

Believe in the Son

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[0 : 0 0] Well, last week I was looking for some statistics on what people think about Jesus. and the most recent statistics I could find were in this Talking Jesus report, which came! and so four years ago, basically it outlines what people in the UK think about Jesus, their perception of Him. And so the survey was surveying a large number of people asking them essentially what they think about Jesus. And these are the answers to the question, is Jesus God? Where people were given five options to describe Jesus. And so you can see 20% said Jesus is God in human form who lived among people in the first century. 25% said that Jesus was a normal human being. 33%, which is the highest, said Jesus is a prophet or spiritual leader, but Jesus isn't God. 4% said other, and 18% said don't know. So basically, 20% thought that Jesus is God in human form, but more people, 33%, regard Jesus as a spiritual leader, but do not regard Jesus as God. And it's interesting, because that was four years ago, but since then there has been this growing interest in Jesus in UK society, and it's brought many people into churches. And I know some of you have just recently joined here, because you're interested in finding out who Jesus is, and that's fantastic. Now, I guess most of us here won't need convincing about who Jesus is, but perhaps not all. In which case, I'm glad that you're here, because at Christ Church Glasgow, what we want to do is explore who Jesus is together, because we believe that Jesus changes lives. And so our Bible reading this afternoon from John's gospel essentially tells us who Jesus is, because if we want to discover the real Jesus, the true Jesus, the original Jesus, then we've got to go back to the original documents, the source documents, if you like, in the gospels, back to those people who encountered Jesus when he first walked this earth and listened to what they have to say. And so that's what we get here in this passage. It's basically testimony, or it is witness to who Jesus is, because the gospel writer John, as he writes this gospel, he doesn't want us to miss the true identity of Jesus. And so this afternoon, I'd like us to look at three things. First of all, the suspicion around Jesus. Second, the status of Jesus. And then third, the supremacy of Jesus. So first of all, the suspicion around Jesus, because when we read this passage, we see that there is some suspicion surrounding Jesus. Well, how did this come about?

Look down at verse 22 and 23. After this, Jesus and his disciples went out into the Judean countryside where he spent some time with them and baptized. Now, John also was baptizing at a Neon near Salem because there was plenty of water and people were coming and being baptized. So Jesus and his disciples went into Judea and John the Baptist was also there baptizing. And it sounds like Jesus is baptizing, but if you look at chapter 4 and verse 2, the gospel writer John tells us, in fact, it was not Jesus who baptized, but his disciples. Now, remember, John the Baptist, we've been introduced to him already. He came as a witness to testify to Jesus. That was his job. And John had been doing his job. And that's why some of John's disciples had become disciples of Jesus. But clearly, not all of them, which is where the suspicion around Jesus comes in. And we see this in verse 25 and 26. An argument developed between some of John's disciples and a certain Jew over the matter of ceremonial washing. They came to John and said to him, Rabbi, that man who was with you on the other side of the Jordan, the one you testified about, look, he is baptizing and everyone is going to him. So there's some kind of beef between John's disciples and this Jew about ceremonial washing. Nothing was really said about it. So it obviously doesn't matter very much. But the outcome of this is that John's disciples aren't impressed with Jesus. And so they want to make a complaint about Jesus to John. And notice that they call John the Baptist Rabbi, but they don't even mention

Jesus by name. He's the man who was with John. He's the one John testified about, suggesting that they're jealous as they see Team Jesus eclipsing Team John as more and more people go and follow Jesus and become his disciples. And so these disciples of John, their reaction isn't fantastic.

More people are now following Jesus. Instead, it's more like, who does he think he is? And what does he think he is doing, taking people away from us? And I'm sure this is an attitude that we are well aware of, isn't it?

[5 : 31] You get this kind of jealousy still in churches, as other churches grow bigger and faster than perhaps our own, where many more people are trusting in Jesus or are being baptized. And we can be like John's disciples. And we can have this petty jealousy that kind of says, oh, everybody's going to them.

Why is everybody going to them? Instead of saying, fantastic, more people are meeting Jesus. Maybe that's just a church leader issue, I don't know. But I've no doubt that we've all felt this kind of jealousy for ourselves when we think we deserve some kind of recognition for what we've done, but somebody else gets it instead. When somebody outshines me and I get overlooked, perhaps it's because of their looks or because of their personality or their popularity or whatever. We feel that jealousy inside, don't we? And even if it's not for us, we'll certainly feel it if we've got children, when somebody else wins the prize that we think our child should have got. Or even when our children miss out on opportunities because they follow Jesus. We feel that sense of jealousy because it just doesn't seem very fair. And so the issue here for John's disciples is that they don't really know who Jesus is, that he is the one who is to be followed. They haven't realized that Jesus must come first. Jesus must come first before John. Jesus must come first before them. And so the challenge for John's disciples, and even the challenge for John himself, is whether Jesus will come first. Will Jesus be number one? Will they step into the shade so that the light can shine on Jesus? And that's also a challenge for us too, isn't it? Because if Jesus is who John's gospel claims he is, he's the Messiah, the Son of God. If he is God's King who rules now and who will rule and reign forever, then surely we must bow to his authority. He must come first. He must come first in my relationships, before my wife, before my husband, before my children, before my parents, before my parents, first in every part of my life, before my interests, before my desires, before my preferences, and my plans, and my fame, and my comfort, and my reputation. He must come first. And that's the radical impact that Jesus makes on people's lives back then and still today. His coming, his identity, his authority mean I must yield myself to him. And I must long for other people to come to him and absolutely love it when they do, even if that's had nothing to do with me. Because what matters is not that we look good, but that Jesus does. And that's what John the Baptist brings out in his response to his disciples. So, let's move on to our second point. First, there's this suspicion around Jesus, but secondly, John brings out the status of Jesus. John the Baptist basically clarifies his status, but in doing so, and more importantly, he tells us the status of Jesus.

So, look at verse 27 and 28. To this John replied, a person can receive only what is given them from heaven. You yourselves can testify that I said, I am not the Messiah, but I'm sent ahead of him. So, John makes it clear that his role was to prepare for the coming of Jesus. And so, he's not seeing this as competition where he's got to compete with Jesus in the popularity stakes. No, unlike some of his disciples, John is not upset by the increasing popularity of Jesus. That's what he wants.

[9 : 45] Because if this is happening, if people are going to Jesus, then it confirms that John has done his job well. And so, John repeats what he'd said earlier in the gospel that I am not the Messiah.

Because John, of course, was sent to testify about the Messiah. And this is the role that John had been given by God. And he says it was given to him from heaven. A person can receive only what is given them from heaven. So, he's aware that this is what God wanted him to do. And he's completely content with what God wanted him to do. So, there's no rivalry between John the Baptist and Jesus. So, John came ahead of Jesus in order to point people to Jesus. And that's why John here wants to clarify his relationship with Jesus.

So, the status of Jesus as Messiah means that Jesus is the bridegroom. So, verse 29 says, the bride belongs to the bridegroom. The friend who attends the bridegroom waits and listens for him and is full of joy when he hears the bridegroom's voice. That joy is mine and it is now complete. The bridegroom. He's calling Jesus the bridegroom. That may seem like an odd way to refer to Jesus. But if you were here earlier, remember in John chapter 2, there was the wedding at Cana in Galilee.

And in that wedding, the wedding ran out of wine. And in that culture, it was the responsibility of the bridegroom to provide the wine for the wedding and to make sure there was enough. But the

bridegroom at that wedding had failed in his duty to provide enough. And so, Jesus, in a sense, took on the role of the bridegroom and he sorted it out. But the portrayal of Jesus as the bridegroom goes far deeper because it picks up on the Old Testament understanding of God's covenant relationship with his people, where God is described as the bridegroom and his people are described as the bride. His people, Israel, are his bride. All through the Old Testament, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Hosea, Ezekiel. And yet, despite Israel's unfaithfulness in this covenant relationship, the future for them is pictured as a wedding feast with God as the bridegroom who is rejoicing over his bride. And of course, all of this is fulfilled in Jesus, who is Israel's Messiah. Jesus himself is the bridegroom. And this is actually how Jesus refers to himself elsewhere. And that's why his people, the church, the church of Jesus Christ, is called the bride of Christ throughout the rest of the New Testament. Jesus is the bridegroom and his church is the bride. And so, all of this culminates at the end of the Bible in the book of Revelation, the final book, with the wedding supper of the Lamb. And so, John the Baptist is saying that Israel's long-awaited Messiah has arrived. And so, now that the bridegroom is here, it's time to get ready for the wedding. And so, John the Baptist's job has been to prepare true Israel, the bride, for Jesus, the bridegroom.

[13:19] And that's why he doesn't care about people going from him to Jesus. He's not the bridegroom. Jesus is. And that's why John calls himself here in verse 29, the friend who attends the bridegroom. That is the ancient equivalent of what we call the best man, the loyal mate of the groom. Now, when you think best man today, it's kind of different to the best man back then. The best man back then had far more responsibilities than, I guess, we'd be wise to give our best men today. This best man back then had a role that had so many responsibilities towards the bride and the groom to make sure the wedding ceremony and then everything they were after took place without any problems. And the best man, he knew that it wasn't his day. He knew it wasn't about him. So, his happiness didn't matter. He was there simply to serve the groom as they had the marriage. And so, the best man would take great joy, as John says, in seeing the bride and groom come together in marriage. That's when his job was done. And this is what John the Baptist is saying about his best man duties for Jesus, if you like, in verse 29.

He says, That's John saying, My job's now done. The job God gave me to do is over. But of course, he can say that because it wasn't ever about John, it was always about Jesus. And so, John the Baptist, he marks the end of all the Old Testament prophets who were pointing to the Messiah. And now that the Messiah has come, here is John. He is ready to step aside and make way for Jesus. He's been like the support act, like a concert at the Hydro. You go and you persevere through the support act because you know the main act that you've paid your money for is coming. That's what John is saying he is like. Jesus is now on the stage. And so, John can be satisfied that he has completed the ministry that God gave him to do. But not just satisfied, John says he's filled with joy at seeing Jesus arrive and hearing his voice. Because of course, Jesus is his Messiah as well. And so, he's happy that all the attention goes on Jesus. That's why he says in verse 30, He must become greater, I must become less. John was merely a voice crying out to alert people to Jesus.

And now that Jesus has arrived, John's job is done and he says, Jesus must become greater and I must become less. And that word must indicates that John knows God's will for his life and he's embraced it.

His Messiah is now here. The bridegroom has come to take his bride. The kingdom has arrived with the king taking up his rightful rule. And that's why John and John's disciples and every person must acknowledge the status of Jesus and bow to his authority. And so, what better application for you and for me than to take John the Baptist's words here as our daily motto, the motto for our lives. He must become greater, I must become less. So, if we believe in Jesus and if we follow Jesus today, that's got to be our heart's desire, hasn't it? That's discipleship in a nutshell. Discipleship is not complicated.

[17:24] It's about putting Jesus first. Because it's not about me, it's about Jesus. It's not about seeking glory and honor for myself, but about wanting the glory and honor to go to Jesus. Not about wanting the spotlight to shine on me, but to shine on him. Because he is the source of all our joy. And so, when our chief concern is not to see our own agenda done, but his, we'll have joy in seeing it being done.

But this is something that doesn't just happen in an instant, does it? To make Jesus greater, to have him increase so that we become less and decrease, it is a lifelong journey. It's a process of working

this principle out into every sphere of our existence and into every single thing that we do. Jesus becomes greater and I become less. Okay, so the status of Jesus. There's a suspicion around Jesus. There's a status of Jesus. And then thirdly, there's the supremacy of Jesus in verse 31 to 36. Now, these verses appear to be the gospel writers, John's words rather than John the Baptist's words. So, it's as if John, the gospel writer, is commenting on what John's just said. And what he does is he expands upon the supremacy of Jesus. Verse 31, the one who comes from above is above all.

The one who is from the earth belongs to the earth and speaks as one from the earth. The one who comes from heaven is above all. So, John's saying here, Jesus is supreme over all because he is from above.

He comes from heaven. So, he's saying everybody else who's ever existed in all of the world belongs to the earth. In other words, they've been born in a human way. They have a human origin because they're human beings, but not Jesus. Jesus is from heaven. And so, we're not being told that Jesus is in a different league here. This is not like the difference between, I don't know, Celtic and Livingston, the top and the bottom of the league. No, Jesus is in a league all of his own.

[19:57] That's what John is saying. He is incomparable as God's Son. He's supreme over every human being, which means, of course, Jesus is supreme over every religious leader and every religious teacher that there's ever been. Why? Well, because they all belong to the earth, don't they? He belongs to heaven.

They're mere human beings. Jesus is divine. And so, Jesus trumps them all, which is why we must take seriously everything Jesus says. Because what Jesus says about God matters far more than what any human being says about God says about God? Look at verse 32 to 34. He testifies to what he has seen and heard, but no one accepts his testimony. Whoever has accepted it has certified that God is truthful, for the one whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God gives the Spirit without limit. So, Jesus has been sent by God. So, Jesus has been sent by God, and so he speaks the very words of God. He testifies to what he has seen and heard, which means Jesus has this divine authority, and he speaks divine truth. He speaks the very words of God to us. And so, we know exactly what God says when we listen to Jesus, because we read here that Jesus has been given the Spirit without limit. John the Baptist already testified how he saw the Spirit come down from heaven and remain on Jesus. And so, all of this is saying to John's readers, including us, that Jesus has the supremacy, that Jesus is more than a mere man.

Jesus is more than a mere teacher. Jesus is more than a mere prophet. Jesus is God the Son, who possesses the Spirit of God without limit. And so, He speaks as God. His words carry ultimate authority because they're from God, which means, well, we've got to listen to Jesus over and above every other voice, because there are many religious teachers out there, aren't there? And they will talk about God and about life and about death and about heaven and about salvation. But their words don't come with divine authority because they're people who belong to the earth, people who have got the same origin as you and me. They were conceived and born in the normal human way. And so, we should never be influenced by anything they say. Jesus is the one we must listen to and obey. Because Jesus comes from above, from heaven,

He is above all, and He speaks the exact words of God. So, Jesus is the supreme authority over everything. And it makes sense, doesn't it? Put it this way, if I wanted to learn the truth about your family and find out what goes on in your home. I could go to a random stranger who doesn't know anything about your family and try and find out about your family from them, but that would be a pointless exercise. What I need to do is go to a family member and ask them what being in your family is like and what goes on in your house. And so, if we want to know about life and about God and about everything else, then we must listen to what the Son of God says.

He's the only one with the authority to tell you what the real deal is with life, with God, with everything. Because Jesus is supreme over everything. And so, John goes on and says, the Father loves the Son, verse 35, and has placed everything in His hands. God the Father loves the Son and has given Him all authority by placing everything in His hands. Reminds us of the kid's song, doesn't it? He's got the whole world in His hands. If I thought of that earlier, we could have sang that in our service as well. And it might be cheesy, He's got the whole world in His hands, but it's true, because it declares the supremacy of Jesus over everything. And these verses give us this wonderful description just to show how superior Jesus is when they describe the relationships in the Trinity of one God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Because here we read of how God the Father

loves God the

[24 : 55] Son and has given Him the Spirit without limit and placed everything into His hands. And you see the intimacy of this relationship. And because of the intimacy of the relationship in the Godhead, Father, Son, and Spirit, that's why Jesus is the only way to God. It makes sense.

It's logical, because if Jesus has come from heaven, if He has been sent by God, if He speaks the words of God, if He is filled with the Spirit of God, if He is loved by God, if He's been given all things by God, then outside of Jesus, it is impossible to get to God. God couldn't make it any clearer for the human race, could He? The only way to get to Him is through Jesus. So, verse 36 says, whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on them. This verse, I think, not just sums up the verses we're looking at today, or even the whole of chapter 3, it's basically a great summary of John's gospel so far.

Because of who Jesus is, the fundamental importance of believing in Him could not be any clearer. And it could not be any starker, because we're told whoever believes in Jesus has eternal life, but whoever rejects Jesus will not see life because God's wrath remains on them. So, there are only two responses to Jesus, believe in Him or reject Him. And there are only two outcomes.

One is eternal life, and one is God's wrath. And so, the first outcome, eternal life, that doesn't just mean that you will live forever after you die, because in the phrase here, has eternal life, the word has is in the present tense. So, it's talking about an experience of eternal life now, whenever we believe in Jesus, as well as in the future. So, you have that eternal life right now, and for the remainder of your earthly life until you die, and then after you die forever.

And only Jesus can give this because He has all authority. Other religions promise that you get this eternal life after you die. Well, maybe you get it. If you've been good enough and done enough, hopefully you'll get there. But Jesus promises it now. And then there's God's wrath. This is only time, interestingly, in the Gospel of John where the word wrath is used. And the wrath of God is not some kind of uncontrollable rage or anger like we might have as human beings. No, this is God's personal hostility towards all sin and rebellion against Him. And it says here that it remains on all who continue in their rebellion by rejecting Jesus. They stand condemned already under God's judgment.

[28 : 20] So, you know, that makes believing in Jesus not simply an option that you can choose if you want, it makes it. It makes it a necessity. That's why we shouldn't be suspicious of Jesus, why we should know the status of Jesus, and why we should bow to the supremacy of Jesus. And it's only if we've done this by believing in Jesus that we can be sure that we have escaped God's wrath. Because the one who came from above and is above all was willing to lay aside His authority and to humble Himself by becoming obedient to death on a cross. Why did the one who is supreme over all come into this world to die?

Also, that God's wrath against all our sin and our rebellion could fall on Jesus. So, it need not fall on us. And that's why we must believe in Jesus. And so, as we close, the question is, does Jesus, the Messiah, the Son of God, does He have the supremacy in your heart and life? He must become greater and I must become less. May that be so, and may that be true for every one of us here today. Let's pray.

Amen.