

# Why is Jesus so provocative?

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Date: 12 March 2023

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[ 0 : 00 ] Let's also pray. Father, I just pray now that you'll be with us as we listen to your word again. Would you again paint the portrait of the Lord Jesus for us so that we might be able to see him in our mind's eye vividly, that we might come to know him more and more, that we might be challenged, that we might be ready to live for him as your people.

So please open our ears and open our hearts. All this we pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen. The year is 1846, and there is a young Dr Hart at work in the General Hospital in Vienna.

His name is Ignis Samuel Weiss, and he's puzzled about something. He cannot understand why so many women in the maternity ward are dying from something called pure peril fever.

And what's even weirder is that he notices that the maternity ward, which is staffed by doctors and medical students, have a mortality rate that's almost five times higher than the ones staffed by midwives.

What's going on? After trying out a few hypotheses, he hits upon the cause. The problem, he declares rather provocatively, are the doctors.

[ 1 : 26 ] It's not the patients. The doctors are causing the deaths. You see, as part of their duties, the doctors and medical students, unlike the midwives, perform autopsies.

And they were getting particles from the corpses they examined onto their hands. So, when they delivered babies, these particles would get inside the women, who would get infected, and die.

The solution, therefore, was simple. Dr. Samuel Weiss ordered all the medical staff to wash their hands with a chlorine solution, and sure enough, the death rate declined.

So, you would have thought Samuel Weiss would be treated like a hero. But instead, the opposite happened.

You see, no doctor likes to hear that they're at fault. Besides, in the mid-19th century, people didn't really know about germs or connect them with disease, so they were skeptical of his theory.

[ 2 : 37 ] As a result, Samuel Weiss was resisted and strongly criticized by his peers, slandered in the media, accused of superstition, and sadly, eventually suffered a mental breakdown and died of an infection.

It's a sad episode, isn't it? You pursue something good, you try to persuade others of the truth, but the truth ends up provoking people, and you pay the price for it.

And in today's passage, we're going to see Jesus is on a similar path. He provokes some folk, he says what they don't want to hear, so much so that, by the end, they literally want to kill him.

But why does Jesus have to be provocative? Well, if you think of Jesus simply as a nice guy whose job is to be nice to us, then you might say to him, hey, hey, hey, Jesus, I lay low for a while, okay?

Don't say or do things that will upset people. But what if, like Dr. Samuel Weiss, Jesus is a doctor on a rescue mission?

[ 3 : 57 ] What if Jesus is the solution to the problem, but people don't like or want the solution in the first place? Does that invalidate him as a person?

Should we then also give him a cold reception? Well, this morning Luke says, Don't do that, even if you are tempted to.

Remember why Luke is writing. Back in chapter 1 verse 4, he wants his readers to be certain about the things they have been taught.

So he wants us to remain certain, confident in Jesus, even when his very identity provokes some people. He wants us to see that following him is the right thing to do, even when other people say no to him.

And so in today's passage, he shows us a string of provocative encounters to sharpen our focus on who Jesus is.

[ 5 : 07 ] And we're going to discover two things that Jesus wants us to know about himself so that we can remain confident in him. So first of all, Jesus wants us to know he's the bridegroom, not just an add-on to our religion.

He's the bridegroom, not just an add-on to our religion. Now last week, I asked you, what image comes to mind when I say the word repentance?

Well this week, let me ask you again, what comes to your mind when I say the word religion? What does it look like to be religious? Perhaps you think of gloomy people guilt-tripping you into doing certain things grudgingly to stay in God's good books.

And if that is what religion is, I don't blame anyone for wanting to avoid religion. And if that is your view of religion today, then I want you to know Jesus has nothing to do with such religion.

And that's not just me trying to do PR for Jesus. That's what Luke himself shows us. After all, last week, who were the first people on the scene to complain about Jesus?

[ 6 : 30 ] Jesus, precisely these kind of religious people. Remember what they said? Just look back at verse 30 if you need to jog your memory.

Why do you guys eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners? This isn't the way to do things. And now, verse 33, the religious establishment are complaining again.

John's disciples often fast and pray, and so do the disciples of the Pharisees, but yours go on eating and drinking. Come on, guys, if you are religious, fasting and praying are mandatory, right?

And certainly in Jesus' day, fasting was observed regularly. The Pharisees, in particular, made sure to fast twice a week. And they often prayed as they fasted, praying for a day where there will no longer be oppressed, a day where God will fix everything, a day when they will enjoy true fellowship with God in a place where God's presence would be palpable.

So, if you were serious about God, surely you'll be fasting and praying. So, if you are eating and drinking instead, how serious can you possibly be?

[ 8 : 03 ] Jesus now answers their accusation. He says, You would have a point, except you haven't taken into account one thing.

Verse 34, Can you make the friends of the bridegroom fast while he is with them? So, visualize a wedding reception.

Now, this isn't like our modern wedding receptions where we go off to some fancy restaurant for an evening at some hotel to ooh and ah over some wedding videos.

These receptions go on for seven days and the whole kampong is invited to join in the festivities. There will be food, there will be wine, there will be song, there will be dance, there will be feasting.

Even Jewish rabbis join in. And it would have been completely absurd if you were at one of those receptions and you thought, Oh, I've got to throw away the guemoe, I've got to put the drink away, the couple is getting married, so I better fast.

[ 9 : 12 ] No. When the groom appears, you have to feast. So Jesus asks, Want to know why my disciples are eating and drinking?

Simple. Because they have correctly identified the occasion. This is a wedding reception. I'm the bridegroom and there's a celebration because I'm here.

I've arrived. Now, that's a surprising way for Jesus to describe himself, isn't it? Jesus the saviour, yes.

Jesus the doctor, okay, maybe. But Jesus the bridegroom, huh? And to his audience, it would not only be surprising, but shocking.

Why? Well, in the Old Testament, God himself is described as the bridegroom. Take Isaiah 62 verse 5, for example, on the screen.

[ 10 : 24 ] As a young man marries a young woman, so will your builder marry you. As a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so will your God rejoice over you.

So Jesus is claiming to be no less than God himself. That's pretty shocking.

But it goes further than that. For Jesus to call himself the bridegroom is to speak of the intensity of his love for his people.

Again, back in the Old Testament, the prophets Ezekiel, Jeremiah, and Hosea all depict Israel during the time of the Exodus as a young bride, who has been worn over by God.

And they all speak of a future time, when this bride, having been exposed as a serial adulterer, is worn back by her husband, who will reconcile her to himself.

[ 11 : 33 ] Though she is faithless, the husband remains faithful and utterly committed to her. So again, imagine you are at church and the husband is up at the front saying his vows.

I take you to be my wife, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish.

Then, imagine when I reveal to you what has just taken place is not so much a wedding ceremony, but a ceremony celebrating a renewal of vows.

after the wife has betrayed her husband, but has now said sorry and returned to him. And now, the husband can't stop talking about how in love with his bride he is in his speeches at the wedding reception.

Well, that is the picture Christ is using to describe himself. A husband who will stop at nothing to win back the one whom he loves.

[ 12 : 54 ] And Jesus says, the bridegroom is now here. Oh, there will be a day when he will be taken away, verse 35. Jesus, even at this early stage, already knows how this is going to all end.

He expects to pay the price. He expects to be crucified. And on that occasion, it would be appropriate to mourn. But not now.

Right now, the groom is here and he is not the add-on to the occasion. After all, you don't go to a wedding to focus on the photographer or the usher.

He is the centerpiece. He is the whole point. His arrival means it's the dawn of a whole new era. After all, that's what weddings are about, aren't they?

They celebrate a couple's transition to a whole new stage of life. And to hammer home this point, Jesus tells a couple of mini parables in verses 36 to 38.

[ 14 : 05 ] First of all, he says, verse 36, if you put a new piece of cloth on an old garment, well, it just isn't going to work.

The two won't match anyway and all you end up with is two spoiled garments. Same goes with the wineskins, verse 37.

The wineskins in those days would be goatskin and with time and use, they become hardened and lost the flexibility to expand.

And so when you pour in new wine, the wine expands as it completes its fermentation in the old wineskin. And before you know it, bang!

Say bye-bye to both your wine and your wine bottle. So here's the point. Jesus says, now that I am here, you can't just go back to your old way of doing things.

[ 15 : 08 ] You can't just pour me into your existing religious systems. Fundamentally speaking, there is an incompatibility between the old and the new.

If you are the bride, you can't just treat your group as yet another acquaintance to add to all your other existing acquaintances. Now that you are exchanging vows with the groom, your life is going to change.

Now, Jesus isn't saying that the old ways are completely useless from the beginning. He never implies that the old wineskin had no prior usefulness.

but he is saying, you can't just take me and use me as a patch. Now, in computing, a patch is a modification to an existing software program to fix or improve that program.

But Jesus says, I am not like a software patch. I am like an entirely new software program. I am not Microsoft.

[ 16 : 22 ] Internet Explorer. I am Microsoft Edge. I am not Word Perfect. I am Google Docs. I am not a physical phone directory. I am your mobile phone and they are not compatible.

Of course, there are some people who prefer the old way or the way that they've always done religion. That's what verse 39 means.

If you are satisfied with the old forms, you won't even see the need for the newness that Jesus brings. And that's the Pharisees.

But that would be a pity, Jesus says, because you'll be missing out on the point of it all. It's like being satisfied with a candle to provide you light when the light switch is right there.

God. So here's the first challenge for us today. Jesus asks us, am I just an add-on to your religion?

[ 17 : 28 ] Are you just using me to support your current lifestyles? Most of us here this morning would be happy to call ourselves a Christian.

we're happy to take Christianity when asked to name our religion on a form. But what does our religion actually consist of?

In theory, we know it's about Jesus, but what is it like in practice? Is it simply about making sure that you show up for church most Sundays while you go and do your own thing on Mondays to Saturdays?

Is it just about making sure that your family members are baptised even if they show no interest otherwise in Jesus? Is it just making sure that you fill up your quota for service?

Is that the substance with Jesus simply as an add-on? Jesus says, if that is what your religion consists entirely of, that would be tragic because religion minus Jesus puts you in the position of the Pharisees.

[ 18 : 47 ] You could have lots of religious activity, but ironically completely fail to welcome God when he does show up. You might even be upset when he does.

But how do I know that I'm not a Pharisee? ask yourself this. Do you think of following Jesus as just another task to add to your to-do list?

Or do you understand that following Jesus means tearing up your old to-do list altogether and making a new list where he is always the priority whatever task you do?

if you get that Jesus can't just fit into your old wineskin of a life? If you get that Jesus will simply burst it?

And if you understand that your life needs to change radically to accommodate him, then you can be reassured. You get what being a Christian is really all about.

[ 19 : 54 ] Many of you will know that I'm involved with the Entrust Conference which seeks to encourage people to consider if God is calling them into full-time ministry.

Just this week I discovered one of the young ladies I've had conversations with at that conference is getting ready to give up her job and preparing to go to Japan long term from 2024 onwards as a missionary.

Well, she gets it. She knows following Jesus requires asking the question, what would Jesus have me do with my life?

And then obeying what he says. Now, that doesn't mean that we all have to quit our jobs and move to Japan today, but we do have to ask ourselves, what old wineskins do I need to throw away, to welcome Jesus and make him the center.

Because don't forget, he's the bridegroom and we are the bride. So of course he's our focus. What bride doesn't focus on the groom on their wedding day?

[ 21 : 12 ] and if Jesus is the groom, we won't regret it because our bridegroom loves us. He has come to fulfill his vows.

He's come to feast with us. That might provoke some people who stubbornly cling to religion minus Jesus, but it should fill us with joy.

even the sad days will not last because when the bridegroom is taken away, it will be momentary. He'll be back.

So Jesus is not just an add-on to our religion. But second of all, Jesus wants us to know he is the good Lord, not here to just affirm our man-made traditions.

In chapter 6, the scene shifts. It is the Sabbath day and the Sabbath, of course, is an important day.

[ 22 : 20 ] It was a gift from God, a day of rest. Now, that doesn't mean Sabbath was a day of complete inactivity. As Jesus notes elsewhere, even God continues his work of sustaining the creation on the Sabbath.

For rest, in this case, is not about lying in bed all day. Rather, when God rested after creating the world back in Genesis 1 and 2, he was simply enjoying the works of his hands.

He was delighting in his creation. And that's what Sabbath is about, resting in God's work. But the Pharisees had missed the memo.

You see, by the time of Jesus, there were up to 39 kinds of work the teachers of the law said you could not do on the Sabbath.

Amongst other things, you couldn't reap, bake, or kindle fire. Now, these are not things mentioned in the Old Testament. And if I had lived then, I would have been very stressed about what I could or couldn't do.

[ 23 : 43 ] I wouldn't have found it restful at all. After all, who knows if the Pharisees are watching you on the CCTV. And they were certainly watching Jesus.

So, verse 1, when one Sabbath, Jesus was going through the cornfields, and his disciples began to pick some ears of corn, rub them in their hands, and eat the grain, the Sabbath policemen are ready to pounce.

Why are you doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath? That is, why are you doing what is wrong according to us?

you see, actually, Deuteronomy 23 said, you could pick kernels with your hands. But the Pharisees considered this trashing, which they had forbidden, so they were provoked.

How does Jesus respond? Notice that he appeals to scripture. He doesn't try to say, oh, that's your opinion, now here's my opinion. He relies on the Bible's authority.

[ 25 : 00 ] But here's the surprising thing. He could easily have turned to Deuteronomy 23 and say, hey, see, it's allowed. It's here. But he doesn't.

Instead, he chooses to appeal to a different episode in the Old Testament, one that at first doesn't seem to have as immediate a relevance. to his situation.

In verses 3 to 4, Jesus appeals to an incident in King David's life from centuries ago. At this point, David is on the run for his life from King Saul, who is looking to kill him.

Hungry and desperate, he finds himself at the tabernacle in search of food. However, the only thing available is the bread that is reserved for the priest to eat, and yet David takes it for himself and his men anyway.

So what's going on? Why is Jesus telling this story? I think there are two reasons. Number one, Jesus wants to expose their inconsistency.

[ 26 : 17 ] look at what David did, he says. Well, was he breaking God's law? You see, if you accuse me of law-breaking, then you better be prepared to accuse David of doing that as well.

Or are you practicing double standards here because you've already decided that you don't like me or my claims? So the Pharisees are now caught in a dilemma. Are they prepared to do that?

And if they do, are they truly on the same page as God? After all, back in 1 Samuel, God never condemns David's actions.

So Jesus wants to expose their inconsistency. But more than that, reason number two, Jesus once again wants to reveal his true identity.

Why does he specifically choose a story about David? Well, think about it. Who is David?

[ 27 : 30 ] He is the one anointed by God. He is the chosen king. And in this particular instance, we can see he carries God's authority. the law is here to serve the king.

And Jesus is now drawing a parallel between himself and David. Like David, he is the one anointed by God, he is the chosen king, and he carries God's authority.

And that is why Jesus says to them, verse 5, the son of man is lord of the Sabbath. The Sabbath exists for him, the king.

What a claim! Once again, just like with the bridegroom image, Jesus is deliberately being provocative so that we can see who he really is.

And at the same time, he is revealing his goodness. You see, what is the ultimate purpose of the Sabbath? We've already said that it's a day where we're meant to rest in God, knowing that we're created for him.

[ 28 : 53 ] But, it is also a day where we remember God is looking to redeem us and to bring us to know him. That's why, for instance, Deuteronomy 5, verse 15 says this, Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and that the Lord your God brought you out of there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm.

Therefore, the Lord your God has commanded you to observe the Sabbath day. So, notice the Sabbath is linked with God's salvation.

And Jesus says, I'm the Lord of the Sabbath. I, of all people, know what the Sabbath is supposed to be for because I set it up.

And Sabbath is about giving people life, not draining life away from them. When you Pharisees turn the Sabbath into a burden, you've actually twisted the whole intention of the Sabbath.

Because Sabbath is about rest, not stress. It's about redemption, not regulations. It's about relationship with the maker, not slavery to a dictator.

[ 30 : 11 ] And that's what I've come to give. Rest, redemption, relationship. salvation. And to demonstrate that, Luke takes us to another Sabbath day in verses 6 to 11.

This time, Jesus is in the synagogue, and a man with a shriveled hand is present. A withered right hand is often associated with judgment or curse in the Old Testament, and so this man would clearly be seen as an outcast.

But it's not just this man who is in the congregation, but more sinisterly, the Pharisees. They're obsessed with Jesus at this point, aren't they?

And at this point, verse 7 tells us, they are looking to come up with any reason to accuse Jesus. But Jesus knows what they are up to, verse 8.

And so, as he calls the man with the withered hand up, he deliberately asks a provocative question, verse 9. I ask you, is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the Sabbath, to save life, or to destroy it?

[ 31 : 34 ] In light of what we now know about the Sabbath, the answer, of course, is obvious. Of course, it is right to do good. Of course, it is right to save a life, even on the Sabbath.

Sure, some Pharisees would have argued that since the man wasn't suffering from a life-threatening condition, the healing could have been postponed to another day.

That was part of the rabbinic tradition. But the silence of the Pharisees here speaks volumes. For they know, their tradition actually goes against the intent and purpose of the Sabbath.

Once again, what is Sabbath about? It's about the day when creation has been perfected. It is the day of goodness and of life. And when Jesus chooses to heal this man, he is really bringing the purpose of the Sabbath to its intended fulfillment.

He is restoring what has been spoiled. So once again, Jesus confronts us with himself.

[ 32 : 56 ] He asks us, do you know, I am the Lord. Even the Sabbath is made for me. And that means my instructions are not suggestions.

that means I do have the right to make demands of you. But do you also know that I am the Lord who gives you rest?

That is why I have come. My demands are not burdensome. Let me say that again. Jesus says my demands are not burdensome.

If you stick with religion, minus Jesus, that yes, you will find extra burdens placed on you, without a doubt. But not if you stick with the real Jesus.

For Jesus is here to do good to us. He is here to save our lives. He is here to meet our needs. And he never says or commands things that will never meet your real needs.

[ 34 : 05 ] love. But the truth is, when Jesus confronts and provokes us, some of us don't like it. Did you notice how all throughout today's passage, Jesus constantly challenges the Pharisees' authority?

All throughout today's passage, Jesus is constantly showing them that actually he knows better. And they don't like it.

They have their own rules and they don't want to give it up. So do we, don't we? You see, we all live by certain rules.

Now, for some of us, maybe it's religious rules of some sort, but it could be other types of rules as well. It could be the rule of autonomy.

No one tells me what to do ultimately except me, myself. It could be the rule of authenticity. I can express myself however I want as long as I think I'm being true to myself.

[ 35 : 19 ] And we don't like the rules we've made for our lives being challenged. We want to be in charge. But what happens when we refuse to let Jesus in?

Well, we could end up doing what the Pharisees do in verse 11. Notice what they do straight after they watch Jesus heal someone. They begin to discuss with one another what they might do to Jesus.

And we know from Matthew and Mark that what they were really discussing is how they might murder Jesus. Imagine that.

You've watched a doctor provide a cure and your next action is to plot how to murder him. It's stupid, isn't it?

And it shows the Pharisees heart. Remember how they are sold into ruse? And yet what is the sixth commandment? do not murder.

[ 36 : 29 ] The hypocrisy is so breathtaking we can't believe it. And that is exactly what Luke wants us to understand. He wants to show us that when we refuse to let Jesus in, we actually find ourselves doing all sorts of foolish and even crazy things.

Things that we might not believe that we are capable of doing, just to avoid him being in charge. And he wants us not to go down the path of the Pharisees.

Here's a question for us today. If you have ever been provoked by Jesus, by what he said, by what he taught, why do you feel that way?

Is it because you are refusing to let him be the Lord of your life? And what is it leading you to do or say?

But if you are faithfully following Jesus today, Luke also paints this portrait of Jesus for us to encourage us. Don't forget what we've seen as well today.

[ 37 : 51 ] Jesus is the lover. He's our bridegroom. He's the life giver. He's the Lord of the Sabbath. This is our Lord.

And whenever we face people who say no to Jesus, whenever we face people who reject his way, even people who claim to be religious, well, Luke wants us not to get discouraged.

This is how it has always been, he says. And stay confident. If you are on Jesus' side, you're on the right side.

The Pharisee system brings death, but Jesus' system brings life. The other system brings destruction, his system brings salvation. So you're on the right side.

You're with the bridegroom. You're with the God who brings Sabbath rest to you. So don't reject him. Don't say, the old is better, I'm content with my old wineskins.



[ 38 : 58 ] No, come to the one who wants to do good to you. Let's pray. Father, as we listen to your word again, I pray that you would help us to hear your word clearly.

Will you help us to speak, hear you speak to our hearts. We pray, Lord, that if we have rejected you in any way, knowingly or unknowingly, we want to repent, we want to come back to you.

Help us not to be like the Pharisees, but help us to be like your disciples here, celebrating that you are with us and following you in every way.

So we just pray, Lord, that you would help us to ponder that and to turn to you this morning. We pray all this in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.