

Jesus Put Plainly

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[0 : 0 0] Thanks very much, Naomi. Good morning, everyone. Whether you're here in the church or online, I'm delighted to welcome you. As we've been reflecting, this has been a week when we have been weeping with those who weep as a church.

Under these circumstances, there are two great resources that we have. One we've used already this morning, it is praying for one another, and particularly praying for those who are mourning, and I'm sure the McLaren family will be very much still in our prayers over the coming weeks.

And the second great resource is God's Word, the Bible. And we go to it for comfort and for strength, and sometimes for challenge in times like this.

And so this morning, we want to look at what God has to say to us through his Word, and particularly what God has to say to us about Jesus, and how Jesus can be with us even in the most difficult of times.

Let me begin with one of my favourite Christian quotations. It is by the Swiss theologian Carol Barth. Carol Barth was widely recognised as one of the foremost Christian thinkers of the 20th century, and you may well be familiar with the quotation.

[1 : 1 5] Barth went on a lecture tour in the United States in the early 1960s, and as often happens with these things, he invited questions at the end of his lectures.

And one of the students said to him, Professor Barth, are you able to summarise in one sentence the whole of your life's work in theology? So I'm going to challenge that. Summarise in one sentence the whole of his life's work.

And Carol Barth said, Isn't that powerful?

This great intellect, this man who studied in much more depth than any of us will ever be able to, God's Word. And yet when it came down to it, all boiled down to this, Jesus loves me.

I was thinking also of the Apostle Paul, Paul who wrote almost half the books of the New Testament, whose theology particularly of what it means that Christ died for us, is by God's divine inspiration the basis for much of what we as Christians believe.

[2 : 2 9] Paul was in Philippi with his companion Silas. They were put in prison, and there was a great earthquake in the night. And the jailer ran in, and he was suicidal. And he said, what must I do to be saved?

No time for Paul to explain the doctrine of justification by faith or any of the other things that we read in his letters. Very simply he said, believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved.

See, there are many difficult things in our Bibles. Many things we don't understand. But the basis of Christian faith, our trust in the Lord Jesus, is very simple.

Jesus loves me. Jesus went to the cross and died for me. And if I believe in him, I can be forgiven for my sins.

When we come to John's gospel, which we've been in for quite a while now, again, there's a lot of complexity. You may have come across some of that in your growth groups over the last few weeks.

[3 : 36] A lot of things that are difficult for us to understand. But very simply, John is just trying to present to us Jesus and to help us to come to belief in him.

To believe that Jesus is the Son of God, that Jesus is the Messiah, that Jesus can be our Savior. Summed up, perhaps, very well for many of us in John 3, 16, God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have eternal life.

And as I've been studying in John 10 this week, I've been very struck by the basic simplicity that there is there, even though there's a lot of complexity. There are some things in this passage, and we won't be able to do more and scratch the surface of them.

There are some things in this passage that keep people like Carol Barth occupied all their professional life. But very simply, there are two lessons which I have taken from it this morning.

One is that we have to consider who Jesus is. There are two groups of people. There are some who believe in Jesus, and there are some who don't.

[4 : 53] We'll see that as we go through the passage. And John is saying to us, Jesus is saying to us in this passage, just look at the evidence. Look at who I am and what I've done and believe.

And that's one thing we would want all of us to get to this morning, to look at the evidence of Jesus, to see him as he is, and to believe in him.

The other is just one verse, one verse which, in the circumstances of this week, it really stood out to me. If you've got your Bibles, verse 28, where Jesus is talking about his sheep, and he says, I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish.

No one will snatch them out of my hand. What a wonderful truth that is, that if we trust the Lord Jesus, if our faith is in him, if we are following him, if he is our shepherd, then there is nothing that can separate us from him.

We can never be snatched away in good times or bad times, in health, in sickness, in life, in death. Our good shepherd is there for us, giving life that can never be taken away.

[6 : 15] And those who leave this world through death, if they know the Lord Jesus, they go to somewhere much better, and they have joy unconfined with their sufferings behind them.

And that truth must be a great comfort to us this week. So, I want very simply to look through this passage.

We'll divide it into three sections, and we'll draw some conclusions at the end about our faith in the Lord Jesus. Let's begin, though, with a bit of background. I think it's always good if we understand a passage in its original context.

So, for the last couple of months or so, we've been going through a section of John's Gospel which runs from chapter 5 through to chapter 10, and is built around the feasts, the festivals of the Jews.

And this section is broadly made up of three things. There are miracles, there are what we might call monologues, Jesus' teaching, and there is dialogue, largely Jesus debating with the religious leaders.

[7 : 19] And John's purpose, and it has in all of his Gospel, is to demonstrate to us that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God.

Over the last few weeks, we've been at the Feast of Tabernacles, which takes place around September time. Today, we've moved on, and we're at the Feast of Dedication.

So, we're about three months before the death of the Lord Jesus in December. The Feast of Dedication is probably better known to most of us today as Hanukkah, one of the Jewish festivals which is reasonably well known and certainly is taught in many schools in our country.

The Feast of Dedication remembered a time of the Jews which we won't find in our Bibles. It happened between the Old and the New Testament. And in that period, the nation was ruled by Greek Hellenic rulers, descendants or successors of Alexander the Great.

And one of these was Antiochus Epiphanes. And he was a very cruel and uncaring ruler. One of the things he did was to say the Jewish religion is banned.

[8 : 37] You can no longer worship as you should. He desecrated the temple. He took away a lot of the religious objects and he forced the people to use pigs in their sacrifice which would be horrific for Jews.

Now sadly, most of the priests at that time went along with them. They were more interested in saving their skin than they were in keeping true to God's faith. But there was one priest called Mattathias and his sons who set up a kind of grill operation against the rulers of the time.

And the best known of these is Judas Maccabeus. And Judas Maccabeus eventually recaptured Jerusalem. And when he did, he rededicated the temple to God.

And that's what is being remembered in this Feast of Dedications or Hanukkah. Now it's relevant to this passage because as you go through it, and we won't spend a lot of time looking at that, but as you go through it, there are reflections, there are things which are specific to this particular feast.

For example, in verse 36, the Lord Jesus talks about being set apart by God. The word really is dedicated. It's the same word that was used when the temple was restored.

[9 : 54] And the Lord Jesus maybe is there giving echoes of in chapter 2 when he talks about the temple by which he meant his body being destroyed and built again in three days. Also, during this festival, one of the readings was from Ezekiel chapter 34.

Graham referred to that last week. It's a chapter about the leaders of Israel, the shepherds of Israel, and how they have failed God. And so Jesus presents himself here as the good shepherd, as the shepherd who won't fail us.

But perhaps most powerful of all, the Feast of Dedications was a time when the Jews looked back to one of their great heroes, to Judas Maccabeus who had freed them from the grip of the Greek army.

And the Jews in first century Israel were looking for another hero, someone who would release them from the Romans, the one who would be the Messiah promised in the Old Testament.

And perhaps that's why as Jesus is walking through the temple courts, the people said to him, how long will you keep us in suspense if you are the Messiah? Tell us plainly.

[11 : 10] Now I don't think this was just a kind of positive question they were asking. It was very much a loaded one. The language that's used that Jesus is walking through the temple, they surround him, and they I think are being quite hostile and are looking for a reason to condemn him.

So it's not a straightforward question, but it's a very relevant one for them and for us. Is Jesus the Messiah? Is Jesus the Son of God?

And so Jesus answers, he answers again slightly obliquely, but in a way that makes it very clear that yes, he is the Son of God, yes, he is the Messiah. And so in the opening verses of the passage, we have the sheep and the shepherd brought before us.

Now you remember we hear last week that Graham talked in some detail about the sheep and the shepherd. That's very much the theme of the first part of John 10. The Lord Jesus returns to it here.

And he says two things. He says, my sheep listen to my voice and I give them eternal life. My sheep listen to my voice.

[12 : 22] Those who are Jesus' sheep who recognise his voice and they respond to it. Let's have a little diversion just for a second and I want to talk about empire penguins.

Empire penguins, of course, live in the Antarctic and they tend to live in big colonies that stick together by and large. But each empire penguin has a mate, they have one mate and after the female lays the eggs, the male stands and incubates the eggs for the chick to hatch while the female goes out to sea and gathers food for the chick.

Now we're not talking about going out and coming back the same day, it could easily be a couple of months or more. And the female penguin arrives back and you've got this big pack of ice and lots of penguins who all look the same.

I think even to penguins they all look pretty similar. How is she going to find her mate? How is she going to find her chick? And the amazing thing is that the female empire penguin is able to call out in a way that is unique to her and the male, her mate, can respond to it.

He's been listening for her voice as he's hatched the chick and when the female comes back above all the noise round about he hears her voice and he responds to it and the family are reunited.

[13 : 51] I think that's a great picture of what Jesus is telling us here. There are lots of noises in our world today. Lots of things that would distract us and draw us away from God.

But Jesus says those who are my sheep they hear my voice they recognize it they trust in me and they follow me because they know that they can have confidence in me.

My sheep listen to my voice I know them and they follow me. Then there's a verse that I highlighted at the beginning the eternal life that Jesus gives us.

I give them eternal life and they shall never perish no one will snatch them from my hand. Paul put it slightly differently.

Nothing in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. What a wonderful blessing that is for those who know and love the Lord Jesus that whatever happens whatever goes on in our lives whether there's happiness whether there's sadness whether there's sickness whether there are all sorts of problems even when it comes to death we have the protection of the shepherd and we know that we will go to be with him when we leave this life.

[15 : 24] But that's the blessing of the sheep there's a little bit more about the shepherd in this bit as well and this is where it gets really quite difficult and I'm going to cover this very briefly. So the Lord Jesus says in verse 29 my father has given them to me who has given them to me it's greater than all no one can snatch them out of my father's hands.

Now when I'm speaking to you I'm saying to you you have a decision to make about Jesus will you trust in him or not? And yet here Jesus is saying that actually the sheep are given to him by the father.

The father is the one who chooses us to belong to Jesus and to follow him. And this apparent contradiction is one that's exercised Christians I think throughout the whole of Christianity.

On the one hand we need to choose and we do need to choose to follow Jesus. on the other hand we are only going to make that decision among the hubbub of the voices and the distractions around about us if God works in us and draws us to Jesus and enables us to make that right choice.

And the truth is not somewhere in the middle it's at both ends. We need to choose and yet at the same time God chooses us. And I don't understand it fully I'm sure you probably don't either but it's a wonderful truth.

[16 : 59] In the words of a great modern hymn loved before the dawn of time chosen by my maker hidden in my saviour I am his and he is mine cherished for eternity.

So that's the first difficult but wonderful thing in these verses. Then as we go on into verse 31 sorry 30 it is Jesus says I and the Father are one.

And that brings us to another great and very difficult truth. How can it be there is one God but there are two actually three if we include the Holy Spirit three persons.

What does the Lord Jesus mean when he says I and the Father are one? Well if I can be a little bit technical the word that's used for Jesus talking about being one is neuter in the original Greek so that means that it's not saying me and I and the Father are the same person.

It is saying we have the same purpose that the Lord Jesus came to fulfil the Father's purpose in his life and we see that clearly as we go through John. But I think it's clear from the passage that it's more than that.

[18 : 13] If that had been all the Lord Jesus had been saying and the people had understood then they wouldn't have reacted so strongly against him. And the Lord Jesus is saying I believe that he and the Father although distinct persons they are in essence the same they are one in nature that he is truly God.

And again the mystery of the Trinity is something that we will never probably fully understand in this slide but isn't it wonderful that God the Son of God truly God himself came into our world and lived among us.

We beheld his glory says John the glory of the one and only Son of the Father. Now I've skated over that very quickly if you want to talk about it later please do but two wonderful but difficult truths.

Let's move on through the passage though because our time is going and we'll look at verses 31 to 39 which I've given the heading the words and the works. So the Jews recognising that rightly that Jesus has claimed to be God in verse 30 they react strongly against that and they try to stone him and then again at the end they try to seize him.

And then in the middle we have a slightly strange conversation I think it probably doesn't mean as much to us in our culture as it would have then. But very simply what Jesus says quoting from Psalm 82 is that in that Psalm God calls the people who actually were corrupt leaders he calls them gods he calls them sons of the most high and Jesus says well if he says that about these people who you could look at and think they were nothing like God why couldn't he say it about me when I'm his son after all that I've done.

[20 : 10] But he backs that up with evidence and his evidence is the works that he has done. The lame walk that was John 5 the hangrier fed that's John 6 the storm is still John 6 again the blind see John 9 and Jesus says look at all these things that I've done are they not evidence that I am God that I am the son of God the blind man we met in John 9 said something similar how could he do these things if he wasn't from God and Jesus says what he has done these signs that he has given they are the evidence if they won't listen to his words and they won't give him a fair hearing these signs that he has done are the evidence that he truly is God and for us today if you are wondering who is Jesus if you are unsure about him then go to the Bible go to the Gospels

John's Gospel or Luke or any of the others read them with an open mind looking for truth and the Lord Jesus will jump out at you from the pages and you will see that what he said here is true that he is the one who came from God who spoke the most marvellous words and who did the most amazing things culminating in his own resurrection then the third part of the section Jesus moves away from Jerusalem this will be the last time he's in Jerusalem before he comes on Palm Sunday and moves towards his crucifixion and where he goes to is something very significant he goes to where it all started in John's Gospel he goes to the place where John the Baptist was baptising that most likely was in the vicinity of Jericho in the Jordan not too far from Jericho you remember when Jesus came back to Jerusalem he came back through Jericho and the reception here is very different the people here remember what John said they remember how John had pointed to Jesus the one that's coming is greater than I am

I'm not even worthy to untie his shoes he said here is the one who is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world he says he must increase and I must decrease and these people who had heard John and who had believed what John said they can now look at Jesus and say yes this was the one who John talked about we see the evidence we see the signs John always calls the miracle signs we see the signs and we know the truth what a contrast from those in Jerusalem the ones in Jerusalem mainly the Jewish religious leaders they had totally closed minds they weren't willing to consider fairly Jesus claims in this place in the desert far away from the metropolis here are the people who really trust in him and who see yes there's authenticity here and we believe in him but as we look at the signs let's not forget the signpost

John's teaching is really important in this John pointed the people towards Jesus so that when they met Jesus when they found out more about him they were able to recognise him and to come to trust in him and can I say that all of us if we are Christians if our trust is in the Lord Jesus we too are signposts we should be those who direct people to Jesus not that we're going to save them not that we're even going to convince them by ourselves but point them to Jesus help them to understand what they need and help them to see that in Jesus these needs can be met if God will open their hearts then through our witness they may come to know the Lord Jesus going back to Carol Barth to finish Carol Barth had a picture or painting of the crucifixion on his wall by an artist called

Matthias Grunwald and in this painting it's Jesus on the cross on one side you have John his disciple with Mary the Lord's mother and also Mary Magdalene and on the other side you have John the Baptist now this isn't intended to be historically accurate because John the Baptist was martyred quite a long time before Jesus was crucified but the significant of John the Baptist well there's a lamb standing at his feet but the really significant thing is that his index finger I think it's slightly exaggerated is pointing towards Jesus his duty John knew was to point people to Jesus and when people came to visit Carol Barth and they maybe commented on the painting Carol Barth would say I want to be that finger I want to be someone who points people to Jesus and helps them to see him as the one who died for their sins and that for us if we're Christians that should be our ambition as well and that's been my job today to point you to Jesus to talk about what the Bible says about him about the way in which he demonstrated so clearly that he was God and that he was the Messiah who had been promised that in some ways is simple but each of us has to make our own decision we can point but we can't make people decide for Jesus so the question today for all of us is what is our attitude towards Jesus are we like the Jews in Jerusalem the religious leaders who wanted nothing to do with him just wanted to be rid of him or are we like the people in the desert there who looked at the evidence who remembered what had been taught to them and had trusted in Jesus we don't need to understand everything to believe we never will understand everything but the basics of our Christian faith are very simple and if today you're grieving find your comfort in Jesus if you're troubled in heart find your peace in Jesus if you're apprehensive about the future find your hope in Jesus if you're feeling the weight of your sin find forgiveness in Jesus whatever your circumstances find in Jesus true love

[27 : 26] Jesus loves me this I know for the Bible tells me so let's pray together our Father we thank you for the Lord Jesus we thank you for the way in which he came into our world as your son lived among us as God with men a perfect life showed us what God is like did such wonderful things and taught in such wonderful ways and then ultimately went to the cross and died for our sins but arose again triumphantly and today we look to him and we point to him and we say he is the one whom all of us need whatever our circumstances he is the one who can meet our needs and we pray that all of us will come to that trust in him to be those who hear the shepherd's voice and who respond and who follow and again we would lovingly commit to you those who are particularly sad this morning we pray for Fraser and Ross and Jack for Lynn and Fraser's parents and other family members and we ask that you will be very near to them and that they will know the comfort that can only come through Jesus and the confidence the hope we have in him we thank you for our time together and we commit ourselves to you in Jesus name

Amen Amen