

Jesus Goes Public

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[0 : 0 0] The title of the sermon is Jesus Goes Public, and that's quite a significant title, and we'll see that as we move on. So the theme is a one-off sermon. I'm not following anything that Ali might be doing.

It's just a one-off sermon this morning, so you'll go back to a series if you're doing one, I think, when Ali comes back from his holiday in the Bahamas. Or Inverness, I'm not sure what it is.

So we're gathered here. As I said, it's a great excitement. It's a great encouragement to see and be part of your worship today. And we're worshipping along with a lot of other people in a more focused way, our own church plants in St. Columbus, but if you broaden it out, lots of people all over Edinburgh and all over this part of East Lothian and then throughout the whole world.

There's lots and lots of people coming together to worship Jesus. 2,000 or so years after Jesus lived. Why is that the case? You know, sometimes it's good maybe to stop and think, why are we here today?

Why am I worshipping Jesus today? Why am I following Jesus? Globally, interestingly, I think, Christianity grew by 1.27% last year.

[1 : 1 7] Roughly 2.5 billion Christians in the world. And many of you here are devoted followers of Jesus. I've devoted my life to telling people to follow Jesus.

And I've stumbled and fallen myself and I'm often not a good example. But nonetheless, that's been the direction and the focus of my life and the lives of many of you also.

And we plant churches because we want more and more people to know about Jesus and to follow Jesus. And so that Haddington will become a church planting church and we'll plant a church and plant another church.

And that church will plant other churches so that more and more people will hear and know and be transformed by Jesus Christ. But why is it we follow him? Why do we keep following him? Because it's tough, isn't it?

It's tough to follow Jesus to be a believer. The prospects for being a Christian in Scotland are not really that good. It's not a great thing to have on your CV. It's not a good thing necessarily to admit to.

[2 : 1 7] It's like a disease. In some people's eyes, worse than the coronavirus. We're moral, and for many people, moral and ethical pariahs. Ridiculed and sidelined in the society in which we live.

The educational, but many in the educational and professional elite would have Christianity privatized absolutely to oblivion so that no one really hears or knows about it.

Jesus' own diagnosis of our hearts and the dysfunction of our hearts and the sin that's in our hearts is not necessarily a very attractive one for us to consider.

What he says about heaven, what he says about hell. Well, Jesus spoke more than anyone about hell. What he said about Satan and angels, it's unscientific. It's irrational.

Why would we listen to that in a scientific and rational age in which we live? What is it about Jesus that makes people change the whole direction of their lives to follow him and have their lives changed forever because of him at a very personal level?

[3 : 25] I'm going to look at a few things in this passage. Just one or two things that we can learn about Jesus here at the beginning of his ministry. Well, the title is Jesus Goes Public.

So he moves into a new phase of his ministry here. Really, it's the beginning of his public ministry. It's a short ministry. It's only three years. I don't know how long Ali's been here.

He's been here longer than that. Yeah, he has. All right. We can. Does anyone remember? No, no. We forgot. Yeah. Okay. He's been here forever anyway. But Jesus only had three years. And this is the beginning of it.

And he bursts onto the scene. And it's very dramatic. Very quickly, large crowds, the last verse of the chapter, large crowds are following from all over the place.

And we need to, I think it's important for us to remember the context in which Jesus is coming into this situation. Remember the background and maybe the earlier chapters here and the other gospels.

[4 : 24] There was, among the Jews anyway, the expectation of a Messiah. And it had been whipped up by John the Baptist. Oh, could this be the time? Is this when Jesus is going to come?

And it was beginning to get really expectant among the people. There was whispers and there was talks and there was gossip. And everywhere people were, they were saying, well, I wonder if John the Baptist is the Messiah.

What about this other bloke that he baptized, Jesus? And there was lots of interaction going on between Jesus and people and Jesus and John the Baptist. There's more detail in the Gospel of John.

But we see that they were ready for, at least they were ready for their understanding of what the Messiah would be like and the coming of Jesus. But we see, not necessarily what they were expecting, but we see that this is what God had planned.

And this is the beginning of the revelation, the public revelation of the Messiah, Jesus Christ. And even at this early stage, he was rather shocking, as we'll go on to see, in some of the way he became public.

[5 : 33] Look, and throughout the Gospels, Jesus is always very different to what we expect. Well, maybe not from our angle looking back, but certainly for those who saw Jesus and lived among Jesus, he was very shocking.

He wasn't the kind of Messiah that they were expecting. But I think that's good. I think if Jesus has stopped shocking you, or shocking me, and challenging me, and shocking you, and challenging you, then probably we're not allowing him into our hearts and lives in the character as God the Son that he is.

And as followers, it's good to be shocking as well. We're non-conformists. Absolute rebels we are, as we follow Jesus Christ.

So, one or two things I want to say about him. And obviously, there's far, far more things. And the first thing is, and please let me clarify what I'm saying here, because it sounds terrible.

But Jesus is attracted to the darkness. Okay? Jesus is attracted. Please let me clarify that. In the first verses we read from 12 to 16, it speaks about him moving from Nazareth to Capernaum to the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali.

[6 : 53] And that's the fulfillment of a prophecy from the Old Testament, which said that that's where the Messiah would go, and that the people dwelling in darkness would see a great light. For those dwelling in that region, the shadow of death, on them a light has dawned.

So, what I'm saying is, Jesus is attracted to the darkness here. And going public, he's taking over from John's ministry. So, John had been in prison, John the Baptist.

So, Jesus is going public, almost following on from John. And that in itself was quite dangerous, quite seditious, because John was regarded in that way. And here he makes himself known.

Now, I've often thought that Galilee was a bit of a backwater, a bit of a rural backwater in Jesus' time, with a few little villages.

And that's where Jesus went when he began his ministry. But it's very interesting that Josephus, one of the great historians, Jewish historians of the day, talks about this whole region around the Sea of Galilee.

[7 : 53] He says it was a hugely and densely populated area. There was four major cities and at least 200 towns and villages. They reckon, they didn't take accurate senses, they reckon there was about half a million people in that area.

And it was quite a pagan area in many ways. It was certainly regarded as being pagan by the Jewish religious elite in Jerusalem. It was mixed race.

There was Gentiles and there was Jews there. It was an area that had been lived in by many different people. And it was regarded as being fairly irreligious and dark and not particularly favorable area.

And we're told also that as Jesus preached there, that many, many people came from the Decapolis. Now, the Decapolis was to the east of, is that right, east of, my directions are not very good, that side of the Galilee.

And it was, they were new towns. There were new cities that were built by the, Greco-Roman cities that were built primarily to house the retired Roman soldiers and their families.

[9 : 08] And they were known to be full of pagan worship, idolatry, sexual license. They weren't clean-cut religious places. And yet, crowds came from these places.

And Jesus ministered among these towns and villages, which were very dark spiritually. Not kind of religiously clean-cut and nice and full of decent people, certainly according to the religious Pharisees.

But it gives us a hint into the ministry of Jesus when he calls Matthew. Because when he calls Matthew, who wrote this gospel in Luke chapter 5, we're told that Jesus came, Matthew was a tax collector.

He was rejected. He was an outcast. And Jesus said, I haven't come to call the well the people who are healthy. I've come to call the sick. And that whole reality is exemplified in where Jesus first goes.

He goes to a part of the world that is spiritually in darkness, that is in great need, is spiritually lost. And throughout his ministry, Jesus was attracted to such.

[10 : 19] And he was scathing about those who thought they were good, who thought they were righteous in their own eyes, who thought they could earn their way to heaven. And it's very interesting, isn't it, that he is reminding us that the reality is we are all in that condition before God without Jesus Christ.

He came because we are all unshakably lost and in spiritual darkness until we come to Jesus Christ, who in our dwelling in the shadow of death brings a light into our hearts and into our minds and into our souls.

So the gospel really is all about, in an ongoing way, I think, recognizing that Jesus is the great light that's prophesied here to Isaiah.

He is the light of life. He's the light of truth. And he is the light that brings darkness into our rebellious and broken and hard and saddened hearts.

And often the darker the moral darkness that we sense in ourselves, the brighter Jesus shines.

[11 : 32] The older I become as a Christian, the darker I think and I recognize my heart to be. And therefore I'm driven to the light of Jesus more and more.

It's almost like his light kind of pierces into the kind of ugly corners that he leaves for a few years just until we kind of grow in our knowledge and understanding of him.

There's always that need for his cleansing and to recognize his goodness and grace. And it's beautiful here that this prophecy goes out to the northern tribes that were the first tribes to be exiled in the Old Testament for their idolatry and for their rebellion.

First to rebel, but also first to know about the light and love of Jesus Christ. And in being attracted to the darkness, Jesus is saying that darkness is actually universal.

It's universal in every human heart. And he simply wanted to expose that then. And he exposed it through his ministry to all the people he taught and he went before, especially the religious leaders who thought they were light in and of themselves.

[12 : 47] And I think that's a hugely significant reality for us to recognize that we are in spiritual darkness without Jesus Christ who is the light of life.

So that's the first thing I want to say about him. He was attracted to darkness. But also can I say that he had and still has a trinity of influence. We're told in verse 23, if I can find it, yep, verse 23, he went through Galilee teaching, proclaiming or preaching the gospel and healing every disease and every affliction.

So there's a trinity of influence that Jesus had there in this early way in his public ministry, even before he goes to the cross. He's a teacher, he's a preacher or a proclaimer and a healer.

So he comes, and these are different words. The teaching that he comes with is really the explanation of, for the most part, Old Testament truth that he brings.

He brings the Old Testament truth to the people as he teaches them. Goes into the synagogues, goes and speaks to religious leaders. And he explains and he teaches the Old Testament to them.

[14 : 03] Truth, the imparting of facts and of knowledge. He was appealing to people's minds and to their reason. So you're all sitting there quietly and submissively and without movement.

But I know inside your brains it's all action. As you listen and as you take and as you dissect and as you think and allow Jesus to mold your thinking.

It's such a great thing that we use our minds. We don't leave them at the door. We're apologists for the gospel. We don't leave our minds at the door. We're not stupid in our understanding and our belief in Jesus Christ.

We've not departed from reason, intellect, and science and truth. All of that comes in as Jesus, in his word, imparts truth and knowledge.

But he was also a preacher or a proclaimer. And that is dovetailed with knowledge. And it must be dovetailed with knowledge.

[15 : 04] Where that knowledge is presented in such a way that moves the heart and that wants to change the will. So it's persuasive. His preaching is persuasive. It's effective.

It is to move our affections. To move our will. So our minds are taken and our heart is transformed. And therefore our will is changed.

It's all involved in what Jesus does. And that, you know, we're told the first thing he says. And we're told this in all the gospels. It's the first message he preaches. First message the disciples preach.

It's the first message of the apostles after the resurrection. It's the first sermon that they preach. Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. So this gospel is never just the taking in of facts or intellectual knowledge or religious knowledge.

It's with the intention of us changing direction. Which is what repentance means. Just moving. Instead of moving away from Jesus.

[16 : 05] Moving towards him. Confessing the things that separate us from him. And from one another, I guess, as well. It's recognizing that the good news is that Jesus wants us to have new life and new heart and new direction.

Forgiveness, acceptance and hope. And it's more than just intellectual knowledge. It's more than just ritualistic truth. And as part of that triumvirate of actions that he took in preaching and teaching, he was a healer.

It's a remarkable verse. We're told that everyone who came to him, those afflicted, various diseases and pains, demons, seizures, paralytics. He healed them all. And that was a powerful sign.

Before the cross, a powerful sign to back up his teaching and his preaching and his proclamation. And it speaks of the healing that the message and the challenge brings to us.

Dramatic healings. They were signs, proof of his divine origin, his power and his message. Because healing is hugely important in the gospel message.

[17 : 21] Healing from the inside out. It will involve, in many cases, and some cases, physical healing. Not always. But there will be a physical healing, ultimately, which we look forward to and which we long for and hope.

But there's that remarkable, miraculous inner healing. Inner heart change. Where from turning away from Jesus, we can...

The fact that you are here. The fact that I am here. The fact that we sing about a Jewish man nailed to a cross 2,000 years ago. That speaks volumes of the amazing healing that's happened in our lives.

To be able to do that. To become friends with the living God. Okay. So he had a trinity of influence. But we also see in this passage that he gets up close and personal.

So he's this great teacher, preacher, healer. However, he's the one who is attracted to the darkness of humanity. And he also gets up close and personal.

[18 : 26] We're told in verse 19 that he says, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men. And then in verse 22, we're told, Immediately they left their boat and followed him. Now, I don't know about you, but when I read that, or certainly when I used to read it, I used to think, That's all a bit weird.

It's just a bit stark, isn't it? That this guy's walking along. There's a couple of guys in a boat, And he just says, Man, follow me. They just get off their boat and go and follow him. That strikes us a bit in 21st century society in which we live.

Or maybe any society. It just seems a bit weird. A bit strange that they would just drop everything and follow him. I'm not getting it in your faces, But I think it's a bit weird.

Maybe you don't, but I thought it was a bit strange. And I think that's because it's a fleeting summary that we're given here. And it's important to remember that. If we look at the Gospel of John, It fills in a bit of the time between verse 11, With the temptation of Jesus ending, And verse 12, the beginning of his ministry.

And during that time, He's interacting with lots of people, Including these disciples. So he'd clearly spent time with them. It wasn't the first time he met them, And they just sort of like magic followed him.

[19 : 43] He would have interacted with them. They would have heard him teach. They would have been among all the other crowds That were gossiping about Jesus, Talking about him, discussing him.

The whole region, remember, was buzzing about Jesus. The whole area was thinking who this guy was. And they would have spent time in his company listening to him.

And now he says to them, Now, I'm the Messiah. Follow me. Follow me. And it's that action that repentance means.

It's really just another, It's looking at repentance from another angle, isn't it? Repent. And follow me. It's just two sides of the same coin in many ways. And Jesus is saying, You need a decision here to be my disciples, To follow me.

Repenting means turning towards Jesus And following him as Lord. And these guys made that decision. They were young. They had no formal education. They were leaving their livelihoods.

[20 : 45] And they were leaving their families. And it was tough for them. But the choices they made Were based on his teaching, His preaching, And the healing that they saw.

But probably more than anything, And I don't think it comes across so easily In the kind of flatness of the text, Is his person.

There must have been, And we see that again and again in the Gospels, An inexplicable drawing power In the person of Jesus.

His authority, His character, The weight of his words, The grace of his personality, Drew them.

I don't know if any of you have seen, And it's always maybe dangerous Talking about Characterizations of Jesus. But There was a series that came out, And I think you could only get it on your phone.

[21 : 48] It was an app. And it was called The Chosen. I don't know if anyone's seen it. Eight or nine editions. Programs. And It's just, They're hoping to do many more series Doing the whole of the life of Jesus.

But It's one of these kind of Pay it forward, Crowdfunding things. So they're waiting for money to, But If you get a chance to watch it, Download it and watch it. It's spectacular. And it will give you An insight, Or at least It will challenge It challenges a lot of my thinking, Or at least My presumptions about the knowledge of Jesus.

Makes him very human, But It seems to be also very accurate to The Bible. And it reminds us that he did Take on flesh, But also that there was something Hugely Pulled, Drawing about his character.

They were, It was a courageous move to follow Jesus. It put them into danger. They didn't know all the answers. But yet they sensed forgiveness. And they sensed that this was The Son of God, The Messiah, Who would come.

There was so much they didn't know. And there was so much that happened Beyond that. But they followed him. And now I don't think It's any different today. I think that The command still goes out.

[23 : 03] That we are to follow Jesus Christ. We're still to be followers of Jesus. Because we all follow something. If you're not a believer today, Here, If you're not a follower of Jesus Christ, You are a follower.

You're either following Your own philosophy of life, Or the society's philosophy of life, Or science, Or something, Family relationship, You're, There's something you're following in behind.

There's something in which You put your trust for living. Maybe not implicitly, Or maybe not explicitly, But maybe implicitly, You're leaning on, Most of us lean on ourselves.

Other than leaning on Jesus. But now we have the full story, Unlike these disciples, Who were really following, In many ways in the dark, But the character of Jesus was powerful.

But we have the whole story. And you were singing this morning About the cross. You know that, I keep saying that, Strangest of things to sing about. A crucified and risen saviour.

[24 : 09] But you've been persuaded by that. By the person of Jesus. It's changed your mind. His diagnosis of your need and mine. The mystery of putting your trust in him, And knowing forgiveness and healing.

Amazing healing. What amazing healing. It's not just that we were spiritually sick. It's that we're spiritually dead. And he's brought us to life, So that we can love him, And love one another with his grace.

We've entrusted our lives to him. We repent. Even though sometimes we don't know where it's leading. I was driving out this morning, Passing the scenes, And this beautiful scenery, And the lovely sun.

And I was trying to envisage what heaven would be like. I can't do it. I can't imagine eternity. I feel like exploding. In my head when I think of eternity. Either in heaven or in hell.

Dreadful. Dramatic. But he says, No, No eye has seen, And no mind has conceived, What God has prepared for those who trust in him. It's impossible, To try and fix it all, And have a clear vision of it, Because it would be very, Very small then.

[25 : 18] Because we're kind of small, At that level. But, But we're asked to trust nonetheless. Trust is, Crucified and risen saviour, And our lives are never the same, Are they?

Starting Harrington, Was a huge risk, Humanly speaking. Yeah, It was a huge risk for us, At a human level. We'd gone down to the last day, Where we were either, Going to go ahead, Or say to Ali, Look, We can't hold you on here, You'll need to go and find another church, Because we've got no money.

That day, We got the money, To support Ali, For at least a year here. So there's risk involved, In planting churches, There's risk of failure, There's risk of all kinds of things going on, But we believe, That this is Jesus' work, And Jesus' way, The planting of churches, With this great good news of the gospel, And when we do so, We find it's worth it, Absolutely worth it.

And so I'm asking, If you're not, The great thing about coming to, A beautiful church like this is, I only know the kind of core people, That have been involved in St. Columbus, Or some old friends, From my previous life, In different places, Who I still know, But don't see very much, Lovely to see, But, Because I don't know, I can just put out that challenge, If you're not a Christian, What is holding you back?

Are you waiting for a flashing light? Are you waiting for more proof? Are you afraid? All of these things, We may be, But he asks you to follow him, The sovereign king of the universe, With all the fear, And all the doubt, And all the confusion, And all the difficulty, And trust your life to him, Make that choice, It will be, The cost is worth it, A million times over, And he asks us to follow him, It's no different today, Count the cost, But then, Follow him, And he is worth it, So lastly, And with this I close, How are we, How are we to be like him?

[27 : 26] There's many ways, We can't be like Jesus, Because he's unique, And he's the saviour, And we're not the saviour, He's the messiah, We do, Well I was going to say, We don't get crucified, But kind of we do, But it's in a different way, Not as messiahs, But as those who, Nail our sins, And our old life to the cross, But there's some ways, We can't be like him, But I think there are ways, We can also be Christ-like, And we're commanded to be Christ-like, In our lives, And that's an ongoing challenge, In Christians for 30 years, Or 100 years, Or five years, That's always a challenge, Sometimes the older we get, The more of a challenge, Because we can become complacent, And we can think, Eh, No at all, And that's never the case, So how can we be like him, Well there's just two things, That I want to say in conclusion, The first is, And this is paradoxical, By dispelling the darkness, That Jesus was attracted, To the darkness, That I hope, That I explained, What I meant by that, In order to dispel it,

Wasn't it? It was so that he was bringing, A great light into the darkness, Of that area, Shadow of death, A great light has dawned, People dwelling in darkness, Seen a great light, And he dispels darkness, And I think as followers of Jesus, In a broken and sin filled world, We are to be dispellers, Probably made that up word, Eh, We are to be those, Who dispel darkness, Okay, With the light of Christ in us, Eh, His light, Must shine into our hearts, Dispelling the darkness, Cleansing us, Forgiving us, We need to be people, Who are rooting out darkness, Selfishness, Pride, Lust, Greed, Loving his truth, And living by it, Humbly, In dependence, On the Holy Spirit, We're to make our great prayer, The hardest prayer of all, But the prayer that he gave us, As a motto, Your kingdom come, Your will be done, The hardest thing you'll do today, The hardest thing I do today, Is pray that prayer, Your will be done,

In my life, Because we battle, At our very core, With my will, First, Everyone else's second, Including God's, But he says, As we, The more light we become, In him, The more we allow his will to be done, And his kingdom to come, And we are to, Seek to dispel darkness, In our own hearts, By relying on Jesus Christ, Relationship with Christ, Allowing his light, Into the darkness there, And then, I think we become attracted, To the darkness, In the same way that Jesus was, Attracted to go out with the gospel, Attracted to tell it to our friends, Who morally, As they live in the world, And as we compare ourselves, To them, Might be much more light, Comparatively than, We are, Morally, As we compare them, At that level, Community level, But before God,

They're in spiritual darkness, And we go out with that gospel, And live that gospel, And love, The darkness, At that level, That we, Want to bring the light, Of the gospel, Into the darkness, In the same way that Jesus Christ, We are a lesser light, He is the greater light, But as we love, There is no greater time, To be a Christian, Than just now, Here, In a secular, Godless, Post-Christian generation, Stop hankering back, After what it was, 50 or 60 or 100 years ago, It was never a Christian nation anyway, But now is a good time, Because society is broken, And community is at a premium, And love is, Hugely self-centered, And it's the best time, To display the love of Christ, Which is sacrificial, And community, Because people are lonely, And isolated, And lost, And it's a great time, It's a tough time, And there is great darkness, Spiritually, But with Christ,

We can bring, Huge hope, And you've already, Recognized that, And seen that happening here, Very powerfully, And it's with Christ, We can do that, Think of, Think of who Christ went among, Think of who Christ changed, Matthew, Zacchaeus, The Samaritan woman, Legion, The outcasts, The reprobates of the day, The ones that nobody had any time, The lepers, What did he do?

[32 : 02] And maybe this is significant, In the coronavirus, He touched them, But he was Jesus, And he was healing them, I'm not advocating, I'm not advocating, Anything, Do what Ross says, He's right, So, But we've got to be wise, But we're not to be fearful, Are we?

In the same way, We're not saying, What's happening in the universe? Because it's all under God's control, However confusing sometimes, And difficult it is to understand, We recognize and see, That he is working towards, Patiently, That day, When everything will be renewed, But think of the people Jesus changed, And dispel darkness, Because we understand the darkness, In our own hearts, It's not in any kind of moralistic, Judgmental way, Where say, No, I must go to the people, That really, The outcasts in society, Because I will, I'm so good, It's not like that, They're just a picture, Of what I am in my own heart, And they are beloved, And they are made in God's image, Every way, Every bit as much as I am, So dispelling darkness, And then also, I think prioritizing, His prioritizing, Prioritizing his priorities, Sorry, Which is,

Teaching, Preaching, And healing, That is, We must prioritize, The importance of truth, It's not good enough, I don't think, For us just to say, Well, I think Jesus would love this, And I would like to do that, And maybe Jesus agrees with that, He teaches us, Who he is, And he teaches us his character, And he teaches us his principles, And from these principles, We pray for the wisdom, To implement them in our lives, Like, The gospel in the Christian life, Isn't black and white, It's very little black and white, Much of it is wisdom, And the wisdom of God, And the seeking of God, And we only have that wisdom, As we know him, As he's revealed, Through the Bible, And through prayer, And through time, In his company, Preaching, Not just in church, But being persuasive, In our lives, But in church as well, Sunday matters, I know that in St. Columbus, And I know here, And on the church plants, We put a great emphasis on Sunday,

That it matters, That it's never irrelevant, But the community that gathers, The word that you hear, The fact that you are active, And listening, Just as much as Ali is listening, And preaching, Is hugely significant, And we're seeking for people, To be persuaded, God forbid, That people walk out, Thinking it's boring, And dull, And irrelevant, What we do, When we gather together, But preaching, And persuading others, And also recognizing, I think, The power, Of, Healing, God's healing, In our lives, It might not always be physical, It may be at times, But, It's that inner, Healing of our heart, That is the most, That's the greatest miracle of all, Changing our hearts, To not be self-centered, But to be Christ-centered, To love him first, And to love, To love one another, Not only as much as he has loved us,

Because that's the 11th commandment, But to love one another, As we love ourselves, And we can only love ourselves, When we see ourselves, The way Christ sees us, As damned, Without him, But it's redeemed with him, And, Part of his family, His child, Loved, Eternally, So, I hope that we can, Be encouragers, To one another, In these areas, Let's pray, Amen, Follow me, Investor, The way Christ of God,