

# Could Jesus Be Who He Says He Is?

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- [ 0 : 0 0 ] Please keep your Bible open in John chapter 7 on pages 892 and 893. I want you to imagine that you are my next door neighbour.
- So you live in the same block of flats as I do. And you come and you knock on my door and I open it and you say, Hi James, I just need to tell you something. I'm really sorry. I didn't realise that I parked my car as closely to your car as I had.
- I just wasn't thinking when I opened the door I was in a rush and I've left a pretty big dent in your car's door. And I'm really sorry. Just tell me how much the repair will be and I'll cover the cost.
- Now imagine I say to you, Well, okay, thank you for coming and telling me. I really appreciate that. Don't worry about the cost. I'll cover that. I forgive you. What would you think of me?
- Probably think something like, Wow, he's a really good person. What a good neighbour. He's wronged and cost to himself, but he forgives. Let's change the scenario slightly.
- [ 1 : 0 4 ] Imagine that you're still my neighbour, but it's not my car that you've dented. It's someone else in the same block. You're talking to me about it later and you say, I was just in a rush, opened the door, dented the car, and I went and knocked on his door and told him, I was sorry.
- It was kind of awkward. I offered to pay for it, but I still think that there's just going to be tension now in our stairwell. What does he think of me? I feel really guilty.
- And imagine you tell me this and I look you deeply in the eye and I say to you, You don't need to feel guilty anymore. Don't feel awkward. I forgive you.
- And you say, what? You forgive me. It wasn't your car. It was the next-door neighbour's car. What do you mean? And I say something to you like, of course it was my car.
- The cars in a thousand car parks are my cars. What would you think of me? Seriously, what would you think? Let's make it more serious still.
- [ 2 : 1 1 ] You come and talk to me and you're distraught. Something's obviously really wrong in your life. And you say to me, I don't know what I was doing. It was a moment of madness.
- I signed up for the Ashley Madison Affairs website and I had an affair. And now the names from that website have been leaked and my wife has found out. And I don't think she'll ever forgive me and I think my marriage is over.
- Maybe my career is over. I don't know what to do. And again, I look you deeply in the eye and I say, maybe your wife never will forgive you, but I forgive you.
- What are you going to say? But I didn't cheat on you. It was my wife. What are you doing forgiving me? This isn't your business. And I say something like this, of course it's my business.
- The moment you signed up for that website, you contradicted my character. You did something that I don't want for this world, but I forgive you. What kind of person do you think that would make me?

[ 3 : 14 ]     What would you think of me if I said something like that to you? Or let's say it's the Edinburgh Festival. And you go to some kind of philosophical, philosophically geared event.

So you have all these pop philosophers discussing the meaning of life. And you're there watching and all of a sudden I appear and I step up onto the stage and I grab the mic from Alan de Botton or someone like that.

Is this on? Excuse me. I need to tell you people this. I am the meaning of life. You need to be so focused on me and love me with so much intensity that your love for other people will look like hate and comparison.

I am the meaning of your life. And if you put your life and trust it in me, I will make you happier and freer than you ever thought you could be before.

What would you think of me if I did something like that? Or if I turned up at some kind of Edinburgh Festival family event where there's some speaker talking about how the most important thing for children is that they know the love of their parents and that the parents love them unconditionally.

[ 4 : 22 ]     And again, I walk in and I take the mic from the speaker and I say the same thing. I am the most important person in the world. And you need to love me with such intensity that your love for your children or your parents would look like hate and comparison.

What would you think of me? What if this morning I stand up here and instead of preaching from John 7, if I, as James Eglinton, demand the complete unconditional obedience of every single person in this room, whatever I say you have to do, imagine if some people were foolish enough to say, okay, we'll go with it, wouldn't I fill you with fear?

Because power corrupts, isn't an absolute power corrupts absolutely. Think of the kind of company that that would put me in if I said that to you. Don't you think of Hitler or Kim Jong-il or someone like that?

If you were to walk around talking like that in Edinburgh today, saying that kind of thing, doing that kind of thing, some people would start following you, but they would probably be the police and our health professionals, people would be really worried about you.

And 2000 years on, I doubt very much that the majority of the world's population would be following a religion based on what you were doing in Edinburgh this summer, if you were going around doing those kinds of things.

[ 5 : 44 ]     And yet, 2000 years ago, Jesus Christ did everything I've just been saying. He walked around constantly forgiving sins, telling people in situations that might not immediately have seemed to have implicated him, I forgive you. You did that, I forgive you. You were this, I forgive you.

And in doing so, conveying that he's the master of humanity, that he is God, that he's the meaning of life, that he's the way, the truth and the life, the meaning of life itself, commanding nothing less than total obedience from people, walking up to them when they're doing their jobs saying, follow me, and expecting that they'll just drop what they're doing, their whole lives, their careers, and that they will follow him, that they'll centre their lives on him, telling people that they have to love him with that kind of love I was talking about.

If saying things like, if anything gets in the way of you following me, so if your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. If your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out.

And the chapter after this one that we're looking at this morning, and John 8, there are some people who criticise him saying, you're just a young man, who do you think you are? And he says, before Abraham was, so he's going right back into the beginning of the Old Testament, I am, okay, he takes the name of God, the Lord Yahweh, the eternally existent one, and says, before Abraham was, I was there, I am, I am the Lord, I'm God, I'm eternal.

You know, there's a really key difference between our day, if you were to go around saying these things, and Jesus' day. And Adam, but today, if you go around doing these kinds of things, the people who are there immediately will probably be pretty uncomfortable with you, okay?

[ 7 : 28 ] They'll think, what is going on here? Why is this guy saying these things? They might pity you, because they might think, well, this person is just ill, this person is not well. Or if they think, well, that's not the case, they'll say, he's some kind of a fool, he's a wicked person, he's a liar.

But I think ultimately, people will just ignore you. In Jesus' day though, the context was completely different. People wouldn't be indifferent, they wouldn't ignore you.

Jesus lived in a context of theocratic, absolute monotheism. If you think about it in present day context, walk down the streets of Karachi, or go to Riyadh, or somewhere like that, go to some ultra-conservative religious neighborhood in Jerusalem, and start to say and do things that offend people's religious sensibilities.

You put yourself in a position of danger. If you start saying things there, like, I am God even, then you take your life in your hands, okay? You're in grave danger.

And that's the kind of situation that Jesus was in socially. We have this all through the Gospels. People were looking to kill him because he said he was God. So he's constantly risking his life with none of the safety net of modern indifference or pity or anything like that that you would have viewed of this today.

[ 8 : 49 ] And yet, when he does so in a context where this should mean that people pick up stillness to kill him, Jesus combines these words, this message, this identity and these claims, with a life of unparalleled beauty and attraction.

A life that completely disarms people around him who normally you would expect to pick up stillness to kill him. And rather than wanting to kill him, they look to him for life.

Everything is the opposite of what you would expect. And you have this whole range of people. You have fishermen, tax collectors, political zealots. You have women and children and prostitutes, the hungry, the sick, the dying, Roman soldiers, criminals.

There's this crowd that gathers around him everywhere he goes. People are attracted to him. There's always a crowd asking, who is this man? Could he really be who he says he is?

And isn't that what we see in the life of Jesus? That he knew he was divisive. He says, I didn't come to bring peace. I came to bring a sword. I came to divide people. And you see this throughout his whole life from the very beginning.

[ 9 : 58 ] So when the baby Jesus was brought to the temple and Simeon holds him, what does he say? This child is destined for the rising and the falling of many in Israel. Through him, the hearts, the hearts of many will be revealed.

The thoughts of many. And I think of the end of his life when he's dying on the cross. And there are two criminals. There's one on either side. One of them mocks him, doesn't he? What does the other one say? He calls him Lord.

Remember me when you come into your kingdom. All thoughtful people at some point in their lives have to ask themselves. What do I think of Jesus?

Could this person really be who he claimed to be? It's the problem that Jesus poses us. What do you do with someone whose life combines such stark absolute claims like I am the Lord your God and also this life of unparalleled moral beauty and who continues to attract people throughout the whole world as we speak, an estimated 2.4 billion people identify themselves in this world as Christians, as people whose lives in one way or another have been affected by Jesus Christ.

And that's why we're looking at John 7 this morning, where Jesus draws and divides a crowd. So the backdrop of this is, okay, in John 5, Jesus has healed a man on the Sabbath, the Sabbath day.

[ 11 : 25 ] And in doing so, he's made himself out to be equal to God. So socially scandalous and people, religious authorities, want to kill him. It's one reaction. Then in the next chapter, John 6, Jesus feeds the 5,000.

And they think that he's great because of this. They think he's completely remarkable, and they want to make him their king by force. So you have these starkly different reactions, either kill him or crown him.

And then in John 7, a wide range of potential options for who could Jesus be comes to the fore. Some people say, well, he's a good man. Some say he's a prophet, some kind of moral teacher.

Some people say, no, he's a liar. He's deceiving the people. Some people say, he's insane. He has a demon. And some people say he's the Christ. So what's going on here?

Well, this happens during the Festival of Booths. So it's a seven-day festival held in Jerusalem. People build tents, they build booths, and they stay in them. And they do that to remember the tents that they lived in when their ancestors were in the wilderness, so after the Exodus from Egypt.

[ 12 : 29 ] So it's a pilgrim festival. People come from all over to do this. And it's a high point in their religious calendar. Jesus has had to leave Galilee then because people there want to kill him.

His brothers don't believe him and his claims, and they tell him, look, if you want people to take you seriously, you have to go to where everything is happening. You have to go to Jerusalem, go public, go to the Festival of Booths.

And Jesus ends up going there quietly, and the religious authorities find out. So they send out guards to arrest him. And the remarkable detail of this chapter is that the guards who are sent out at the beginning to arrest him find him, but they don't do what they've been sent out to do.

They don't arrest him. And the chapter is a dramatic piece of storytelling. Jesus' life is in danger. He's in a crowd, and there are guards going around the crowd looking to take him.

What will they do if they find him? Or how will they find him? And if they find him, how will Jesus escape? Jesus doesn't flee the festival. He doesn't hide. In fact, he goes public.

[ 13 : 36 ] He starts to teach the people. He starts speaking in public. And the guards find him, but they too end up being caught up in this big question. Who is this man?

How do you make sense of him? How do you account for him? Could he be who he claims to be? And the final picture at the end of the chapter is that the guards are asked, you found him and you didn't arrest him.

Why didn't you do your job? And then they tell the Pharisees, haven't you heard him? No one ever spoke like him before. We've never heard anything like this.

But the story in between then, if the guards being sent out and the guards saying, no one ever spoke like this, the story of a whole crowd trying to work out who Jesus is.

There's a controversial moment here. In verses 37 to 39. On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, if anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink.

[ 14 : 35 ] Whoever believes in me as the scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water. Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive. For as yet the Spirit had not been given because Jesus was not yet glorified.

A key part of this festival over the seven days was that people would take water from the pool of Siloam and then they would take this water and pour it out on the altar.

And the theological significance of what they were doing goes back to Isaiah 55 in the Old Testament where the Lord himself says, come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters.

Where God himself promises to be the one who satisfies everyone who comes to him. And John tells us this is the last day of the festival. It's the great day.

This is the thing that everyone is focused on for the waters to be poured on the altar. It's the climax of one of the most important religious events of their year.

[ 15 : 34 ] And Jesus at that point gets up and says, come to me if you're thirsty. He invokes Isaiah 55 and says that he is the one who gives you this living water, that he is God.

Now Jesus doing this in this context is huge. It's controversial. It's another direct claim to be God. And it's more than that. It's a direct command to come to him, to worship him, to look to him as the ultimate thing in your life, as your greatest source of joy and satisfaction.

And the one who can give you a new life. So this is dynamite in this context. This is so dangerous.

A century before this, there was someone else called Great Offense at this festival. There was a priest king called Alexander Yoneas. And he came to the festival. The background context is very political between religious groups, the Pharisees and the Sadducees.

And he wanted to set one group against the other. So he was the priest king and he took the water from the pool of Siloam. But to disrespect the Pharisees who were present, he didn't pour it on the altar.

[ 16 : 50 ] He poured it down on his feet. And the Pharisees who were there, there were thousands of them, everyone had a lemon because that's part of what you do for the ritual. You always have a lemon with you. And they started to throw their lemons at him.

They didn't have stones to stone him, they attacked him with their lemons. And that's what he wanted. He wanted to goad them. He wanted to provoke them to aggression. And they got aggressive.

And in response, he had 6,000 of them killed. But what Jesus does is way more controversial than Alexander Yoneas. He just disrespects them by messing up the ritual.

He pours the water on his feet. Jesus says that he is the God who gives you the water, the living water. It's a far higher level of controversy.

Jesus wasn't the first Jew to take language of God and apply it to himself. There was a rabbi, again the century before him, called Rabbi Hillel, who'd done the same. He used language about himself that sounded very like language for God.

[ 17 : 55 ] But the people's reaction to him was, no, he can't possibly mean that. That's impossible. That's dangerous. That's controversial.

And to this day, that rabbi is interpreted by Jewish scholars as not actually having meant what he said. He must have meant something else. So there are other ways of interpreting him. But in Jesus, when Jesus comes a century later and uses the language of God for himself, no one here is saying, Jesus, do you get what you're saying?

If you take Isaiah 55, that's you saying you're God. Do you really want to say that? Do you mean that? We don't think he could mean that. Jesus listeners know this is what he means.

That's why you're a liar. You're insane. Or you're the Christ. It's far more controversial.

So we're going to look at the reaction to what Jesus does here, then, when he says, I'll give you the living water. I am God. We're going to look at that through three questions. Is it enough simply to say in response to Jesus that he's a good man or that he's just a good moral teacher?

[ 19 : 08 ] That's our first question. Our second question is, is it enough simply to say that, in response, well, Jesus is just a liar or that Jesus is insane? And our third question is, could it be that Jesus is who he says he is?

So question one, is it enough simply to say that Jesus is a good man or a good moral teacher? And in verses 11 and 12, the Jews were looking for him at the feast and saying, where is he?

And there was much, much ring about him among the people. And some said he is a good man. And in verse 40, when they heard these words, some of the people said, this really is the prophet. Is it enough just to say that about Jesus then, with this problem of who he is?

He's just a good man or he's just a good teacher, a good moral person. And I want to say no, that that's not enough. And here's the problem if you say either, well, Jesus was just a really good person but not God, or Jesus was a really inspirational spiritual figure.

Okay, so he's a moral teacher but not God. But I still really admire him. Let's look at his goods or his inspirational deeds. And let's look at the good deeds that simply could not have happened if Jesus wasn't who he says he is, feeding of the 5,000, raising Lazarus from the dead, raising Jairus daughter from the dead, turning water into wine, giving sight to the blind, curing lepers, curing a paralyzed man, casting demons out of Legion and putting him back in his right mind, healing the man with the withered hand, stepping out of a boat and walking on water, commanding a storm to stop to save the lives of the people he was on a boat with, cursing a fig tree and making it wither.

[ 20 : 48 ] And that's just scratching the surface. It's the tip of the iceberg. Every single one of those good deeds, those inspirational deeds, depends on him being who he says he is.

If Jesus isn't God, all of those good deeds, they can only be tricks, illusions, and Jesus is some kind of Darren Brown of the ancient Near East, or they have to be lies that Jesus perpetuated about himself, or that his followers made up to try and trick people at a later date.

But if Jesus isn't God, all of those good deeds, those inspirational things he did, don't you have to see him as a bad person rather than a good person if he's not God? And let's say, if you have to take away all of the good and inspirational things Jesus did that need him to be God, in order for them to be true, doesn't talk of him as, well, he's a good person.

He's an inspirational teacher, a figure, but he's not God. Doesn't that kind of talk start to get pretty meaningless pretty quickly? But let's leave the miraculous supernatural deeds to the side for a moment.

And let's just think about his good moral deeds then. Okay? So, let's say we're saying Jesus isn't God, but he was still a really good moral person. So let's think of some of these things.

[ 22 : 07 ] Well, forgiving a prostitute, forgiving a greedy tax collector who was cheating people of their money, forgiving a thief on the cross. But again, he only did those things because he believed he was God.

If he's not God, how is it a virtue for him? How does it make him a good person for him to go intruding into other people's lives and their personal failings and saying, you know what, you did that, I forgive you.

Go back to the start. Remember when I was saying, if you come to me and say that you've dented your neighbor's car or that you've had an affair, and I say as a person who's not really connected to that, I forgive you, you're not going to respond and say, wow, you're really virtuous, James.

What an inspirational figure you are. They say, get out of my business. Let's think about his good moral teaching then. If Jesus isn't God, but he's still a good moral teacher, let's think of the sermon on the mount.

Maybe you think, well, there's good moral teaching there, right? And it's kind of standalone teaching. So if he's not God, these things are still good things to say, like turn the other cheek or be a peacemaker or go the extra mile.

[ 23 : 21 ] But how does that sermon end? Jesus gives us all this moral teaching and the conclusion of it is, what he says about the wise and the foolish builders. There are two people in their building houses, one on the sand, one on the rock.

And then the rains come and the person who's built this house on the sand, his house falls down. The person who's built this house on the rocks, house stands firm. Jesus and Jesus is saying that he is that rock, that he is your Lord and your God.

And if you build your life on him, i.e. if you take his moral teaching and you go with it, that your life is built on something firm that will last. The foundation of Jesus' divinity, Jesus being who he says he is.

All of his moral teaching presupposes the moral authority that comes with believing that you are the master of the universe. Well, you could try and separate those things and say, well, I don't think he was God, but it's still a good idea to be a peacemaker, isn't it?

It's still a good idea to turn the other cheek or to go the extra mile. So he's still a good moral teacher. But if you say that, you're saying that Jesus came up with good moral principles almost accidentally, his reasons for saying all of these things, i.e. being God, were wrong, but still somehow he accidentally comes up with something decent.

[ 24 : 39 ] Is that really how you want to set your standard for what makes someone a good moral teacher? The basis of everything that he says is wrong. His self-understanding is wrong. But sometimes he stumbles across a good moral idea.

So therefore, my response to Jesus is he's a good moral teacher. Imagine a doctor whose understanding of medicine is completely flawed. Huge, huge gaps in his understanding.

And lots of the medicines he gives out are not the right medicines. They're not the right diagnoses. It's a disaster. But occasionally, by accident, he'll give you something that might happen to work in that instance.

If you're happy to say on that basis, this person is a good doctor, you need a far higher standard of what you're looking for and a good doctor. I am a terrible, terrible footballer.

I'm hopeless, completely rubbish. I have scored some goals, though, in football matches, where someone has kicked a ball in my direction and it has bounced off me into the goal. If I was another end of the pitch, they would be own goals, but thankfully, I was where I was supposed to be.

[ 25 : 49 ] None of those goals make me a good footballer. They were accidental. You cannot use that as your standard to say, therefore, James should go to Real Madrid. It doesn't work like that.

A moral teacher who's moral teaching is entirely based on his false belief that he's God, cannot be a good moral teacher. We cannot commit ourselves to that. That's crazy.

Jesus' good deeds are either miraculous and require him to be God in order for them to have happened, or they can only be seen as virtuous if he was God. If you take the God factor away, he just comes across in his deeds as a megalomaniac, busybody.

His moral teaching, in its entirety, is a call to obey him utterly with the whole of your life. It's a call to lose your life and find a new life in him. All of that rests on his belief that he is God.

If Jesus wasn't who he claimed to be, it's just meaningless to talk about him as some kind of good man or a good teacher. What are the alternatives then?

[ 26 : 56 ] Our second question is that enough simply to say that he's a liar or that he's insane. We see this in verses 12 and 20. The crowd answered, you have a demon. In 12, no, he's leading the people astray.

The first question was asking whether Jesus could be good if he wasn't God. And our second question is asking whether Jesus could be bad and not be God. Immediately we run into a problem, which is the utterly captivating person of Jesus.

Remember the structure of this chapter. Guards go out to arrest Jesus. They find Jesus. Jesus is so compelling, so arresting, that they don't take him.

They don't arrest him. And they say, no one ever spoke like this man. If you compare Jesus with the other most influential people of all time, most of them are religious people.

They're Mohammed, Gandhi, those kinds of people. But none of them ever claimed to be God. And Jesus did in a context where every time he did that, he was inviting people to kill him.

[ 27 : 58 ] And yet wherever he went, instead of that happening, he captivated their imaginations. There's a unique moral beauty in the person of Jesus, in his character.

Where he's absolutely firm, he has the most tender heart you've ever come across. Where he's completely holy, where his character is flawless.

No one can find anything wrong in him. But that holiness, rather than repelling other people, draws them to him to find forgiveness for their sins.

He is uniquely authoritative, but he never ever has to coerce people and force that authority onto them. When Jesus finishes the sermon on the mount, what does Matthew say?

The people were amazed at the kind of authority he had when he spoke, not like the authority of the religious officials, who have to force it on you. And three of the Gospels, in Matthew, Mark and Luke, they all say the same thing, that people who heard him were amazed at his authority.

[ 29 : 03 ] Jesus is completely, utterly courageous, but at the same time he's so attuned to the needs of others. He believes he's God, but it never ever comes across as self-importance or arrogance.

And with this belief that he's God, he's always utterly focused on other people, on the needs of the broken, and gathering broken people around himself to make them whole.

A key point in John 7 is that the people he's saying, well, he's good, and that's our conclusion. They're focusing on his life, at the exclusion of his claims about himself. Okay, well, he says he's God.

I don't know how to deal with that, because it's so controversial, but I will say that he's good, so I'll focus on his life. And the people on the other hand, he's saying, well, he's a liar, or he's insane, are focusing on his claims, but they're neglecting his life.

They're saying, well, in effect, maybe he feeds the 5,000, maybe he does all these good things, but look at what he says. He's acceptable. This cannot be true. Therefore, either he's a liar, or he's insane.

[ 30 : 09 ] But neither of those sides is willing to say, what happens if you put the life and the claims together? What does that give you? What would that make him? And the thing is, when you meet him, when you hear him, do you think you are hearing or encountering someone with profound, dangerous delusions, or someone who's constantly lying to you about the most foundational things?

Or do you think that the person Jesus Christ is so utterly unlike anyone you've ever met, so attractive that it's like you're looking into the heart of God, being shown to you in a perfect, beautiful human nature.



When you look at Jesus, it's what you see so surprisingly attractive that it makes you think, this man must be what God is like. And if I had ideas about God that were different to this before, I need to rework them and reshape them so that Jesus is my picture of God.

And that is why some people at the Festival of Booths hurt him, and their conclusion wasn't, he's just a good man, he's just a good teacher, he's just a liar, he's just insane.

Their response was, this is really the Christ. So our third question, finally, could Jesus be who he says he is? To say yes to that question, it sounds like madness.

[ 31 : 48 ] It sounds unbelievable to say yes, there was a man who was also God, and yet some people there did say yes. And in the 2000 years since Jesus stood up and cried out, if anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink.

Billions of people from across the world, from innumerable cultures, from all across history, have come to him, and have taken him at his word, have believed in him.

And for them, the answer that this is the Christ, it's the only way to make sense of the whole package, of the life, of the compelling, arresting beauty, of the claims, of the moral teaching, of the death, of the resurrection, of the ascension.

The only way to hold all of this together is to conclude this is the Christ. This person is who he says he is, is what he says he is.

At the close of this chapter, you have the Pharisees there. So the anti-Jesus religious group of his day. And they're trying to kill him, that's their goal.

[ 32 : 51 ] And their party line was, we are anti-Jesus. We've sent out the guards to catch him. And when the guards don't arrest him, they rebuke them with their question, why didn't you do this?

And they say, well, haven't you heard anyone who says the things that he says? And then they rebuke them for this by saying, well, has any of the Pharisees believed in him?

And it's a rhetorical question, it's a rebuke. They're saying, we are impervious to his character. We Pharisees all know better. We've thought this through.

We are inoculated against his person, his teaching, his speech. Nothing this man can do could convince one of us. None of us will ever believe in him. None of us believes in him.

The people who believe in him, in effect the Pharisees, are saying, are just gullible. They're stupid. They don't know the law. They haven't thought it through enough. And if they did, they would be just like all of us Pharisees, me and all of my fellow Pharisees standing here.

[ 33 : 53 ] None of us believes in him. But when John writes this, he leaves in a really crucial detail, a delicious detail for the open-minded reader.

There's a Pharisee there called Nicodemus. And John puts a little note in there to say, if you've read my book, you've already met him in chapter 3. This was the Pharisee who came in secret, okay?

He came in secret to meet Jesus, who was compelled by him, attracted to him, despite everything that he'd been inoculated against as a Pharisee. And he came wanting to know more.

And now again, at the Festival of Booths, Nicodemus is there with the other Pharisees. And he says, well, guys, isn't our law that you have to hear someone out before you judge them?

Maybe we should let Jesus speak. Maybe we should be open-minded and listen to him. And he gets slapped down by the other Pharisees. But the point for John in writing this down and telling you that Nicodemus is here still drawn to Jesus, still with questions about him, is to show that even at that level, the kind of people who, by virtue of their education, their beliefs, their vision of society, their view of God, the organization they belong to, the company they keep, even in that group where you would expect, well, those guys, if anyone wants to kill Jesus, it should be those guys.

[ 35 : 18 ] There's still someone in their group who sees something in Jesus, who'd come to him in secret, it's a really weak defense, but he's still trying to leave things open.

He still has questions there about Jesus. How do we close this? Jesus demands are all or nothing. There's no square inch of your life, of the world that we live in, that Jesus does not claim as his own and wants to bring into obedience to him.

If you're of an older generation, the absolute stark nature of his claims will probably not be that alien to you. If you're culturally modern. So if you find it quite easy to think in stark rights and wrongs, moral absolutes, authority figures, you'll probably get the starkness.

Maybe you'll want to make him king. Maybe you'll want to have him crucified. Or maybe you'll still try to be selective and have Jesus as your savior, but not your lord.

So you'll say, I'm sorry to you, but I'll still live how I want. Or you want him as your lord, but not your savior. You'll say, okay, I'm going to try and be a really good moral person then, but I'm not going to repent and bow the knee and say sorry and trust in your grace alone.

[ 36 : 34 ] But the starkness of the options in itself isn't that alien to you. If you're of a younger generation, though, if you've grown up breathing the air of postmodern culture, where the onus is really on you to work things out for yourself rather than accepting some kind of authority opinion, and you're a lot less sure of what you can find out, the starkness of what Jesus says will probably feel very alien to you.

It's very, it's really postmodern to buy one of those Buddha heads and keep it in your home or in your garden. Because we postmoderns have reinvented the Buddha as another possession you can buy to give you a sense of peace.

Ironically, because the Buddha's own message was to rid yourself of all of your possessions. But we've done that to the Buddha. And you want to see, well, what kind of Buddha could I construct that I can fit into all of my pre-existing desires and values and the kind of life I want to lead.

So you reinvent him as a possession rather than as the one who said, get rid of your possessions, don't buy things, lose what you have. But if you approach the Jesus question like that and your starting point, your starting point is to say, well, I'm going to see what kind of Jesus maybe could I fit into my life.

I've got to work this out. And I'm going to try and say, well, Jesus is something I'll consider, something I'll maybe squeeze into my pre-existing agenda, my desires.

[ 38 : 04 ] I'd be willing to incorporate Jesus into my life if he fits in with, let's say, what I think about, what I think about my view of myself, my work, my view of sex or relationships or gender or something like that.

If he fits in, then, okay, then I'll have a Jesus there in my life. And if not, this probably won't work. If you start off responding to Jesus like that, it won't work.

Because your starting point is that you're assuming already Jesus is not, cannot be who he says he is. Because he's just something else to fit in. And there are other things in your life that are absolute, that are ultimate, that are your foundations.

And from the very beginning, you're saying Jesus isn't who he says he is. And you never let yourself be free to ask, could Jesus really be God? What you find in the New Testament and what you find throughout the last 2,000 years of the Gospel spreading around the world is that when people open themselves up to asking who is Jesus, could he really be who he says he is, so often they come away saying, no one ever spoke like this man.

I've never encountered someone like this. The guards who were sent to arrest Jesus could see this. Even Nicodemus. And everyone would have expected him to say, you should want Jesus to be dead.

[ 39 : 24 ] Even Nicodemus could see it. And then at the end of John's Gospel, at the end of the Gospel when Jesus does die, when he's crucified, who do we find again? Popping up discreetly, but still he's there, still attracted to Jesus, even in his death, Nicodemus.

He's there helping Jesus, prepare Jesus' body for burial. The question to you is, that this text puts, do you see it? And have you seen this?

And can you come away saying, no one ever spoke like this man? Amen. Let's pray. Lord our God, what a great thing you've done for the world by giving your son over to it, by sending him into it, by giving us a man in whose perfect, beautiful human nature we can see the very heart and the ways and the greatness of God.

Lord, what courage he showed in walking through our world and in claiming what he claimed to be. And what a great thing he's done for us in giving himself over to death, in being crucified as the one who claimed to be God, and in purchasing the forgiveness of all of our sins in that death.

Lord, please open us to ask, who is Jesus? Could he be who he says he is? Help us if we come and struggle with that, to ask open questions, to talk to you directly, to look at the life of Jesus in the Bible, and help us to be drawn and arrested by him, by his compelling beauty, by everything about him.

[ 41 : 12 ] Help us to conclude not only that no man ever spoke like him, but fill us with the belief that this really is the Christ. We pray in his name, amen.