

Who is Jesus?

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[0 : 0 0] I always find it very difficult to translate what's happening then, 2,000 years ago, with what happens today in Melbourne. I think that's quite a tricky thing to get that right.

Sometimes that happens a lot when you read the Bible, I should say. But in our passage today, there are two things that are going on, two things that we see all the time in this city.

The two things are noise about Jesus, noise about him, and hostility towards him. Noise and hostility. If we ask the average Melburnian who they think Jesus is, what do you think some of the answers might be?

A good man, just a myth, maybe lots of, I don't really care either way, in fact. Lots of churches will say the same things, different opinions.

A good man, just a myth, different opinions, some okay, some awful. Lots of noise. Hostility as well. You won't find Jesus' name mentioned publicly or in the public square these days, even in some of the churches, actually, as our culture becomes more godless.

[1 : 1 0] Just try, in any of your conversations, to throw Jesus' name in there and just watch how awkward things get. If you agree with Jesus on certain issues, hostility is what you can expect.

Noise and hostility now. Back then, the same. Let's look at some of the noise about Jesus. Not all of it, but just some of the passages.

So verse 12. Among the crowds, there was widespread whispering about him. Some said, he is a good man. Others replied, no, he deceives the people. Verse 15.

The Jews were amazed and asked, how did this man get such learning without having been taught? Verse 31. Still many of the crowd believed in him.

Over the page, verse 40. Over the page. On hearing his word, some of the people said, surely this man is the prophet. Others said, he is the Messiah. Still others asked, how can the Messiah come from Galilee?

[2 : 1 1] And verse 43. Thus, the people were divided because of Jesus. Lots of noise about Jesus. Let's look at the hostility as well.

Again, a bit of flicking. This hostility to Jesus started in chapter 5 when he healed a man, a paralyzed man, on the Sabbath. And back then, for that reason, they tried to kill him.

But that hostility has continued into our passage. Verse 1. End of verse 1. The Jewish leaders were looking for a way to kill him. Verse 13. But no one would say anything publicly about him for fear of the leaders.

End of verse 19. Why are you trying to kill me? The middle of verse 23. Why are you so angry with me? Verse 30.

At this they tried to seize him. And then end of verse 32. Then the chief priests and the Pharisees sent temple guards to arrest him. Noise and hostility back then, just as today.

- [3 : 17] And so John's aim is that we rise above the noise and the hostility to give Jesus a fair hearing. John's aim is that we rise above the noise and the hostility to give Jesus a fair hearing so we can believe in him.
- So we can have eternal life. The context of chapter 7 is the festival of tabernacles, also called the festival of booths. And what it was, was every year religious Jews would make a pilgrimage up to Jerusalem.
- And for a week they would camp in tents or tabernacles or booths. And what they were doing was commemorating God's rescue of Israel from Egypt.
- When they wandered through the wilderness, they would camp in little tents as they headed to the promised land. That's the context. But this year, a very tense feast.
- Because there's lots of noise about Jesus. There's lots of hostility as his ministry starts growing. There's your context. A very tense feast. The setting of our passage, and this is on your handout as well, the setting is a courtroom.
- [4 : 27] It's a courtroom. There's a defendant, Jesus. There's the prosecution, the religious Jews. Jesus is charged with healing a paralyzed man on the Sabbath.
- They're trying to give him the death penalty. They're trying to kill him. There are Old Testament laws cited as legal precedent. And over a dozen character witnesses are brought in to testify against Jesus.
- Who is in the jury? You are. You are. We're going to move pretty fast through the text. But if you get lost or if you fall asleep, as some of you have already started doing, I'm watching.
- If you get lost or if you fall asleep and suddenly go like this. Remember, we're in a courtroom today. We're in a courtroom. And John's instruction to the jury is that you rise above the noise and the hostility to give Jesus a fair hearing.
- Is that okay? Stay awake. Point one. We're going to read from verse one. After this, Jesus went around in Galilee. He did not want to go about in Judea because the Jewish leaders there were looking for a way to kill him.
- [5 : 36] But when the Jewish festival of tabernacles was near, Jesus' brother said to him, Leave Galilee and go to Judea so that your disciples there may see the works you do. No one who wants to be a public figure acts in secret.
- Since you're doing these things, show yourself to the world. Jesus' own family, his brothers, are the first to take the witness stand. But they're confused about Jesus' agenda.
- They think he's some fame-hungry politician, like on the campaign trail. Why don't you leave Galilee and go to Judea? If you want to be a public figure, that's where all the people are this time of year.
- But they're full of noise. Verse five. You see, Jesus is working to God's agenda, not his brother's agenda.
- His time is not yet here. His hour, his time is the next festival of Passover next year. And he says in verse seven, The world cannot hate you, but it hates me because I testify that its works are evil.
- [6 : 46] This is a really key verse today because it hints that there are two sides in the universe. There's God's side and then there's the world's side. God's side, the world's side.
- That's a really important divide as we work through the passage. God's side, the world's side. Jesus, obviously, he's on God's side because he's God's son. The people are on the world's side and the world hates him because he testifies their works are evil.
- That's why Jesus experiences hostility everywhere he goes. He's the light from God. He exposes the darkness in our lives and we hate him because of that.

He says to his own brothers, It's safe for you to go to the festival. No one there hates you. The world cannot hate you because you are from the world. His own family, not on his side.

Pretty shocking. In verse 10, however, After his brothers had left for the festival, He went also, not publicly, but in secret, it says. He's not afraid of people.

[7 : 50] He's not afraid of the Jews. He's just working to a different agenda, to God's agenda, in God's timing. And so John takes us to Jerusalem, to the festival of tabernacles.

Jesus goes there to teach, as he always does, but he's interrupted by four confrontations. So four confrontations, they're on your handout. They are a second point.

And like a courtroom, like a courtroom, one by one, noisy and hostile people take the stand to confront Jesus. And this is the important bit.

I want you to notice how in every confrontation, I want you to notice whose side people are on. God's side or the world's side. I want you to notice how when people try to interrogate Jesus, it only exposes what they are like as he turns the tables on them.

Okay, look out for that. God's side, world's side. Watch Jesus turn the tables on his accusers. So confrontation one, verse 14. Let me read verse 14.

[8 : 56] Not until halfway through the festival did Jesus go up to the temple courts and begin to teach. The Jews there were amazed and asked, how did this man get such learning without having been taught? How can Jesus talk and teach like a rabbi having never gone to school?

But he turns the tables on them. Verse 16. He answered, my teaching is not my own. It comes from the one who sent me. Anyone who chooses to do the will of God will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own.

Whoever speaks on their own does so to gain personal glory. But he who seeks the glory of the one who sent him is a man of truth. There's nothing false about him. God's way, the world's way.

The crowd think Jesus is a false teacher that he's after personal glory. But he says in verse 17, that's because you don't know the will of God.

You don't do the will of God. That's why you question his teaching. He exposes them in verse 19. He says, not one of you keeps the law. Not one of you does God's will. Why are you trying to kill me?

[10 : 01] If they did keep God's will, they would keep God's law. They would recognize where Jesus' teaching comes from and they wouldn't try to kill him. But they are on the world's side.

That's confrontation one. Confrontation two, verse 20. You are demon-possessed. The crowd answered, who is trying to kill you? You aren't from God.

You are from the devil. Demon-possessed is the charge. You'd have to be pretty brave to call God a demon to his face, I think, like these people. It's quite shocking.

And again, the people forget whose courtroom they're in, don't they? See, Jesus is not in our courtroom. He's not in the dock answering our charges.

We are in his courtroom. And so he turns the tables verse 23. He cites Old Testament precedents. He says, if a boy can be circumcised on the Sabbath so that the law of Moses may not be broken, why are you angry with me for healing a man's whole body on the Sabbath?

[11 : 04] For those of you who aren't Jewish, which is most of us, Jewish law says that when you have a baby boy, he's to be circumcised on the eighth day after his birth. Now, if that eighth day happens to fall on the Sabbath or a Saturday, they are fine to proceed, you know, snip away.

But when Jesus tried to heal a man's body on the same day, they were outraged. And again, he exposes whose side they're really on. They reduce God to being some sort of petty legalist, don't they?

They think God cares more about Sabbath regulations than a man being healed of paralysis after 38 years. He says in verse 24, stop judging by mere appearances.

Instead, judge correctly. God's side, the world's side. In confrontation three and four, again, people try to interrogate Jesus, but when they do, they're the ones who end up being exposed.

We don't have time to go through confrontation three and four, but in each, just notice Jesus having the last word. So end of verse 28, you don't know God, but I know him because I'm from him and he sent me.

[12 : 20] You are not on God's side, said Jesus, because those who confront God can't be on his side. You're from the world. That's why in verse 34, he says, you will look for me, but you will not find me.

And where I am, you cannot come. God's side, the world's side. And so after those confrontations, finally, Jesus gets some clear air to speak without people interrupting him.

Shall we see what Jesus says? This is point three. This is his own testimony for himself. Verse 37. On the last and greatest day of the festival, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink.

Again, if you're not Jewish, the last day of the festival of tabernacles, what they would do was bring huge quantity, huge buckets and vats of water and they would pour them over the temple here, over the altar, so that the water would sort of flow out.

That's what they would do. Large quantities of water flowing out from the temple. And what they were doing was reenacting several Old Testament prophecies, which, ones like the one on your handout, Zechariah 14, on that day, living water will flow out from the temple.

[13 : 34] And with all that symbolism in mind, on the right day, the water day, in the right place, the altar at the temple of Jerusalem, Jesus cries out, whoever, verse 38, whoever believes in me, as scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them.

If you don't understand water prophecies, John helps us in verse 39, by this, so by all the water, Jesus meant the spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive.

Up to that time, the spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified. The Old Testament reading we had was one of those water prophecies.

It's on your handout. It says, For I will pour water on thirsty land and streams on the dry ground. I will pour out my spirit on your offspring and my blessing on your descendants.

Isaiah says that just as fresh living water or fresh flowing water is like life to people in the desert, just as flowing water is like life to people in bushfire country in Victoria, so too the spirit is life to people in darkness, to people who are on the world side.

[14 : 54] That's the spirit to bring life to the world. Notice that the spirit isn't earned by keeping the law or moral performance. Not even the Jews were that moral.

The spirit is for the anyone's of the world. It's for the whoever's of the world. Whoever believes in the sun, even if you're Australian or Chinese or Persian or Indian or good or bad, anyone can have eternal life if they believe in Jesus and his spirit lives in them.

He'll be like an endless spring of fresh water to people in the desert. That's the picture, an endless spring. You don't need to go to Jerusalem on a pilgrimage.

You don't need to keep the law. You just need to believe in the sun and then the spirit will reside in you. And the people, they hear Jesus' own testimony.

They hear him take the stand and they are staggered in verse 40. On hearing his words, some of the people said, surely this man is the prophet. Others said, he's the Messiah.

[16 : 03] But still others asked, how can the Messiah come from Galilee? And so John summarises all the noise in the courtroom that day. Verse 43, thus the people were divided because of Jesus.

We've heard a lot of hostility. We've heard a lot of testimony about Jesus. And one final witness is going to take the stand. The most important witness, actually, and this is our final point.

It's Nicodemus. This is point four. Nicodemus is a Pharisee. He's like the religious leaders, but he's also not like them.

So he had gone to Jesus earlier. And in verse 51, here is the most important testimony. Does our law condemn a man without first hearing him to find out what he's been doing?

Of all the eyewitnesses in the courtroom, John presents Nicodemus as the one to copy. He rises above the noise. He stands up to his own legal fraternity and says, isn't it illegal to condemn a man without first giving him a hearing?

[17 : 07] Shouldn't we just listen to the facts first before trying the death penalty? Nicodemus is the one to copy. And so as we move and as we gather all these pieces together and apply it, it applies, I think, in two ways.

For those of you here who aren't Christians, who wouldn't call yourselves Christians, I feel sorry for you. And the reason I feel sorry for you is because there's so much noise in Melbourne.

If you're trying to figure out who the real Jesus is, there's so much noise that you have to sort of wade your way through so you can hear and see the real Jesus.

much of the noise in Melbourne, like this courtroom, he's a good man, he's a liar, he's demon-possessed. All of it are misinformation, confusion from worldly people who hate Jesus because he testifies that their works are evil.

John wants you to rise above the noise to give Jesus a fair hearing, to judge him rightly, as he says, on his words and on his actions.

[18 : 19] That's being a Nicodemus. That's giving him a fair hearing. That's how you get to hear about living water. That's how you get to know Jesus, to believe in him so his spirit can live within you.

The other way this applies is for those who are Christians. So for everyone else in the room who's a Christian, now's your chance to wake up. We are also to be like Nicodemus.

Nicodemus braved the hostility of his age. Do you notice many times in the passage it says people were too afraid to speak out for fear of the authorities, fear of the religious Jews, but Nicodemus stood up to them all.

He stood up to the world. He demanded that Jesus get a fair hearing. He's showing himself to be on God's side, that the spirit is at work in him.

See, maybe you experience hostility because you believe in Jesus. Maybe you experience hostility because your words and actions show that you give Jesus a fair hearing in your life.

[19 : 30] Maybe what you need is not more peace, but more bravery, like Nicodemus. Jesus says we should expect hostility. if we're on his side, the world hates that.

It's not that we go looking for trouble or hostility. We would rather live in peace, but every time we side with Jesus, every time we give him a fair hearing, hostility is what you should expect.

It's what he got. Some hostility will be out and out rejection, maybe even from your family, but some hostility for a lot of us will be much more subtle.

It will be slowly being left out of the centre of things. It's the subtle comments, the sneering remarks about you being a Bible basher or some holier-than-thou religious Jesus freak.

It's all noise, says Jesus. It's all noise. They didn't get him right either. You're in good company when they're hostile to you.

[20 : 36] If you face hostility for Jesus' sake, please be encouraged. Please be encouraged. That's a sign that you're on God's side and not the world's. It's a sign of the Spirit's life within you.

Remember, Jesus is the judge. He's the judge in the only courtroom that matters. You will be vindicated on the final day. But I just want to finish with a challenge to the Christians here.

if you haven't experienced hostility for your faith in the last few years, why do you think that is? That's a really good question.

Why have you not experienced hostility for your faith? It might mean you haven't given Jesus a fair hearing in your words and actions, in the way you live your life.

can I challenge you this year, this Lent? Christians, we always give up things for Lent, don't we? Can I challenge you to spare the chocolate? Why not pray for more bravery?

[21 : 47] Jesus, in Lent, we look forward to when Jesus bravely goes to the cross to give his life. Maybe we could be, like Nicodemus, like Jesus, a bit more brave for him.

That would be an excellent prayer request for you, this Lent. Maybe more bravery, so that you can rise above the noise and the hostility of this city.

So I pray for that as we finish. It's a moment of quiet first. Lord Jesus, we pray as you, you are the judge, you are on God's side, we were all on the world's side, until your spirit gave us life.

love. Please, Lord Jesus, help us to be brave against the noise and against the hostility of our workplaces, of our family and friends.

Help us to be brave. Please, would we give Jesus a fair hearing in our words and actions. We are so afraid, we want to be like the world.

[22 : 52] While