

Getting Stuck In With.... JESUS – Hebrews 12:1-3

Who watched this last Sunday evening? (SLIDE) BGT – my favourite of this kind of show (variety, short) You may recall we did Bible's Got Talent this time last year, hot on heels of show.

- Gonna use BGT theme a bit again today. But first - favourite acts? (SLIDE Lorraine Bowen)
- Who cheered for in final? (SLIDE finalists) – right winner? (SLIDE)

Key – so important to see real person – e.g. winning act 'love for dog', or the Neals father and sons. BEING AUTHENTIC – W Y S I W Y G.

TODAY – start of new series on 'getting stuck in' – i.e. getting involved, making faith and commitment real. (Not getting stuck.... in) Over next few weeks we'll be looking at key areas for a real life with God: prayer, talents, money (can't avoid – Spurgeon 'last part to be converted...')

But start today with most important one of all – 'GSIW – Jesus'. None of the rest means anything if it doesn't have Jesus at the heart of it. Thing is, Christianity not a religion at all (only 5x in NT – 2x negative, 3x looking after people, 0x to do with religious observance) – **not a religion but a rel'ship**

Really a love affair with Jesus (difficult for men to hear this) – shock you. All the 'stuff' important (church, moral values etc) – none of it means anything if not growing in relationship with Jesus:

(SLIDE) Hebrews 12:2 'fixing our eyes on Jesus' (let us...)

What does that mean? Lots of things – must be our passion, our priority, our pleasure and joy. Our obsession, maybe.

Focus for today: getting rid of false views of Jesus. Lots of them – often driven by pictures (SLIDE) – BUT obscure the real person. Like a human relationship – begin with an image of them, then it changes as we get to know them better. Key: who is the real Jesus? What are the fakes?

(SLIDE – BGT JUDGES) Judge the various images of Jesus:

FAIRYTALE JESUS (SLIDE) – Christmas myth. Lovely story – exotic cast of characters. Comfortable – God stays as a baby, doesn't grow up and start telling us what to do. Or shaking us out of our comfort zones. We like Christmas Jesus because he's cute and mute, he doesn't say anything.

But Hebrews doesn't let us get away with that: (v2) he's 'the pioneer and perfecter of faith.' He's not a fairy story, he's a real human being who was opposed by people (v3), and died a criminals' death (v2). This Jesus was real, we have to take him seriously. **(SLIDE – COWELL)**

Assume that Jesus real, next 3 – some truth in all of them, but all only partly true, which is why they are dangerous. They stunt our growth, as Jesus gets pushed into a box and sanitised.

THERAPY JESUS (SLIDE) – i.e. it's all about me. My wellbeing. Partly true – Jesus does heal – word for salvation and healing are the same. Heals our souls and bodies.

BUT Hebrews says: v1b READ – i.e. let's stop thinking about ourselves, and give ourselves wholly to Jesus. Yes there's sin, yes there's trouble, yes there's stuff that requires us to persevere. But it's not all about us. Fix your eyes on Jesus. **(SLIDE – HOLDEN)**

SUCCESSFUL JESUS – 2 versions: respectability (old version) / prosperity. Partly true – he does want us to flourish.

BUT Hebrews says (v2): Jesus' path led him to the cross, to shame, to opposition. He never had a permanent home, or any money or any measurable 'success'. He was certainly not respectable. There's a wildness in Jesus which we often like to sanitise. It may not bring success or even respectability, but it is for real people – and probably a bit more exciting. **(SLIDE – DIXON)**

STRONGMAN JESUS – variant of last one, but different focus. Spiritual power – life of endless victory. At its crudest we use Jesus as a way of getting God on our side. Partly true – there is power in the name of Jesus.

BUT Hebrews says: v2 – power made perfect in weakness; v3 – endured and overcame but didn't blow them off the face of the earth. **(SLIDE – WALLMS)**

Common thread – making faith all about us – my healing, my success, my power. To journey with Jesus is to seek a different kind of life. This is what a lot of Jesus' parables are about: treasure hidden in a field, the mustard seed – it's a kind of like a secret. It's not a religious varnish on our basic human aspirations, but rather life in a completely new dimension. That's what so many people miss. God bit gets squeezed.

But true life with Jesus is exciting, radical, turns things upside down. Also where true life of God found – joy when we shouldn't feel it, peace when we should feel anxiety, unexpected answers to prayer.

(SLIDE) Most of what we call spirituality today has almost nothing of God in it – it's all about us. New age religion/alternative therapy just human desires with a veneer of vague spiritual coating. Google 'spirituality': **(SLIDE)** – on own, exercises, always sunny – does that equip you for real life? – escapism or consumerism. I want something real. Why need real Jesus.

You want to know God – get back to disciples in boat and hear Jesus calling 'follow me.' **(SLIDE)** *(not believe, but follow)* **Follow me**: I can't promise riches or a life of ease and respectability. But I can promise something altogether more real. Something transformational, something powerful, something life-giving. But only if you fix your eyes on me.

Next few weeks – see what that looks like in practice. But as we start today, let's not miss the point. Rest only matters if you decide that Jesus is the one around whom to build a life. Forget the sort of empty religious observance of respectable society, or modern consumerism. Read the gospels and you'll see what Jesus thinks of that. And therefore what God thinks of it. Go for the real thing.

Doesn't work if half-hearted – got to go for it. That's the secret – the treasure is there, but only if you're prepared to dig for it.

