

A Reasonable Faith

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[0 : 00] Well, last month, the results of the 2022 Scottish census on religion were released and they received pretty wide coverage in the news.

! That's probably because they revealed for the very first time in Scottish church census history that the majority of Scots said that they have no religion.

It's the first time apparently this has happened. So in 2022, 51.1% of people said they did not belong to a religion. But this rising to 62.8% among the 16 to 24 year old category.

And then overall, this statistic is up from 36.7% in 2011 said that they had nothing to do with religion. But now it's 51.1%. So no religion was the most common response on the census in almost every council area in Scotland.

And so it's very clear, isn't it, that people are claiming to be Christian these days far less than they ever have before. And there are many different reasons for this.

[1 : 12] But it seems that the majority of Scots or people who live in this country have simply dismissed Christianity as being an irrelevance for their lives.

And I reckon it's not because they've actually explored Christianity that they've really looked into the person and work of Jesus and then they have decided it's not for them and they've dismissed it.

I think it's more likely that most people have never even considered Christianity at all. They've never really given Jesus Christ the time of day. It's as GK Chesterton, the English novelist and poet, has said.

He said the Christian ideal has not been tried and found wanting. It has been found difficult and left untried. And we do see something of this in our Bible reading from Acts chapter 17 in verse 1 to 15, where some people are prejudiced against Christianity, whereas other people are persuaded by Christianity.

And there's a mixed response to the message of Jesus as it goes out. And there has always been and there will always be a mixed response to the message of Jesus Christ.

[2 : 26] And the contrast in the reading is actually seen in the two different cities that Paul visits. I wonder if you noticed that. So in Thessalonica, the response to the message of Jesus comes from prejudice and it results in persecution.

And then he moves on to another city, Berea, and the response in Berea is eager examination that then results in belief. And so both of these responses in two different cities are telling us essentially that Christianity is a reasonable faith.

In other words, when you approach the Christian faith with an open mind, you discover that it actually makes sense. It makes best sense of the world that we live in, of our lives and of what is going on.

So let's see this under three headings this afternoon. First of all, the clear reasoning of the message. Second, the contrasting responses to the message. And third, the continuing relevance of the message.

Clear reasoning, contrasting responses and continuing relevance. So first of all, the clear reasoning of the message. So Paul, the apostle, he goes to Thessalonica to spread the message of Jesus, to tell people about him.

[3 : 42] That's his job. Thessalonica was the capital of the province of Macedonia. It's in what we today call Greece. And it was a seaport and so commercial place, very cosmopolitan.

And just look at Paul's method. Verse two and three. As was his custom, Paul went into the synagogue and on three Sabbath days, he reasoned with them from the scriptures, explaining and proving that the Messiah had to suffer and rise from the dead.

british pounds so i couldn't just doubt that what she was saying wasn't true i had to investigate to know for sure and so i did investigate and discovered that all that she said was actually true and there was a sum

of canadian dollars that was coming my way so the claim was so big and it was also so reasonable i couldn't just leave it i had to do something about it now that's just an illustration but it's actually the same with jesus christ because the magnitude of the claims that jesus makes and the magnitude of the impact that jesus has had on our world means that you've got to check him out you can't just doubt that christianity isn't true and walk away from it you need to investigate it for yourself because if there's a chance that it's true and you miss it then you've missed out you've made a massive mistake and that's why nobody should be closed to reason and everybody should be open-minded enough to investigate the claims of christianity to look into jesus christ because there's nothing absolutely nothing to lose and there is everything to gain okay so that's the first point the clear reasoning of the message the second point the contrasting responses to the message so when it comes to jesus some will be persuaded and believe and others will be blinded by prejudice so the first response we read about here is persuasion verse 4 some of the jews were persuaded and joined paul and silas as that a large number of god-fearing greeks and quite a few prominent women so they were persuaded because of the reasoning of paul's message about jesus so they became the start of a new church in this place called thessalonica in greece and paul wrote a couple of letters to them they're later on in the bible but let's look at the negative response to jesus in thessalonica and i will come back and we'll see the positive response in berea so in verse 5 to 9 chapter 17 there's a response that flows from prejudice and results in persecution so verse 5 says but other jews were jealous so they rounded up some bad characters from the marketplace formed a mob started a riot in the city they rushed to jason's house in search of paul and silas in order to bring them out to the crowd so this is a completely irrational response isn't it this opposition comes through rent a mob so they gather up some dodgy characters who are hanging around and they start a riot in the city so why this extreme reaction well we're told that some of the jews were jealous now you'd have thought that they would be delighted to see that their scriptures are being fulfilled in jesus christ and thrilled that all these different people are turning to god and yet they're jealous because jews and gentiles are now being persuaded by the message of jesus so verse 6 but when they did not find them they dragged jason and some other believers before the city officials shouting these men who have caused trouble all over the world have now come here and jason has welcomed them into his house they are all defying caesar's decree saying that there is another king one called jesus so here's jason he's dragged out of his house he's treated like a criminal this angry mob are screaming their heads and they're claiming the christians are the troublemakers accusing them of causing mayhem all over the world and of defying caesar's decrees because at the heart of their complaint they're saying these christians say that there is another king and his name is jesus now we'll come back to this in a moment but just see how these people resist the rule of king jesus by attacking his people because when it comes to christianity it is always far easier to attack the messengers than to deal with the truth of the message

and so the irony is that it's those who are most hostile to the message of jesus who are guilty of what they accuse the christians of doing so they're saying their society has got no room for christians the christians are the troublemakers and yet notice that it isn't the christians who are causing trouble it was their accusers and it always is i was reminded of this recently as i watched the scottish parliament appoint kate forbes as the deputy first minister and the scottish greens launched this all-out attack on kate forbes and her christian views so on the one hand they were playing this equality card saying that they were so concerned about the rights of all people and yet in the same breath they were unashamedly sticking the boot into kate forbes and it was completely hypocritical as those who regarded themselves and saw themselves to be non-judgmental actually being the most judge mental and you see this in thessalonica but it's those who accuse the christians of causing trouble who are actually the real troublemakers well why this response well it's because they had grasped the very heart of the matter they grasped the core of christianity the message that jesus is king because it's not just a very clear message the message that jesus is king it is also a very challenging message because if jesus is king and it's not just a challenge to roman rule it's a challenge to their self-rule of every single human heart because we must submit to the rule of jesus and bow to his authority if jesus is king and i must be guided by him and his words not the desires and the inclinations of my heart because the kingdom of jesus will always clash with the kingdom of this world whether it's on gender or sex or marriage or the family or abortion or

euthanasia and whether it's in first century thessalonica back then or 21st century scotland the reality that jesus is king is a massive challenge to our lives and to our society especially in a culture that is completely obsessed with self with you do you because it's when people discover that well if jesus is king then i must submit to him that they reject him and yet if jesus is king then surely he has got the right to tell me how i should live my life not to restrict my freedom but because he knows what is best for me we're living under his rule is the best way for us to flourish as human beings put it this way a car is built to drive along the road not to sail through water if you try to take your car onto water we all know it's going to be a disaster why because it's a violation of the design of that car the car is only free and liberated if you like if it's in the environment that it was designed to be in which is the road and not water so if human beings came from nowhere then our lives have no meaning so therefore it doesn't really matter how we live or what we do but if we were created by a loving god then we must have been created to live in a certain way and so to disobey god's design by living our lives our way is to violate our very own nature whereas to live our lives god's way and under the authority of jesus the king is the only way to experience freedom to be what we were truly made to be and so we can refuse to accept jesus because we don't want his rule over our lives now that's one response to jesus but that's not all because in verse 10 to 15 we see another response that comes from honest examination and results in belief and this comes from the people of berea so verse 11 says now the berean jews were of more noble character than those in thessalonica for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the scriptures every day to see if what paul said was true now noble character means that they were open-minded unlike the prejudiced jews in thessalonica the bereans were honestly seeking the truth we're told that they examined the scriptures now the verb for examine here also means to judge in a legal sense and so it's used of king herod examining jesus before his death and it implies a serious examination without any bias ready to let the truth take you where it needs to and so the bereans wanted to know whether what paul said about jesus was true and when they discovered that it was verse 12 as a result many of them believed as did also a number of prominent greek women and many greek men it's such a different response to the thessalonians isn't it and so the thessalonians verse 13 interestingly but when the jews in thessalonica learned that paul was preaching the word of god at berea some of them went there too agitating the crowds and stirring them up i looked at the bible map these thessalonian jews had traveled 50 miles to get to berea they were accusing the christians in a sense of being fundamentalists because they proclaimed that jesus is king but actually who are the fundamentalists here who is it that stirs up the crowds who starts the protests who causes the trouble who's trying to shut down any discussion and cancel people who is bombarding twitter with their propaganda it isn't the christians it isn't the noble bereans it's this bunch of jealous thessalonian jews they're the ones who are closed to reason they're the ones who are blinded by prejudice they're the ones who have completely lost the plot they refuse to believe in jesus but they can't even cope with other people hearing about jesus and allowed to make up their own minds on jesus that is the height of narrow-mindedness and bigotry and yet there are sadly people just like them today even if they don't realize it people who have never bothered to investigate jesus for themselves and yet dismiss christianity out of hand and yet it's the kind of approach that you would never get away with in a law court just imagine you're called to jury duty what do you do as part of the jury well you've got to make a decision based on the evidence that is presented to you you can't refuse to look at the evidence and then still give an honest verdict and yet somehow people imagine that you can adopt this approach with christianity where you're at liberty to pass judgment on jesus without giving him any proper examination but it's not just narrow-minded

[22 : 36] prejudice is it it's actually intellectual dishonesty as well and so if you're here this afternoon and you wouldn't call yourself a christian don't be like the thessalonians and just dismiss jesus christ be more like a berean and examine jesus for yourself but if we are a christian then there's obvious application for us here too we should examine the scriptures and that sounds obvious doesn't it yeah you should read your bible you expect the minister to say that when you come to church read your bible but does it happen because we seem to have plenty time to study the screens in our hands we seem to devote so much time to look at our smartphones and yet say just too busy to be reading the bible hardly any people are prepared to pick up a bible and study it and hear what god says but yet are willing to be bombarded by what the world says that comes on every single device that you've got in your home and yet surely we'll pay the price for it won't we especially if you're a younger person because either god's word will shape you or the world will

shape you and so don't let the culture tell you how to think how to live what to believe let god tell you how to live what to think what to believe because he made you and he loves you listen to god's voice speaking instead read some words earlier from jh bavinck whose book personality and worldview has just recently been translated from the dutch so i'm going to read you a bit from it about the importance of god's word i'll read it in english i won't read it in dutch though i could he says that interaction is possible for us through and offered to us in holy scripture that book describes and provides us with that whole and full revelation of god the more often and the more deeply we investigate and search the bible we always find greater treasures from god the riches that have come forth from that book are incomprehensible you need to spend your entire life wandering through it from day to day to understand something of the glorious gift that god has given us in it it gives light to our life comfort to our pain confronts us over our sin offers us grace when we are bowed down makes us happy and thankful humble and childlike and finally because it has unlocked the mysteries of the mysteries of the ages for us it makes us see death without alarm so let god's word be the thing that shapes us spend time in it eagerly examining it and it will shape us and mold us as people and that was the approach of the bereans not the thessalonians and so this comes to our final point so the clear reasoning of the message the contrasting responses to the message and thirdly the continuing relevance of the message christianity is a reasonable faith so here at christ church glasgow we seek to reason to explain to prove and to proclaim jesus from the bible we want to encourage everybody to explore the truth about him and we would love more people to come to acknowledge jesus as king because as the scriptures are opened to us and jesus is held forth then the holy spirit persuades people of the truth about jesus

that's how lives are changed that's how the church grows and that's how christianity is shown to be credible in our culture because christians are not gullible people who are badly deluded or who have been hoodwinked somehow into believing a load of airy fairy nonsense no christians are people who through open-minded examination have come to see that christianity makes best sense of the world and our lives and our lives and the way things are so being a christian is never blind faith that is always reasonable faith and so if you're not a christian or even just not sure what you believe it's great to have you here because a church where the scriptures are explained and examined is the best place to explore life's big questions but you must be careful not to be blinded by prejudice when it comes to jesus but instead be open-minded be ready to be persuaded that christianity is soundly rational be prepared to doubt your doubts about you thinking you know it all and you are correct listen to god's perspective on life in this world so christians don't believe in jesus because it makes them feel good though it might christians don't believe in jesus as a lifestyle choice though christianity does impact the way that you live your life no christians believe in jesus because they've discovered the message of jesus is true and that's the key to this passage this afternoon jesus is god's chosen king and he has come into this world for us for you for me he suffered and died on a cross for our sin and he rose again from the dead the good news is that jesus christ had to suffer and rise from the dead the good news is that jesus was glad to suffer and rise from the dead for us which means that we can't walk away from this massive claim that jesus christ came to save we've got to respond to it or we'll be lost forever we're called to believe in jesus and to recognize that he is king and to make him our king by submitting our lives to him let's pray together