

# The importance of responding to Jesus

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- [ 0 : 0 0 ] It's good to have a good number of people here this morning. Hopefully, now that the young guys have gone out, everyone has got a chair and no one's having to stand up at the back, which is always helpful. It's good to have a busy church on a Sunday morning.
- But actually, I wonder if you've ever kind of asked the question, well, why isn't, for us, why isn't the whole of Haddington in church this morning, whether here with us or in other churches or across the country?
- Why isn't it that churches are bursting at the seams if the good news of the gospel is so good? This passage is here to help us answer that question.
- Why didn't, and still today, why don't more people believe in Jesus? Just to kind of get us up to speed with what we've been looking at over the last month or so, we've been working our way through chapters 11 and 12 of John's gospel.
- We've looked at chapters 1 to 10 at various times over the last couple of years. And actually, throughout this book, throughout this gospel of John, we have seen, we have read about incredible things.
- [ 1 : 0 6 ] You might remember or you might have heard right back in chapter 1 of John. He begins his gospel with this incredible claim that the Word, which John describes as the eternal creator God, the Word became flesh in Jesus Christ.
- And so John starts with a bang, that actually in Jesus, God himself has come into our world. We've seen then in the first half of John's gospel, Jesus saying incredible things about himself, that he has descended from heaven, that he and the Father are one, that he is the promised Christ, that the rescuer who is to come, that he is the light of the world, that he is the resurrection and the life.
- Again, incredible claims that Jesus has been saying, but actually claims that we've seen Jesus back up with incredible miracles or signs, as John calls them.
- Signs all pointing to the truth of who Jesus is and all that he's said. And these middle chapters, 11 and 12, have all been kind of based around or have been in response to probably the most incredible sign yet in this gospel, which was Jesus bringing a man, Lazarus, back from the dead, back out of the tomb after four days, this public event that people witnessed firsthand.
- And so incredible things have been going on. And through this, lots of people have come to believe in Jesus. Lots of people have come to trust in Jesus.
- [ 2 : 4 6 ] But also at this kind of halfway point through John's gospel, just as many, if not more, have turned their back on Jesus, have rejected him.
- So strongly, in fact, have they rejected him that Jesus at this point is a wanted man with a price on his head. The authorities have decided, they've made up their minds to kill him.
- That has been their response to Jesus. And so again, a big question, a good question for the very first people reading John's gospel and still for us today is that question.

If it's really true, if Jesus was who he said he was, if God really walked among us, then why didn't more people recognize that? Why didn't more people believe in him and trust in him?

It's very easy for us today, 2,000 years later, to think, well, it would have been fine if I'd been there, if I'd been alive then, it would have been obvious. You know, everyone would believe. It would have been easy to make up our mind.

[ 3 : 45 ] But actually, we see in the Bible that that is not what happened. Back then, just as now, many people refused to respond to Jesus. Perhaps if you're a Christian this morning, that's a question you've thought about that perhaps frustrates you or upsets you.

Why don't more of my friends, of my colleagues, of my family believe? Perhaps it can worry you. Why am I kind of in the minority here in Scotland, at least?

You know, we tend to put a lot of stock in what other people are doing, don't we? You could think of any time, any example where you've been asked that question, hands up for option A, hands up for option B.

What is the first thing you do? It's always to kind of look around, you know, how many people have got their hands up? What is everyone else doing? It's easy to doubt yourself if you're the only hand that goes up.

Or perhaps this morning you're here and you're not a Christian. You're not really sure. Either way, you're still kind of asking questions. As always, we're absolutely delighted that you are here, absolutely delighted that you're asking those questions and church is the very best place to ask those questions.

[ 4 : 55 ] And maybe that is something that you have thought about or that you would think about. Surely if God has come to earth, surely the response would have been massive. And actually, in so many ways throughout history, it has, hasn't it?

Jesus and the gospel have changed the world completely. But still, how come not everyone there at the time could see it? How come not everyone here today can see it?

Is it perhaps safer just to go with the majority? And so that's really where we're up to. That's the question we're going to think about. Why don't more people respond to Jesus? Whether 2,000 years ago, whether right here this morning.

And then having thought of that, we'll move on and see actually for all of us, every person here and throughout history, why it is so important that we do respond to Jesus.

There we go. First question, as we said, why don't more people respond to Jesus? In 2007, Joshua Bell, one of the greatest virtuoso violinists in the world, did an experiment where he spent 40 minutes busking at a metro stop in Washington, D.C.

[ 6 : 07 ] This incredible musician playing incredible music on an incredible multi-million pounds Stradivarius violin. The experiment went this way, that of the 1,097 people who went past him that morning, only seven stopped to listen for any significant amount of time.

He made \$32 busking that morning. There can be incredible things happening that we miss. And as we've said, the Bible makes incredible claims about Jesus.

How was that missed? Or perhaps we could be stronger than that. How is that rejected by so many? Well, there are two parts to answer that question here in these verses in John.

Two different parts that we'll look at in answer to that. And the first is this. It will take a little bit of explaining, so do stick with me. But John here is clear. And elsewhere in the Bible is consistent with that.

Why don't more people respond to Jesus? One, because God has hardened some people's hearts against him. Now, let me read from verse 37.

[ 7 : 19 ] It says, It says, Though he, that's Jesus, had done many signs before them, they still did not believe in him, so that the words spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled.

Lord, who has believed what he heard from us? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? Therefore, they could not believe. For again, Isaiah said, He has blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts, lest they see with their eyes and understand with their heart, and turn, and I would heal them.

John, the gospel writer here, quotes from Isaiah. Isaiah was a prophet in the Old Testament, that part of the Bible written before Jesus was born.

Isaiah was a man who saw God's glory, who was sent out by God to tell of his glory, but was also told by God that no one would respond to his message.

Not simply because they weren't listening or couldn't be bothered, but actually because God had hidden it from them. He had blinded their eyes. He had hardened their hearts, as it says here.

[ 8 : 34 ] Now, straight away, that sounds sort of shocking, doesn't it? Why would God do that? I think the first thing here that's vital to say, and we'll see this much more in just a second, in fact, in the rest of our time together, that doesn't mean that it's saying here that people are robots and just have no choice and that we're not responsible.

Actually, we absolutely have responsibility in how we respond to Jesus. There's not any conflict here. We're going to see that even more clearly in just a moment.

But what John is talking about here, the situation back in Isaiah's time, and also here in the time of Jesus, is people who had set themselves against God so persistently, so repeatedly, in such a settled way, that eventually God removed their opportunity to see the truth, even though it's right there in front of their faces.

And this is not God keeping kind of eager people away, like a bouncer, kind of keeping people who want to get in out. This is actually God giving the people what they have wanted.

The author Don Carson describes it as a judgment where guilty people are condemned to do and be what they themselves have chosen. And that is such a lesson, that is such a warning for us today as well.

[ 9 : 59 ] And that warning that actually we can't just presume on God. That actually we can't just keep on putting God off. Well, that's something I'll think about later. I've got other stuff going on.

I've got more pressing issues. I'll get around to maybe considering God when I'm older. Actually, we might not get that chance. And sometimes it's a bit like kind of DIY tasks at home.

If your house is anything like mine, there are plenty of little jobs that need doing. Maybe a kind of a mark on the wall here or there. We've got quite a big hole in the wall at one point. It's fairly obvious.

And when that happened, you know, you thought, oh, I'll get around to that. I'll fix that. You know, I need to sort that out. And gradually, as you kind of pass it day by day and don't really do anything about it, you get more and more used to it.

You eventually become kind of blind to it, immune to it, and nothing ever happens. There are plenty of places around my house that fit into that category.

[ 10 : 55 ] But what we're talking about here in John is something far more significant, something eternally significant, because that is what can happen if we continue to ignore God.

And John's writing here not to say, well, there's nothing you can do. It's all wrapped up. He's writing here to give us an urgency that we don't settle ourselves against God, that we don't keep on ignoring, that we don't keep on rejecting, that we don't keep on thinking, oh, I'll get around to that, responding at some point in the future, because the worst thing that can happen is that God gives us what we choose and blinds our eyes towards him, hardens our hearts against him.

And nothing, nothing could be more serious than that. And so there's the first part of the question, why don't more people respond to Jesus either then or now?

First part is there's this hardening by God, a judgment from God on the hearts of those who reject him. There's part one. The second part of this answer then, and the next couple of verses here, looks at things we could say from the other perspective, what we could call man's perspective, man's responsibility, man's actions.

We said earlier, God being in control doesn't mean in any way that we are not humanly responsible for what we do and for our motivations. And that's what we see here.

[ 12 : 20 ] Verses 42 and 43, John writes, nevertheless, many even of the authorities believed in him, but for fear of the Pharisees, they did not confess it so that they would not be put out of the synagogue, for they loved the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God.

John records how actually there were plenty of people who did recognize who Jesus was, who did actually believe the things that he was saying.

Even some of those in authority, they're kind of the bigwigs, the VIPs. Why didn't they respond? Why didn't they speak out? Why wouldn't they stand to be counted among God's people?

Well, we read it there in black and white, don't we? For they loved the glory that comes from man more than the glory that comes from God. And this part of the answer is, again, really just the same now as it was then.

Why don't more people respond to Jesus? It's because as human beings, we love the glory that comes from man. We want to be part of the in crowd.

[ 13 : 30 ] We care more about what people think of us than what God thinks about us. And again, that's such a dangerous attitude. C.S. Lewis, in an essay called The Inner Ring, writes about being accepted, writes about being part of a group, being respected by others.

He says, for all people of all ages, he writes, one of the most dominant elements of life is the desire to be inside the local ring and the terror of being left outside.

And I'm sure we've all felt that, haven't we? At various stages of life, from the playground to the common room, to the workplace, on social media, to our friends or our peers, whatever age we might be, that we are desperate to be in the right crowd.

We are desperate to have the right people say the right things about us. We're desperate to be on the inside, the inner ring. And John here is saying that that desire for the glory that comes from man is so strong that actually it can lead us and has led people throughout history to turn our backs on Jesus.

Because to believe in Jesus, to follow him, to accept him, it comes with that risk of being different. And we all love to fit in. And so whether knowingly is in this passage or perhaps even subconsciously where we just don't even want to think about it, we don't even want to give it the time, we don't want to go there, we turn our backs on Jesus in order to stay with the world and those around us.

[ 15 : 10 ] And yet John says, as we do that, C.S. Lewis in that essay, The Inner Ring, he goes on to say how actually we get into one circle and there is always an inner circle.

And again and again and again, it's like an onion that actually this worldly position, this worldly respect, this worldly glory never actually satisfies us. There's always something more.

We always just think, oh, if I could just get into that inner circle, if I could just connect there, if I could just get glory from that person, or if they would just say this about me. But that actually, we never get what we think we need.

The glory that comes from man is fickle and can't give what it promises. But actually in seeking that, we miss out on that glory that comes from God, a certain and eternal glory we can share, made possible through Jesus.

Again, what a challenge that is for us, a challenge if you're not yet a Christian. Is it that you are so concerned about what other people think that you will miss out on the most important thing of all?

[ 16 : 21 ] And also a challenge that continues for those of us who are Christians, in some way a challenge that never goes away. Our whole life is lived in this challenge. In our schools, our workplaces, with friends, are we really willing to potentially stand out?

Are we willing to risk that glory that comes from man? Perhaps that's not the words we would use, but are we willing to risk that kind of respect, that popularity, simply just that being thought of as normal and kind of one of the gang?

that is hard to do. And yet that is what believing in Jesus means. It's not a secret thing, but a public thing.

And yet the strength to do that comes from knowing the glory that comes from God is far greater, is far more secure, and far more eternal than anything that we could receive from anyone else.

And actually that leads us then on to the second half of our passage. Why don't more people respond to God? That was question one. Their hearts are hardened. They love the glory of man.

[ 17 : 33 ] And yet actually this passage, and really the whole of John's gospel, is this appeal that people would respond. This isn't John just simply saying, here are the facts, just let me lay them out.

This is how it is. This is John inviting, imploring people to come in. In fact, at the end of the book, John gives a kind of a purpose statement as to why he's written. He says, these things are written so that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and in believing, have life in his name.

And this passage doesn't end just saying, well, this is how it is. It calls for it, invites us to this response. And our second question then, why is it so important to respond to Jesus?

Why is it so important to respond to Jesus? This is really from verse 44 onwards to the end of our passage. Let me just read the start of that. And Jesus cried out and said, whoever believes in me, believes not in me, but in him who sent me.

And whoever sees me, sees him who sent me. I have come into the world as light, so that whoever believes in me, may not remain in darkness.

[ 18 : 45 ] Jesus shows us there that the primary reason our response to him is so important is that our response to Jesus is our response to God.

To believe in Jesus is to believe in God who sent him. To see Jesus is to see God. Jesus comes as the light to illuminate God to us so we can see what he is like.

Jesus says that the words he speaks are God's words that we're to respond to. Our response to Jesus is our response to God.

And we live in a world where an increasing number of people would say they are sort of spiritual, but not religious. It's the kind of category people often put themselves in. The philosopher Charles Taylor writes about our secular age as being a time that has very little time really for God.

He sees very little relevance for God in so many ways. But he describes our age as being haunted by transcendence is the phrase he uses.

[ 19 : 54 ] That idea that we can't get away from that kind of nagging thought that there is something more. That this can't be it. That actually a kind of closed view of our world and our universe simply cannot answer all the questions that life raises.

And yet that something more is so often a distant, kind of unknown, perhaps even unknowable, just kind of transcendent and out there and who knows what. Actually the Bible says that that's like walking in the darkness.

That there's more, but who knows what is to be in the dark. But that Jesus has come as the light so that we can know that transcendent God.

And a God who answers the questions of morality, of purpose, of human worth, that a godless world so often struggles to give satisfactory answers to.

It's so important to respond to Jesus because our response to Jesus is our response to God himself, the God who rules over and the God who makes sense of the world and the universe in which we live.

[ 21 : 09 ] And again, I think that's both a warning, isn't it, but also an incredible promise. It's a warning because, as Jesus says, if we don't listen to him, if we don't receive his words, then actually we are rejecting God himself.

We're rejecting what God has said. And we end up with the ultimate result, that ultimate judgment that comes from that, of that separation from God. And the fact is that we can't get to God without Jesus.

But Jesus' emphasis here, verse 47, is that he didn't come to judge, but that he came to save the world. There is this incredible promise that comes hand in hand with that warning.

He came as the light. He came so people could see. He came so we could know God and enjoy that the glory that comes from him, which is certain and eternal, rather than chasing after the glory that comes from man, which is fickle and can disappear, and we can't control it or grasp it.

And Jesus comes with that promise. Verse 49, I have not spoken on my own authority, but the Father who sent me has given me a commandment, what to say and what to speak.

[ 22 : 24 ] And I know that his commandment is eternal life. You know, what is that commandment that the message, the word that Jesus brings from the Father? Well, ultimately, that commandment is that we would believe in Jesus and through that receive eternal life.

is that as we've already heard with Emily this morning, that we too would be able to answer yes or I do to that most important question for each of us of all time.

Now, we heard it read earlier, do you believe that Jesus is the Son of God and the only Savior of sinners in whom you have put your trust as a sinner needing forgiveness, grace, and spiritual life?

That actually God offers us that grace. God offers us that spiritual life, that eternal life, that life with him through Jesus as we respond to Jesus in faith and love, as we believe in Jesus, believe he is who he said he is, believe he has done what he has said he has done, believe it is finished as we sang earlier, that he has won that victory on the cross.

Trusting in his promise of forgiveness, trusting in his death in our place, trusting in his resurrection, is leading the way for all who trust in Jesus to enjoy eternity with him.

[ 23 : 49 ] And that is why it is so important that we respond to Jesus. Now, we began this morning by asking that question, why don't more people respond to Jesus?

Why don't more people believe in Jesus? We've seen, hopefully, that doesn't mean that's a failure, it's not a weakness on God's part, it's actually, as we read the Bible, exactly what God has promised, that it is a narrow path.

For those of us who are Christians, this morning we shouldn't be surprised or discouraged by that, but rather encouraged to keep on living faithfully in light of that. But we see even more clearly, I think, in this passage, that importance of responding to Jesus.

And perhaps that is directly for you this morning. Ultimately, the question that really matters isn't, why don't more people respond? But why don't you respond to Jesus?

Why don't you believe in him? That is the biggest question for each one of us here this morning. And for those of us who are Christians, that as a church, we would be taking this good news out to share with those around us.

[ 25 : 01 ] That in Jesus, God offers us, each and every one of us, each and every person we know, offers us eternal life. And not through what we've done, not through our efforts, not through us earning it, but through belief in Jesus.

The grace and the forgiveness that he pours out on us when we turn to him. That God offers a place sharing in his glory, a glory far better than anything that the world can offer.

And that is an incredible, and that is an urgent message for us to be holding out. And that is a positive message for us to be holding out, that we would be inviting people in to share in the joy of this eternal life that God has promised and made possible through belief in Jesus.

that we've been looking through the last few weeks to a close. A section we said at the start a few weeks ago, it was all about seeing God's glory, that glory that we see most fully in Jesus and most fully of all in his death and glorious resurrection.

This kind of central section that finishes with actually that amazing truth that we can share in that glory, that we can enjoy that eternal life promised by God through Jesus if we respond by believing in him.

[ 26 : 26 ] Let's pray together. you