



JUDGING Jesus

8 WEEK SERIES IN JOHN
MITCHELTON PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

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Judging Jesus

The story is told of an American high-school group taken to the Louvre to see Leonardo Da Vinci's *Mona Lisa*. But when they see the famous painting, they're underwhelmed. They're not sure what all the fuss is about - she's not even smiling properly! They're laughing and joking about it, when a security guard overhears what they're saying. He comes over and says to them, "Children, in this gallery, you don't judge the paintings. The paintings judge you."

When John, a close disciple, wrote his biography of Jesus, he was saying something similar. John repeatedly shows us how people judge Jesus. Their judgment is that other prophets got a much bigger following in Israel than Jesus ever did, so surely he can't be all that special. They conclude that he's a good teacher, sure, but nothing more than that. They judge that he couldn't persuade the leaders of Israel to take his claims seriously, so no one else should either. They decide that some of his teaching was really just offensive. They determine that he didn't come from a great family or a great area, so he never should have expected everyone to follow him in the first place. Over and over people judge Jesus. But in every case, John shows us, judging Jesus is a judgment on them.

Why? Because Jesus himself is the truth (John 14:6). He is God become human (1:1,14) to reveal God to us (1:14,18). He is the one who *judges us* (5:22-23). He is the Word by which we hear God, the Light by which we see God. So when we judge Jesus it actually says nothing about him; it says something about us: we're in the dark about the very God who gives us life.

Unlike the other biographies of Jesus by Matthew, Mark and Luke, John doesn't want us to slowly discover this truth about Jesus over the course of the whole story. John wants us to see the truth right from the start, and then to read all the stories of other people judging Jesus in that light. The hope is that as we do that, and as we see how blind to Jesus people really can be, we might have our own eyes opened. We might see how we've been thinking too little of Jesus. Of who he really is. What he's really done for us. And how badly we really need him. (It's actually a bit disturbing that in John's account many of the people who judge Jesus are those who say they already in some way "believe" in him!)

The good news is that we really can have our eyes opened. For every story of people judging Jesus in John's account, there's a story of someone who sees the light and follows Jesus with joy. It's our prayer that through our Sunday sermons and our mid-week Growth Group sessions we might all come to see God in Jesus like that, that our whole way of seeing ourselves and the world around us might be flooded with his light.

The MPC Ministry Team
JANUARY 2017

Fewer Questions, More Discussion

This study guide is different. If you've been part of an MPC growth group before, you'll know that our study guides have often been quite 'full-on', with lots of pre-reading and cross referencing and background material. We've had feedback that sometimes the studies have been too long and too complex. (Though some people think the opposite!) Also, at times we've heard that the length of the studies means there's not much discussion on each question.

In this series we're trying to encourage more free flowing discussion, by asking fewer questions - between 10 and 12 questions in each study. Your group meeting shouldn't be any shorter - we want you to tussle with the text, debate, cross-question and even argue. Vibrant discussions are great! We expect your group discussion should last from 45 minutes to an hour, with a time of prayer afterwards.

Maybe, your group will find the studies too short. If so, do your bit to contribute more to the discussion! Otherwise, have a longer time of prayer. (If that doesn't work, spend longer chatting over coffee together!) Please let us know how your group is going week by week.

Phil Campbell
JANUARY 2017





WEEK 1 || *JOHN 1:1-23*

THE WITNESS

For the Jews one of the great tests of your status and authority was your origin: where you're from. A person's place and family of origin revealed who they were, what honour was due them, what they knew and what authority they had when they spoke. Throughout John it's a means by which people judge Jesus. ("Nazareth? Can anything good come from there?" - 1:46)

But John's famous opening words claim that the origin of Jesus is far more impressive than that. As we'll see in the coming weeks, a person's judgement about where Jesus comes from says more about them than it says about him.

ISRAEL JUDGES JESUS

Read John 1:1-23

1. What do we discover about Jesus' origins and John the Baptist's origins here? (Does this remind you of anything in Malachi 3-4 or Isaiah 40?)
2. What did you notice about Jesus' and John's purposes? (Don't miss verses 6-7 and 22-23 for John!)
3. Which one had the better reception so far?

... WHICH JUDGES THEM

Of the many things you may have noticed, keep in mind that Jesus not only came from God... more than that, astonishingly the Word (Jesus) was God! But despite that, his own people did not accept him (v11). They were the ones who should have known him best! It seems that John the Baptist's attempts to prepare the way for Jesus didn't have the widespread effect he hoped for (though some of his disciples follow Jesus later in verses 35-37).

4. With the benefits of hindsight, what was foolish about the people's decision not to accept Jesus?
5. If Jesus is both the Word by which people hear God (v1), and the Light by which people see God (v9), what does the people's rejection of Jesus say about them?
6. What benefits does John the Baptist say those who reject Jesus are missing out on (verses 15-18)?

WHAT'S YOUR VERDICT?

The famous prophet John the Baptist told people that Jesus was far greater than himself. In fact, John's followers ended up leaving John to follow Jesus. (verses 35-37) John's whole purpose was for people to end up following Jesus, not himself.

7. What would you personally be missing if Jesus had not come from God to earth?

8. As you read John's descriptions of who Jesus is, are there any of them that have been of great comfort or encouragement to you in your Christian walk? Share with the group.

9. John makes some very big claims about Jesus. How many of them genuinely shape the way you think about Jesus?

Do any make you uncomfortable?

10. John's disciples left what they were following when they saw just how precious Jesus was and what he would offer. What costs might you face to follow Jesus today?

CONCLUSION

Jesus is the one who has come from the Father to reveal him to humanity. Without him, we'd have an incredibly reduced picture of God, both in his character and his stance toward us. Added to that, we'd have no right to call God our Father, because that's a right that only Jesus can give. The judgements that Jesus' fellow countrymen made about him left them condemned to not knowing God in truth, or as father. Praise God for the light and life that Jesus brings!