

In the next 25 minutes 6,000 people will have been born.
By this time tomorrow that number will be more like 300,000.
Of the sixty billion people who have ever lived

Most will have left no trace of their existence.
Many will have left tiny ripples.
Some will have affected thousands, perhaps millions of people over the years.
And then a few (very few) will have left a major mark in history.
Out of this elite group of philosophers, scientists, rulers and politicians –
One person **towers** above them all.
His name is Jesus.

No other person has attracted as much love and hatred, admiration and criticism, adoration and opposition as Jesus.

No other person's words have been studied more, analysed more and assessed more than Jesus'
Today 1,000s of millions of people listen to his teaching and try to apply it to their lives.
Jesus: who is he?

When Jesus entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday the whole city was stirred and asked, "who is he?".
Who is this one who stirs hearts, and transforms lives?
Who is he who turns people's worlds upside down and claims to be the key to abundant life?
Who is he?

You know, it's a question that many people **fail** to engage with.
They go their whole life sitting on the fence –
never really investigating the claims of Jesus and therefore
never really discovering the life that he promised to give.

So this evening, I want us to look at:
who Jesus claims to be and how that claim impacts us.

I want us to use a conversation that Jesus was having with a group of people
who thought of themselves "as believers".

It's found in John Chapter 8, p1074
and we're going to parachute right into the middle of the conversation.

In John 8v30 we read that "even as he spoke, many put their faith in him".
In v30, we see that many people became Christians,
but in v31 we read, that there were also those who "merely believed him".

John usually talks about those who have a "living faith" in terms of 'trust in' or 'believing in' Jesus (that's what have in v30).

But in v31 John uses the word "believe" without the important "in" –
In other words, he is signalling to us "that here is belief **but with a vital ingredient missing**".

Here are people who believed **things about** Jesus, but who did not believe **in** him (and there is a huge difference).

They believed some **facts** about Jesus, but they had no **faith** in him.

I guess, this would describe be the majority of people in our country and many, many people in church who call themselves Christians – but who are not.

who believe a lot about Jesus but they have not personally put their trust in him

They know *about* him, but they do not **know** him.

And in John 8 we see that Jesus pushes these people, goads them and prods them into making up their mind about him:

“Crown me or Crucify me”

“Make me Lord or call me a Liar”

But for Heaven’s sake don’t miss out on eternal life (don’t sleep walk into hell) simply because you won’t get off the fence!

Who is Jesus?

4 things that he says about himself; and

2 possible responses.

What does Jesus say about himself?

1.1 Well firstly, he says “I will set you free”.

v36 *“if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed”*

What does he mean?

Well **they** say,

v33 *“We are Abraham’s descendants and have never been slaves of anyone.*

How can you say that we shall be set free?”

Now they can’t be talking about physical slavery,

since Israel had been enslaved by both Egypt and Babylon.

So they’re not talking about physical freedom - they are talking about an “inner freedom”

Do you remember in Braveheart when Mel Gibson stands in front of his troops, and says in his best Scottish/American accent?

“they can take away our land, they can take away our families, they can take away our lives but they can’t take away freedom!”

we know immediately he is talking about inner freedom.

This is what Jesus is saying to those who believe him –

but they reply

we are Abraham’s children!

we are good and upright and moral citizens,

our family has been going to church for ages

How can you say we are not free?

And Jesus says v35 “you’re not free, because there is a difference between a Servant and the Son of the Household”

For although

they both live under the same roof,

they are both fed from the same kitchen,

they both obey by the same head,

their relationship is utterly different.

The slave has a servant relationship to the head,
he lives with the uncertainty that
if he doesn't measure up,
if he doesn't perform his duties
if he goes absent for a few days - then he can be thrown out.

the son on the other hand, has a totally different relationship –
he has an assurance of an unconditional love
he knows that if he screws up he'll not be disowned;
that if he goes missing the Father will search for him

Jesus says: to those who just “believe stuff about him”
You are still relying on your own goodness to impress God
You are relying on your own holiness to get into heaven
You are relying on being good enough for God to bless you in this life
And if you screw up (and you will) then what hope do you have?

Do you really think you can *ever* be good enough to earn the right to a friendship with God?
Who do you think you are? You will never have that right!

And this upsets them, because deep down they know its true:
Anyone who is NOT relying on Jesus for forgiveness, or approval, or security, or eternal life is relying on themselves
And when life lets us down or when we screw up – and we will
what hope is there for us except to try harder... and screw up once again!

But says Jesus,
if you come to the Father through me,
if you put your life in me
then I will give you a relationship with God that is based not on your performance but on intimacy.

I will make you a child of God,
I will transform your experience of God
I will give you a spiritual freedom not based upon
rules and regulations, or
“have to's and should do's”,
but based on an unconditional and loving relationship with God
he says Firstly, “I can set you free”.

the he says

1.2 Secondly, v51 “if you keep my word, you will never see death”.

Not only can I give you an inner experience of liberation
but I can give it to you forever!

In 3 zillion years from now you will still be experiencing that same unconditional love of God

If you follow what I say then
you will not only get the most out of life –
but you will also inherit eternal life - and

that is so far beyond our imagination that it will leave us staggered!

Many people think that becoming a Christian is full of restrictive rules and regulations.

But David showed us last week

*You don't buy a new DVD player and say "boy its really restrictive this DVD player" –
when I put bread in it, it doesn't make toast,*

when I use it as a skateboard it breaks,

when I throw it as a Frisbee it crashes".

How restrictive is that!

For if we follow the maker's instructions the DVD will play great videos –

its not restrictive to follow the instructions – it simply gets the best out of what it was designed for!

Jesus says "If you follow my word then I will give you life and life in such abundance that you will never see death – this is what you were designed for". Do you see?

well they don't, because they reply v53 "who do you think you are"

Who do you think you are to say:

you can make us children of God?,

you can set us free,

you can give us eternal life?

Are you greater than Abraham?

They are not convinced about what Jesus is saying...

So Jesus pushes them, he says

1.3 Thirdly, you know "Abraham rejoiced to see my day" v56

The day he is talking about – is the Day foretold in all the Prophecies in the Old Testament.

It is the Day of God.

It is the Day of Judgement.

It is the day when God "calls time" and wraps this world up.

It is the day when God says "enough, is enough".

"I have had enough of this suffering, this injustice, this rejection of my ways –

Let earth end and heaven begin!".

It will be a day of both amazing hope and dreadful terror.

It will be the answer to all of humanities prayers and it will be the sum of all its fears.

"Ready or not", says God "here I come"!

You know we **want** God to sort this world out,

we pray for justice, for peace, that humanity's heart may be changed.

And it will happen – on The Day we meet God –

either when leave this world – or when Jesus comes and this earth is wrapped up.

God will put things right

And if we have not responded to His love

If we have said "I don't want you God to be God of my life"

then it will be the most terrible day in the world for us

for we will be standing on the wrong side of the fence!

When Jesus said “Abraham rejoiced to see my day”

They didn’t want to think about it –

They didn’t want to engage with what Jesus was saying

So they made a joke about it –

“Who do you think you are?”, v57 “you are not yet 50 and you claim to have seen Abraham!”

So Jesus pushes them even further.

He says v58

1.4 I tell you the truth “Before Abraham was born I am”.

And at this they explode!

They go absolutely apoplectic!

They pick up stones to kill him!

Now to see why, we have to go back to Exodus Chapter 3 –

Where Moses met God in the burning bush

In Exodus 3 Moses said to God “who are you” “what is your name” “who shall I say is sending me?”

And God replies, say “I am that I am” has sent you, this is my name.

And ever since that moment, “I am” has been understood to be the greatest, highest, most intimate expression of God.

There has never been a more profound revelation of God than this.

God is saying “I am who I am”

I am uncaused.

I appeal to no one else to define me

I am not the product of anything

I have not been created or born or made by anyone or anything

I am transcendent beyond existence: over time, matter, energy, life.

I am existence, I am life, I am the ultimate and only authority!

The Hebrew word for “I am that I am” is Yahweh

And so intimate and holy is this name that the Jews refused to ever speak it out loud or write it in full.

Whenever they wrote it they took out the vowels (so they’d write YHWH) and they never spoke it out loud under pain of death.

And yet Jesus doesn’t just speak it, he applies it to himself. “before Abraham was I am!”.

I am life.

I am existence

I will set you free,

I will give you eternal life,

I will judge the world

I am God.

This is Jesus

These are his claims

This is the one who offers you friendship...

And this evening before you and me there are only 2 responses.

But one of them is not to say

2.1 Yeah, I see, I think Jesus is a Great Religious Leader.

If you read the account in John 8 – no one says “Jesus, we think you’re a great bloke, we love your teaching and you’re a top draw religious leader”

No one says that!

Can you imagine coming to church and me saying the things like

I am God

I can give you spiritual freedom

I can give you eternal life

for I created world

Would you really leave church tonight and say

I really like Steve, good bloke, great Rector

yeah I know he thinks he’s God but you can’t have everything you know!

Finally someone in the Church of England who knows what they believe!

They never say this of Jesus

You’d never say that of me!

The never say “great teacher”

What they DO say is in v48:

You’re demon-possessed!

And either they mean

You’re demonic trying to deceive people in this way!

you’re a shyster, you’re a fraud, you’re trying to preying on the weak and gullible;

or

they mean “you are demonic because you are deluded”.

Unhinged, a fruit cake,

A sandwich short of a picnic

A sausage short of a barbecue

A bunch of French fries short of a happy meal

You see the truth is that

given Jesus’ claims

2.2 He IS either Divine or Demonic

there is no middle ground

if he’s NOT telling the truth: he’s demonic; and

if he IS: he is Divine.

CS Lewis put this brilliantly

He said ““A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher.

He would either be a lunatic - on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg - or else a great deceiver. We must make a choice.

Either this man was and is the Son of God; or else a madman or something worse...

you can shut him up as a fool,

you can spit at him as a fraud,

you can fall at his feet as the Lord

but let us not come up with any patronising nonsense about Him being a great human teacher.

He has not left us that option and he did not intend to."

Throughout the conversation in John 8 and throughout his ministry Jesus tries to get people to see this. He tries to get people to get off the fence.

He is trying to get you off the fence tonight

He is saying to you:

Crown me or Kill me,

make me Lord or call me a Liar – but you must choose.

You must either make me the centre of your being (which is obvious if he is the Lord God, the Creator and Sustainer of everything) or

you must reject my claims – but you cannot (must not) just keep sitting on the fence!

In almost every conversation he has with those who merely believe

he calls them to a make a decision –

what do you make of me?

Crown me or Kill me – but for heavens sake,

don't just say "I'm a great moral teacher" –that is both intellectual and spiritual suicide.

don't just ignore me – for the opposite of love is not hate it is indifference.

so "Love me" or "hate me or even worse: ignore me" that is our call.

Every time he spoke he tried to get people to come off the fence,

over and over and over again he is saying:

what do I have to do to get you to engage with me?

My friends if you "believe stuff about Jesus" but you have not made God the centre of your life, if you have not placed your trust in him:

who else will forgive your sins?

who else loves you enough to die for you?

who else has promised to prepare a place in heaven for you?

If not Jesus then who?

What more are you waiting for?

Is the sight of God on a cross not enough to move you – how stone hearted are you!

Kill me or Crown Me!

Call me Demonic or Divine!

But get off the fence!

And Jesus will keep pushing us

get off the fence, get off the fence, get off the fence, get off the fence!

Until our lack of response IS our response and we have done worse than hate him we have been indifferent to him.

The opposite of love is not hate it is indifference.

It is a decision to NOT make up our mind

3. My friends who do you think he is?

If you forgive the imagery

Nobody really sits on the fence with one leg on one side and one leg on the other –
its just too painful!

Please don't think about that too much!

The reality is that when we sit on a fence we put both legs on one side or the other

So some of you here tonight are sitting with both legs towards the side of scepticism.

You say

"I like God, I like Jesus, I don't like the Church much, I not entirely convinced about some Christian's (no
don't look at each other!)

your legs are over towards scepticism.

You are still saying – I believe Jesus was a great moral teacher,

But don't you see "that image of Jesus is a fantasy"

He can't be "just a great moral teacher" he claimed much more

He said: "I am the light of the world, I am the true vine, I am the shepherd, I am the door, I am God" "I am
the one who laid my life down for you"

He calls you to get off the fence.

for loves sake, for heaven's sake, for your souls sake.

Make him the centre point of your life

You cannot keep Jesus hanging around on a cross waiting for you to make up your mind!

Many people who call themselves Christians are also on the fence – but their legs are on the other side,
they go to Jesus when in trouble,

they believe his teaching, but they won't throw themselves at his feet

they give ascent to his Divinity but they place limits on their allegiance.

If that's you – your image of Jesus is too small.

Look if the distance between the earth and the Sun (93 million miles) is represented by the thickness of a
single piece of paper then our galaxy would be a stack of paper 310 miles long ... do you see how big that
is!?

If you then compressed that galaxy into a single full stop, then our galaxy is just one full-stop amongst all
the other full stops that are currently printed in all the books in all the world. ... do you see how big this
universe is!?

Jesus said "I created this", "I hold this together with one word", "I am the reason for its existence..."

Is this the sort of person you can limit your allegiance too?

Is this the sort of person you invite into your life to be merely an assistant to you?

Is this the sort of person you say "don't call me – I'll call you when I am ready"?

Make Christ the centre of your life and he will give it back to you in abundance

He'll not restrict you as much as fulfil you

He will set you free to be the one you were made to be and he'll do it forever.

Get off the fence and live your life in Jesus.

Tonight say to him “I am all for you – for your **are** and always have been all for me”