

The Good, The Bad, or the Holy One of God?

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Preacher: James Lapping

[0 : 00] Great, cheers, Ali. Welcome to all of you in the hall this evening, sanctuary this evening, and a big warm welcome to you guys at home.

And if you've just joined us and are new this evening, especially big warm welcome to you. It's lovely to have you with us. And it's a good evening to join us because we are in the second in a little series in John's Gospel, looking at John chapters 7 through to 9, entitled Truth on Trial.

And we get that idea of truth by verse 18 in our passage where Jesus says, but he who seeks the glory of the one who sent him is a man of truth, and there is nothing false about him.

And in our passage this evening and throughout the next few Sunday evenings, we're going to see a lot of debate and confusion about who Jesus is. And so tonight, we've called our talk tonight.

Hopefully it's slightly memorable. Depends how good your memories of Western movies are. The Good, the Bad, or the Holy One of God.

[1 : 14] So that's our title tonight. Well, let's pray as we begin. Amen. Jesus, thank you that you are the only person who speaks truthfully, that your words are spirit and life.

Please help us to listen to your true words this evening, to hear them, think about them, discuss them, inwardly digest them, so that we might see you more clearly.

Amen. Amen. Well, a couple of years ago, a friend of mine who served in the military was telling me the story about the time he almost got the conspicuous gallantry cross, and that's a very prestigious award.

It's one below the VC. And what had happened was someone had come to his room in his dormitory in the evening, knocked on his door and said, right, Malone, we're taking you down to Buckingham Palace to give you this award.

And they zoomed him off, and on the way he ate all these wonderful crepes and lovely desserts and meals and champagne and all this. And when he got there, they started telling him what he had done.

[2 : 27] And he had realized that it wasn't him, but it was a different Malone in the same company. And the only way they could tell the difference between these guys was the one was called Foxy Malone and the other one was called Bugsy Malone.

But obviously, you wouldn't put that on your official reports. And so there's a lot of confusion over who the real Malone is. And in this passage evening, we see lots of confusion over who Jesus is.

And we might be here tonight as someone who is confused about Jesus. And by way of context, in chapter 6, we have seen that Jesus has declared that his words are words of spirit and life.

And that in order to partake in this life, you have to partake in Jesus. You have to eat of him in the language of chapter 6, by faith.

And then Peter has gone on to confess that Jesus is the Holy One of God. That is, he is God's anointed Messiah who's going to bring about all God's promises.

[3 : 43] And then we've seen a mixed response from the crowd and from the religious authorities of their day. They don't know who he is. Some of them are hostile towards Jesus.

And the reason for this that we saw and considered last week was that they have hated God. In verse 7, at the start of our chapter. And the setting of our story tonight is that Jesus goes up to Jerusalem.

And he arrives there in the middle of a great feast. The feast of tabernacles where God's people remember how God had brought them up out of Egypt and dwelt with them.

And there is total confusion about him in verses 11 to 13. Did you notice that as you listened? The religious authorities are looking for him with the intention of harming him.

We get that from verse 1 and 11. Some of the crowds call Jesus good. Jesus, that's that nice fellow who says nice things and he healed my auntie's toe.

[4 : 53] Others say he's deceptive. He's a bad person. He claims to be for God. But he breaks the law of Moses. But no matter what your opinion, everyone is good and keeps their head down.

And what is becoming an increasingly poisonous atmosphere of hostility. And we see that in verse 13. And Jesus' response to this confusion is to teach.

So verse 14, he goes into the temple. And that's in Jerusalem. And that's the center point of Jewish faith. And like all rabbis, he adopts the posture of a teacher.

And that is he sits down and he begins to teach the crowds in this crowded area in the temple courts.

And what we see is that he first addresses those who say that he is simply a good person. And then we'll see how he goes on to address those who say that he is bad or deceptive.

[6 : 11] And so to those who say that Jesus is merely a good person, Jesus says, and this is our first point, I am sent by God and I teach with God's authority.

Verses 14 to 20. I am sent by God, Jesus says, and I teach with God's authority. And as Jesus teaches, the religious authorities of Jesus' day are amazed.

Verse 15, and they question him. They say, where does this man get such learning without having been taught? He hasn't done his Judaism 101 course.

And then Jesus gives a most astonishing answer in verse 16. What does he say? He says, my teaching is not my own, but comes from the one who sent me.

Normally, rabbis in those days, when they were teaching, they would have quoted people that would have agreed with them and say, I'm saying this because so and so and so and so and so and so says it.

[7 : 24] Very much like the way you might write an academic essay and you'd footnote who you're quoting to support or disagree with your argument. But Jesus doesn't do this.

He has one footnote and it says, God. And what he is doing is he is completely undermining those who say that he is merely good.

Do you see that? I am more than simply a good person. I speak as one sent by God and I teach with God's authority.

Well, Rob prayed for us there. And imagine Rob invited you out for a coffee. You would pay, obviously, because he's saving up for babies and what.

And you had a brilliant study with Rob, looking at the Bible with Rob. And then at the end of the study, you tell Rob, that was amazing, Rob. And then Rob closes the Bible and says something amazing.

[8 : 27] And he says, my teaching, what I've taught there, has come directly from God. How would you respond to that?

You might think that he's half balmy. You might send him on his way and try to avoid him next time. And the religious authorities ask where Jesus' teaching comes from, verse 15.

And Jesus answers, from God, verse 16. And the obvious question on your and my lips might be, how might I know that Jesus' claims about himself, that he teaches with the authority of God, how do I know those are true?

And Jesus anticipates this question and he gives an answer that we might not anticipate. So one way that we might answer that question is, well, you could look at the evidence.

Look at all the stuff that Jesus did. And later on in John's Gospel, Jesus says exactly that. Look at my works. Look at the things I do, the miracles. And then you'll know.

[9 : 36] And towards the end of John's Gospel, John says, I write these things, these signs, so that you may know and believe that Jesus is from God.

But if Jesus' teaching is genuinely from God, then what court is there that could be of more authority than God's own words to judge God's words?

Human evidence itself is simply not enough. And so it's a circular argument. These are God's words because these are God's words.

And so Jesus gives this unexpected answer to the anticipated question in verse 17. Anyone who chooses to do the will of God will find out where my teaching comes from, God, or whether I speak on my own.

I don't think Jesus is asking us to clean up our lives by trying to obey God's will here before we know that his teaching is really from God.

[10:48] I think Jesus is saying that as you trust him and put what you know about him into action, no matter how small it is, then your lived experience of your life of faith, of trusting him will become a witness to you of who Jesus is.

And the way that we know who Jesus is is not simply by studying him and looking up his claims, but by partaking of him, through his words, and entering into the life of faith.

Growing up, my best friend was a chap called Andre, and his grandmother lived in the basement of their house. And she was from Poland and up towards the Black Forest region.

I don't know if they joined exactly, but she used to make the most amazing cakes. And she made this Black Forest gateau, and it was absolutely stunning to look at.

And I looked at her, I amazed her, it was amazing. And then she cut a slice, and she said, James, take, eat this. And it was absolutely glorious.

[12:04] I would never have known how wonderful that cake was unless I'd taken a bite. It literally went up into my mouth, up, evaporated, and then down into my stomach.

I don't know how she managed it. So unless I partake of Jesus, I will never know how glorious he is. And then Jesus says in verse 18, he says, if you want to know, look at me. I am true. You can trust me. I'm trustworthy.

I don't seek my own glory. And at election time, lots of people do seek their own glory. But Jesus says, I seek the glory of the one who sent me.

And we saw this last week, how Jesus refuses to go along with his brothers who want him to create fame for himself, and how he goes up to the feast instead in secret.

[13:06] And in verse 19, it becomes absolutely clear that how Jesus operates is completely different to the other religious leaders of his day. They have been given the law of Moses, yet not one of you keeps the law.

Why are you trying to kill me? They've been given the law, but they don't keep it. And I think the application or the warning for us from this is, is that what is going to make us move away from Christ, and that would be a terribly sad thing, to give up on Jesus and his claims, is not a lack of evidence or some other mental, intellectual issue, but that we have stopped feeding on Christ. We have stopped seeking out God's will as the thing that drives us in the life of faith. And when we do this, other things seem to creep in and crowd out Jesus.

So family, or jobs, or friends, or academic success, or that really important relationship. And they're all things that take away from our awe and wonder at Jesus' gloriousness and move it on to something else.

And it's then that the intellectual doubts, once we've already moved on, that those reasoning questions come in, not the other way around.

[14:41] See, no one wakes up suddenly one day and says, I'm chucking in church. I'm not going to follow Jesus anymore. Rather, they move their gaze from Jesus and they start looking at other things.

They move away from depending on Jesus day by day. From turning to Him in repentance and trust. And they give up on that slowly. And they move on from Christ.

Well, I know a number of us have recently been reading a book by Dane Ortlund called Gentle and Lowly. And it's really a reworking of a book by a much older book by a chap called Thomas Godwin. The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment. And the basic argument of the book is, and you could correct me later, but I think this is right, is that if you want to live the victorious life, if you want to be happy as a Christian, then you need to declutter your life.

Get rid of all that stuff that draws you away from Christ. And look at Him only. And so to those who say that Jesus is merely a good person, Jesus says, something altogether different is here.

[15:58] I'm sent by God and I speak with God's authority. And the way that you and I see that is by eating Jesus spiritually, by faith, by making God the center of our life, then we will know that Jesus is simply not a good person, but He is God.

Well, next we see Jesus goes on to answer those who say that He is bad or deceptive, who say that He breaks the law of Moses.

And to those folk, He says in verses 21 to 24, I am sent by God to bring about the real Sabbath.

I am sent by God to bring about the real Sabbath. And the law there in verse 19 is the law that was given to God's people as they came up out of Egypt and were rescued and called to be God's people.

And it was the gold standard of what it meant to belong to God's people. But it pointed that old law to something even bigger and greater that was yet to come.

[17 : 13] And circumcision that we see talked about in this passage is the sign that you've entered into that and that you are part of God's people. And at the center of this law is the idea of Sabbath, entering into something that is bigger and greater and better.

And we're a bit down on Sabbath today. When I was at university, Sabbath was, there was a sign on the tennis courts that said, no tennis on Sundays or Sabbath. And we think no sport or no shopping on Sabbath or no work or no dancing.

And that's bad. That's booted to that stuff on Sabbath. But Sabbath, as God intended it, is meant to be a picture of what heaven looks like and of what the Holy One of God was going to bring about. And that it would be something infinitely positive. It would be a recreation where God would dwell in the midst of His people where there'd be perfection, no more tears, no more crying, no more sadness, where bodies would be healed perfectly and there would be glorious.

No medics in heaven. Sorry, if you are one. And what is going on in verse 21 to 24 is that in Jewish culture, a boy had to be circumcised on the eighth day.

[18 : 41] And that was a sign of cutting off all those imperfections that represented physically. And it was allowed on the Sabbath because it was in keeping with the Sabbath picture of God bringing perfection to His people, cutting those imperfections off.

But when Jesus does an even greater and bigger thing in healing someone's whole body, not simply cutting off a little bit of skin, by making them perfect on the Sabbath, the religious authorities are outraged.

Why are you angry with me, verse 23, for healing a man's whole body on the Sabbath? Why are you angry with me for doing the very thing that the Sabbath points to, for bringing about the real Sabbath?

Well, upstairs in my office, I've got this picture of Capri. And Capri is this beautiful little island off Italy and it's gelatos, ice creams everywhere and it's got cobbled streets.

And you go up to the mountain and it's glorious. You can take the funicular up and keep it there to remind me that there is such a thing as summer and that the sun will come out eventually and to think of somewhere where I want to go and that will keep me going.

[20 : 12] But you could imagine if I went to Capri when I am allowed to in some distant future and I got there and I took my picture with me and instead of enjoying an ice cream there and instead of enjoying the sun, I spent all my time staring at the picture and analyzing it and saying, but this isn't like my picture.

That would be ludicrous. You'd be a lunatic to do that. But what Jesus is saying is something bigger and greater is here to which the Sabbath points to.

Jesus doesn't just remove a minor imperfection, a bit of skin. He restores the whole person. He recreates them brilliantly. Jesus says, I am sent by God to bring about the real Sabbath.

And so in verse 24, he says, stop judging by mere appearances. Stop looking at the picture or a copy but instead judge correctly. I am the real deal.

I'm the real McCoy. I am sent by God to bring about the real Sabbath. And so the people say he's deceiving and bad.

[21 : 28] bad in his outrageous claims and in his breaking their understanding of the law. But Jesus says, I'm not bad. And if you want to commit to doing God's will, then you'll see that I am the real deal.

The Holy One of God who speaks with God's authority. The people say he breaks the law because he healed a man completely on the Sabbath that he's a bad man.

But Jesus says, I'm not breaking the law. Rather, I'm everything that the rules about circumcision and Sabbath were pointing towards. I'm the real McCoy.

And so, therefore, stop judging by mere appearances but judge correctly. Jesus was the one that all their hopes and all their dreams of what it would be like when God came down and dwelt among his people would be like.

And so, the challenge for us tonight is as we come to church and consider Jesus is to judge him correctly.

[22 : 36] so what is it going to look like for you and for me to make a faith commitment to God and to take Jesus' words as God's words this week.

I am sent by God and I teach with God's authority. And I wonder if we might just take a moment just to think quietly by ourselves what that might look like this week.

What little things according to what little bit you might know. So I'll give you a moment there. Well, it might be if you are someone who is doubting or struggling rather than shying away or drawing back from Jesus press into him make it a priority to spend time with Jesus and his people in formal and informal ways.

Look at your life assess it think about it and cut out the things in your life that clutter it up that you draw your way from Christ. And if you are someone here tonight who's never trusted Christ and you're still wondering about it wondering what to make of Jesus' claims then realize you can never rationalize your way you can never do the sums and rationalize your way into belief in Jesus.

I'm not saying that faith is unreasonable or blind but you need to read Christ's words as God's words to you and you need to take them on faith and trust them.

[24 : 31] and in a moment we'll have an opportunity to partake of Christ spiritually by faith as we celebrate the Lord's Supper and when you do I hope that you'll be refreshed and spiritually encouraged partaking in Christ in that and then a final second application I'll give you a moment to think about this one is what is it going to look like to live knowing that all our hopes for rest and renewal and creation are fulfilled in Jesus who ushers in a true and greater Sabbath for God's people.

I am sent by God to bring about the real Sabbath. I'll give you a moment to think about that real Sabbath that he is bringing and what that means for you now.

Great. So I invite the stewards to help with the table.

Life in this world is broken but it's not God's fault. He has a plan to fix it and it will be glorious. Put our hopes not in our own efforts and the things we do in this life but look to that glorious Sabbath to come that Jesus will bring in.

Let's pray as we close. So Father we thank you that you have not left us to our own devices but that you have sent your son and that he has spoken with your authority.

[26 : 49] we thank you that in Jesus all your promises are yes and amen of that glorious future to come that glorious future rest where everything will be fixed and will be perfect.

Help us to take Jesus' word seriously now and live the life of faith entering into it wholeheartedly enjoying Jesus and help us to keep our eyes fixed on that heavenly Sabbath to come where we will be with Jesus and with you forever.

Amen.