idols and the toys and treasures and pleasures of the world Jesus says leave them behind and take my yoke live for my kingdom and I will give you rest be humbled by the humble one and I will take care of you I'll give you rest for your souls so friends what will you do with Jesus what will you do with him will you worship him as Lord and trust him and turn from sin or will you just basically ignore him and not repent will you see

Jesus then look in the other direction the most insulting thing you could do to him here in this chapter we see a depth of Jesus character that we might otherwise miss his harshness his toughness we see some of the paradoxes of his personality we see that Jesus is loyal to John the Baptist but won't help him get out of jail we see Jesus stand and quote the Old Testament and yet he says my kingdom is greater than that and anyone in this kingdom is greater than that one we see Jesus act humbly and yet he makes egotistical claims about his greatness we see that Jesus truly is royalty he's royalty and yet he stands next to a crazy rough nut prophet and he denounces the weak and effeminate people who live in royal palaces we see Jesus all these contradictions or paradoxes in his personality that I just think are so wonderful

Jesus preaches the promised mercy of God and yet he preaches hell fire and judgment he's wiser than any sage but he quotes kids songs to confute the stubborn adults around him he's a preacher of predestination and election and yet he's an evangelist with an invitation and calling people to make a decision for him he's a judge and a confronter and a preacher of repentance like John the Baptist but he's also a king of compassion and mercy and healing and grace friends we live between the two comings of Jesus so know where you stand in Jesus first coming the kingdom of heaven advanced violently through his violent death to redeem us so that we could trust and repent and be forgiven now at his second coming that will be the consummation of the forceful advancement of the kingdom with the violent day of judgment those who have not been forgiven and transformed by

God's mercy and by the spirit of God by Jesus they will be condemned forever to eternal torment you know the ultimate violence against sin forever and friends don't be found in that group because the more you know of Christ the more culpable you are and the more judgment will be against you so come to Christ today you who are weary and heavy burdened and you will find rest for your souls let's pray to him now Lord Jesus we come to you and we come seeking your mercy Lord Jesus we are sorry for the ways we have ignored you and turned away from you and turned our back on you and been ashamed of you we repent of our sin and for each of us that is different we pray that you would reveal and convict us of the things we need to turn from and father we put our trust in your son and ask that you would forgive us now and make us part of this amazing kingdom of

[36 : 54] God that has arrived and we pray that on that final day we will be found in Christ and have our names in his book of life amen