

Back to Church Sunday 2012

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[0 : 0 0] Now it's a special Sunday today come back to church Sunday for 2010 and as Debbie has indicated it's a it's a national initiative but it's one that had its origin here at St. Paul's and particularly with the work of Debbie and so there is over 650 people churches involved and potentially thousands of people coming back to church this Sunday and a lot of it has to do with the work of Debbie so I think we should be acknowledging her work across the country so thank you Debbie.

So it's very exciting for us to be involved in that as a church. Many many people would have been coming back to church they would have seen something of church in the past experienced something of church in the past.

This experience may be positive one it may be negative as we just indicated in terms of apologizing for some of the hurts from the past or it may be completely neutral back to church and you know whatever I mean it's been here before.

Whatever your experience of church has been you've been invited to come and experience it again and for some there'll be issues which are just purely the same for others things will be different.

But let me say that more than just coming and checking out church again because you can do that any day you can effectively you know any day nine to five you can knock on the office and say I want to come and check out church and wander around have a look take some photos if you like not terribly exciting but really what we really want you to do is not just to come and have a see come and have a look at church but to come and see Jesus. That is exactly what John the Baptist wants you to do when he's written these words here. There's this guy John and he wants people to see Jesus.

[1 : 5 9] That's what those verses are all about. He's drawn a fair bit of attention himself just before Jesus came on the scene so much attention in fact that those who thought John himself was the long anticipated Messiah of Israel.

John the Baptist however referred to his ministry as one as preparing the way for the Lord. John openly acknowledged that someone more impressive than John the Baptist was actually going to come and so John the Baptist is pointing the way to the anointed one the Messiah.

So if you like I'd like you to take up that passage which in front of you that was read out. These are the sentences that John wants us to see here how great Jesus is.

He wants us to get that Jesus is in fact the long awaited Messiah not John the Baptist and that Jesus is the long awaited Messiah will lovingly rule with all God's authority.

So there are five things in these sentences that John wants us to come and see and understand and believe and know and trust about Jesus. So let's do that together.

[3 : 1 3] First thing is that John wants us to come and see about Jesus is that he is the giver of spiritual insight. Have a look there at sentence number 38.

Turning around Jesus saw them following and asked what do you want? They said Rabbi which means teacher where are you staying?

Come he replied and you will see. You see often in John's biography of Jesus there is a multi-leveled meaning to the simple language.

People talk to Jesus on a simple physical level and Jesus uses their language in order to take them into a deeper spiritual level of understanding.

And so when Jesus asked the question in sentence 38 what do you want? He's actually asking something deeper than they think. You see there were a number of people who followed Jesus and wanting wrong things from Jesus.

[4 : 1 2] And so he's asking them what do you want? What do you want? And what's their reply?

Where do you live? Where do you live? We want your address Jesus. And so Jesus patiently responds to their simple level of understanding with a command and a promise.

He says come and you will see. Now on one level it could simply mean okay dudes follow me and I'll show you where I live. Just down the street around the corner I'll show you my house.

But in the mind of Jesus and of John what he really means is if you truly come to me you will see spiritual reality.

You will get true spiritual insight if you come and follow me. The second thing that John wants us to come and see is that in seeing Jesus you find the Messiah.

[5 : 19] So John's two disciples go with Jesus and stay with him the rest of the day. They actually do go and follow Jesus. And the next two sentences number 1441 show that they have indeed seen Jesus as he promised they would.

Andrew Simon Peter's brother was one of the two who heard what John had said and who had followed Jesus. The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him we have found the Messiah.

That is the Christ. So Jesus began in effect by saying what are you guys seeking? And now Andrew says to his brother we have found the Messiah.

As the sentence says the word Messiah means the Christ and the title of Christ means the anointed one. You see during the coronation ceremony of kings and priests in Israel they used to pour water sorry oil on the head of the of the person to signify that this person had God's authority to lead.

The dark side of Israel's history is that the leaders consistently failed to lead the people well. And so as God had promised there would be this special anointed one expectation was high.

[6 : 44] God had promised that there would be this Christ this anointed one who would come and he would rescue and rule God's people. This anointed one would not be symbolically anointed with oil though but truly anointed with God's own spirit to rule with the absolute authority of God.

And John wants us to see that Jesus is God's anointed ruler. The third thing that John wants us to come and see is that Jesus is the sin removing lamb.

Have a look there at sentence 36. When he talking about John saw Jesus passing by he said look the lamb of God. And a few sentences earlier John says the same thing in sentence 29.

He says look the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Now I can imagine those listening to John would have been baffled by this.

You see they might get that John was pointing beyond himself forward to Jesus. They might get that Jesus is God's anointed and powerful ruler the Christ.

[8 : 03] But a lamb? I mean the baffling greatness of Jesus is revealed in him being both the Christ, the anointed ruler and the lamb of God.

In John's time lambs were sacrificed in the temple every day to remind people of the seriousness of sin and the fact that sin needed to be punished. And so John picks up this imagery and reveals that Jesus' greatness will be seen in him sacrificing himself to take away the sin of the world.

Jesus is the Christ. He has all the authority of God to command. He is the ruler of the world. But this Jesus isn't a corrupt dictator. He isn't some sort of power hungry maniac.

He is compellingly powerful and yet loving and humble and compassionate. These disciples of John discovered Jesus as the servant, a lamb who dies for the sins of the world.

The one who leads and has all authority is also the one who cares and loves and provides and sacrifices. Jesus is the one who gives spiritual insight.

[9 : 28] And that insight leads us to see him as God's anointed ruler. As God's anointed ruler, he leads by sacrificing himself for our sin.

John wants us to come and see how glorious Jesus really is. The fourth thing naturally flows on from that. John wants us to come and see that Jesus wants our allegiance.

Have a look at sentence 43. The next day, Jesus decided to leave for Galilee. Finding Philip, he said to him, follow me. As the Christ, with all the authority of God to rule, Jesus is now taking the initiative and calling people to come and follow him.

As the Christ, he has the authority to call people from every corner of the earth to align themselves with him.

And as the lamb of God who has sacrificed himself for the sins of the world, he has proven that he is worthy to be aligned to.

[10 : 40] And makes it possible that we might align ourselves with him. The final thing that Jesus, about Jesus, that John wants us to come and see, is that Jesus can change your identity.

Have a look there at sentence 42. Jesus looked at him and said, you are Simon, son of John. You will be called Cephas, which when translated is Peter. There is no explanation here as to why Jesus changed his name, Simon's name, to Peter.

The point, though, is that Jesus has authority to give you whatever name he pleases. And in giving you a name, determine your destiny.

So don't miss the implicit authority in what Jesus does here. He says to Simon, you are Simon.

You're now going to be called Peter. End of story.

Not do you mind? Not would you prefer to be called Boris? It's Peter. That's it. Jesus here displays his absolute authority to choose Simon, to name Simon and to determine Simon's destiny.

[11 : 50] So don't miss the point of what appears to be a rather simple name change. The name change is symbolic of something much deeper that is happening here.

His whole life has been changed because he has met Jesus. He has seen Jesus. The point is that your life will never be the same again if you come and you follow Jesus.

What we are meant to see is that there is no identity better than the one that Jesus gives you.

Jesus, the Christ, the all-powerful ruler of God, the anointed one, the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, gives us a whole new identity which is at peace with God.

And John wants us to see that. He wants to see the big five things here that reveal how glorious Jesus is. He is the one who gives spiritual insight. He is the one who is God's anointed ruler.

He is the ruler who deals with our sin by dying on the cross. He is the loving ruler who calls us to follow him. He is the loving ruler who gives us new life.

[13 : 02] And John goes on to say a little bit later in his biography of Jesus that he wrote all that he did about Jesus so that people might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you might have life in his name.

And so you've come to back to church Sunday. Let me say that more than anything else, our prayer and our hope is that you haven't just come to check out St. Paul's and see whether or not they've painted the place since you were last here, but that you might actually come and see Jesus, the glorious Lord Jesus who offers us a new life in his name.

But there's something more, a little bit more. On Tuesday, Tuesday Sydney time, Monday North America, I flew out back home out of Canada, and on the way out through Vancouver Airport, you go through US immigration in Canada.

And so I rocked up to the immigration counter, slapped my passport and my papers on the desk, and the guy said there, US customs guys are pretty surly.

You know, they've got the paramilitary uniform and the guns, and I think they kind of wish they were in Iraq, but they're not, and so the best gig they've got is to protect the US-Canadian border, which is a great risk, I can tell you.

[14 : 46] And so they're keen to take on anyone, and so I rock in there, and the guy said to me, says, here, you're a minister.

Yeah, that's right. So, what sort of minister? I said, oh, I'm minister of an Anglican, I don't care. And of course, in your mind, you're going, OK, I haven't got drugs, and I don't think it's illegal to be a minister in America.

But you never know, the rules have been changed. And I said, I'm a, he said, I don't care. He said, are you a Christian minister? Yes, yes I am.

And you want to get into America. No, actually, I want to go home to Australia, is what I really want to do. Right. He said, well, I've got a question for you.

He said, when someone says to you, show me God, and I will believe in him, what do you say? And you're sort of going, oh, man, I just want to go home.

[15 : 56] And what do you do with that? Do I just go, do I just go the easy option and go, I don't know. What should I say to that? Or do I just take the guy on?

And so, I went for the latter option. And I said, well, Jesus said, Jesus said, you see me, you see God.

So you've either got to prove whether or not Jesus is right or wrong on that point. But let me say that there were plenty who saw Jesus, saw all the miraculous things that he's did in first century Palestine. They saw the healings, they saw him raise people from the dead, and yet they didn't

actually believe in him.

What they want to do is kill him instead, which is in the end what they did do. They stuck him on the cross for all the things that he did. So I said, don't make the connection to think that just because you can see God, you're going to believe in him, because seeing doesn't equal believing.

In fact, Jesus said, blessed are those who don't actually see me physically, but who believe in me. And in fact, John wrote at the end of his gospel that he wrote everything that he did about Jesus so that we might in fact read about Jesus and actually have life, believe in him and have life in his name.

[17:12] So my challenge to that person would be if you want to see God or you want to believe in him, read a gospel about Jesus and don't just read it though, read it and pray, God, help me to see Jesus, but more importantly, that I might believe in Jesus because there's another thing which comes into play here.

It's not a matter of just seeing who Jesus is, but it's actually having the willpower to actually believe in Jesus. And I could present God to you here, right here, right now, and you could say, I still don't believe in him because it's a matter of the heart.

That's basically what I would say. And he slid my passport across with the immigration papers which I grabbed very quickly and he said, that's interesting but I'm not convinced.

And I grabbed my passport and I said, that just proves my point. And away I went. See, welcome to Back to Church Sunday. We want you to come, we want you to see Jesus.

But more than anything, we want you to believe in Jesus. Come and see and believe to put your trust in this Jesus. And churches consist, like this one, consist of people at all stages of that process of coming and seeing and believing in Jesus.

[18:27] What stage are you up to? Akronism change. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.