

# Can the church cope with the real Jesus?

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Preacher: William Philip

- [ 0 : 0 0 ] Well, perhaps you'd turn with me back in your Bibles to Matthew chapter 12. My title this morning is this, Can the Church Cope with the Real Jesus?
- God hates religion. And he can't stand being in the presence of barren and lifeless and cold religious people.
- Does that shock you? Well, let me be even more blunt. If the Bible's anything to go by, he especially hates religion that seems to be very correct, very orthodox, very pious, the very bastion of respectability.
- According to the Gospels, that kind of religious commitment can be the greatest impediment to a real encounter with the Spirit of the living God.
- And that's because it's that kind of religious person who can't stand the presence of the real Jesus Christ. And they therefore do everything to push him away.
- [ 1 : 1 3 ] But the other side of it is that Jesus can't stand the presence of that kind of reaction to himself either. And he takes himself away.
- And ultimately, he allows the distance between his person and that person to reach the only possible distance of comfort that there can be.
- That is an infinite one. And it's the difference and the distance between heaven and hell. And that's why in the Gospels, Jesus' harshest words, his greatest rebukes, his most terrible warnings are not to the obvious sinners, the sexually immoral, the thieves, the drunkards and so on.
- Although, of course, he does warn them. But his harshest warnings are to the religious, to the orthodox, to the comfortably decent people, the congregation meeting on the Sunday morning, and to their ministers.
- So are you awake? Well, we better be, because these words of Jesus are serious. They're to be heeded. Last week in chapter 11, we saw verse 28, didn't we?
- [ 2 : 2 3 ] That Jesus gives life and eternal rest. That that's only found in the presence of Jesus, the Redeemer, of his life-giving spirit.
- And that we must be exposed and face up to him. And a choice must be made. It's a choice of eternal consequence. And that's what we're faced with here in Matthew chapter 12.
- It's a stark chapter. It's a picture of lifeless religion, face to face, with the life-giving spirit of God in the person of Jesus Christ himself, the real Jesus Christ.
- This is the religious orthodoxy of Israel in its final showdown with the presence of the living God. This is a momentous moment of destiny.
- All down the ages, God's spirit has been speaking to his people through the words of the prophets, giving them his great promises. Through the mighty works that he'd done, showing them his great power.

[ 3 : 23 ] Through the many, many warnings that he'd given about his holiness and righteousness and about their need to repent, to follow him. And now in the person of the Son, in Jesus Christ himself, the Spirit of God confronts lifeless religious Israel once and for all.

This is a climax. This is a great day of decision. The presence of Jesus, you see, confronts Israel with the unanswerable words of God's Spirit.

He confronts them with the irrefutable works of God's Spirit, done with authority by Jesus himself. He presents them with the unavoidable warning of God's Spirit in his words, as he warns them.

Because, you see, ultimately, a confrontation with the presence of the Spirit of God in Jesus Christ is the thing that determines the destiny of every generation.

Every people, every individual man and woman and boy and girl. No matter how irreligious you are or religious. No matter how unorthodox you are or how orthodox you are.

[ 4 : 37 ] You can't have the life of God's Spirit within you without the presence of the real Jesus Christ in your life.

That's the significance of verses 15 to 21 in our passage. Just look at them there. It's the very heart of this passage. Matthew quotes here from the prophet Isaiah. He loves to do that. We've seen it already several times in the Gospel.

Isaiah is speaking about the great prophetic hope of all the prophets right from the beginning. That God promised his people a rest. A rest forever in his presence.

No king ever managed to deliver that rest, but the king, the Messiah, the promised one, he would. Back in Isaiah chapter 11, we're told that the shoot of Jesse, the son of David, he would be the one upon whom the Spirit of the Lord would be in his fullness.

He would be the one who would give the most glorious rest. In chapter 11, as we looked at last week, that's exactly what Jesus said to John the Baptist. This is me.

[ 5 : 44 ] I am he. I will give rest. Come to me. And now here, Matthew quotes again from Isaiah, this time chapter 42. And again, he points to Jesus and says, he's the one on whom the Spirit of God rests in his fullness.

He's the one that John said will baptize with the Holy Spirit and give you life. Just look at what he says in verse 18. He's chosen by God.

He's beloved of God. He's full of the Spirit of God. He speaks for God. He exhibits the gentleness of God.

He won't snuff out the smoldering wick. But he wins the victory of God. He brings justice to victory. He's the hope of all the people of God in all the earth.

He's the one. And yet when faced with the real Jesus Christ, not only the world, but the professing church of Jesus' day, they refused him.

[ 6 : 47 ] They refused his life-giving presence. The professing church then and so often since would rather take refuge in organized religion that is dead and deadly than face up to the real Jesus Christ.

And the message you see of verse 15 is very clear, isn't it? When Jesus meets that kind of reaction, the reaction of verse 14, that people can't stand him and want to get rid of him and want to destroy him, he won't force himself on those people.

He'll depart. Jesus, verse 15, withdrew himself from there. Yes, he's gracious. Yes, he's merciful. Yes, he's patient. But there comes a time when, as he said to his followers in Matthew chapter 7, the time comes to no longer cast your pearls before swine.

And he'll pass on to those who will welcome him. And here, that's Matthew's great emphasis. Twice, he makes the point that Jesus will be the hope of the Gentiles, the pagan sinners, because the Jews won't have him, because the professing church doesn't want the real Jesus.

Again, it's an astonishing mystery, the reaction of the Jews of Jesus' day to his presence and his message. And yet, the truth is that so often it's the same today. The reaction of organized religion, of churches, even churches with very respectable and orthodox histories.

[ 8 : 24 ] And the reaction of very religious people often. Even those who've had the privilege of being brought up in the surroundings of Christianity, and the Christian church and Christian families. And yet, the challenge of the real Jesus Christ, the real gospel, often provokes just the same hostile reaction.

Isn't that right? So you see, there's a message here in the Bible for all of us today, for everybody. And it's this, it's a challenge. Can the professing church really stand the presence of the real Jesus Christ?

Can we? That's what this chapter is all about. We can only skim the surface of it, of course. It's a very long chapter. But let's look at the three main sections.

And let's listen and learn as we hear the voice of the Spirit of God challenging the professing church today with the words of Jesus, the works of Jesus, and with the warnings of Jesus, as the Spirit speaks today.

In verses 1 to 14, we have the Pharisees, don't we? Faced with the unanswerable words of God's Spirit in the presence of Jesus Christ. Here we have religious people faced with the real implications of the Spirit's word for man in Scripture, when Jesus himself authoritatively proclaims them and expands them.

[ 9 : 48 ] And it shatters the illusion, doesn't it, of a self-contained world of religion. A world that has its eyes only on the present, only on this world, only on the things of this world.

Jesus, you see, shows us in his handling of the Old Testament Scripture how if you miss the big story of the Bible, quite literally you lose the plot. You completely misinterpret everything and it becomes a total tragedy.

When you take the person and work of Jesus Christ out of the center of what the whole Bible is about, you turn a wonderful story of God's redemption of man for the life of the world to come into a grim story of man's regulation of man just for this present evil age.

You take a liberating message that promises life by God's grace and you turn it into a legalistic bondage, a bondage of death that can't give any help, even in this life.

That's what the Pharisees had done, you see. The Pharisees read their Bible through religion's spectacle. And so their great interest was in regulation. That's what religion wants to do.

[ 11 : 02 ] That's why they're incensed, you see, in verse 1. When they see the disciples taking corn and a few years of corn to help their hunger, oh, they're reaping. They're harvesting.

That's against the law. Well, of course, there's nothing in the Old Testament law about taking a few grains of corn to eat on the Sabbath day, but the rabbis had added all their own legislation just to cover every eventuality.

They were the real red tape men. They're the sort of guys who'd all be working in Brussels as opposed to today, making all this extra red tape and rules and regulations just to make sure the law is absolutely clear.

That's what religion does, you see. It puts man at the center of the story, not God. It becomes self-contained and safe. You see, you can regulate everything.

You can make it neat and tidy. It becomes managed by man, and so it's manageable by man. God's law becomes domesticated. Of course, actually, it just becomes neutralized.

[ 12 : 02 ] Keeps out all the radical, the unexpected, the untidy, like an unpredictable God, like an unpredictable Jesus. So, you see, we can keep all that unpredictable stuff out, and we can concentrate on mastering the performance.

It's a closed system. It's like an exam syllabus. You know, there's only these things that can be in the syllabus, and when you come and sit the exam, you know that if you've learned all those things, you'll be all right.

There's always a great furore, isn't there, if there's a question that comes up in the higher English paper that wasn't in the syllabus, and everyone's up in arms, because you see something outside the closed system has come in. And that's religion.

The commands, the laws of God, when they've been removed from the story of the Bible, what it's really about what God is doing, not just about what God tells us to do, that's what you get.

But you see, Jesus says to the Pharisees here, you've got the wrong specs on. You need to read the Bible through redemption's glasses. That's the plot. That's what it's all about.

[ 13 : 05 ] That's where it's all going. If you saw that, you'd see what David saw in verse 3 and 4. The law wasn't there to cause death, but to give life.

Not there to hinder the needy, but to help them. David was God's anointed king. It was his life that was God's concern, not starving him to death. So the priests in the temple were serving God when they served David and gave him the bread.

Just as the priests in the temple in verse 6 were serving God when they were serving on the Sabbath, and I suppose technically working and breaking the Sabbath. But you see, the temple and the Sabbath itself were both about relationship.

It was about the presence of God being with his people to bless them. It would be absolutely absurd for a law that prescribed for the Sabbath and prescribed for the temple so that God could meet with his people in a joy of relationship.

It would be absurd if the law then prevented that or banned it to be used against the purpose that it was there for. But you see, that's what religion does.

[ 14 : 15 ] It turns the grace of God into the works of man. It turns a relationship with God into a matter of ceremony and rituals. The prophets all the way through the Old Testament warned against that.

Verse 7, it's the prophecy of Hosea. I desire mercy, not sacrifice. Mercy is the word for covenant love, faithfulness. I want the love of your hearts, not all these sacrifices.

But they couldn't see it. They couldn't see it then, and sadly many people can't see it now. Even when a greater than all of these was standing right in front of them, Jesus himself, Jesus the Lord of the Sabbath, who created the Sabbath for a man, who's now redeeming the Sabbath from these people for the joy of man.

They couldn't see it because they'd lost the plot of the Bible. They'd stripped out the presence of the living God. And the reality is that it's a story of God's transformation of the whole world.

The whole Old Testament prophesied beyond and passed itself to a world to come to the kingdom of God, to a world of the eternal Sabbath rest in the presence of God.

[ 15 : 32 ] That's what the Sabbath pointed forward to. That's what the temple prophesied. But you see, they wanted to confine it all to this world, to their little world.

They lost sight of where it was all going. They wanted to tame God's law and domesticate it so that they could manage it in their own little system. You see, that's much, much more comfortable.

And that's the paradox, the great paradox. It's not just rejection of religion and irreligion that keeps God at a distance. Religion so often is used by us to keep God at a distance.

The real God, that is. The disturbing God. We foster that illusion of a self-contained world where everything's manageable, where we can just do everything that's necessary and we can keep at a distance those troubling words of God that stir us up.

Words that convict us and condemn us, that speak of God's holiness. It's so terrible that he is determined to transform the whole world and bring about a new creation, the home of righteousness.

[ 16 : 44 ] Something that we are utterly incapable of doing on our own but requires totally God's intervention from outside. That sort of talk scares us out of our control.

And so we use religion to keep God at a distance. That's a stark symbolism of the man with the withered hand in verse 10 you see.

There he is, and Matthew emphasizes, in their synagogue. But their religion is absolutely powerless to help him. He's just a symbol of the withered and burdensome reality of religion without the power of God present in it.

Just like a submarine stuck at the bottom of the Pacific Ocean. Absolutely and utterly dependent on a rescue from above.

What do you think those men were thinking about this week as their oxygen ran out, as the power supply failed? That would fairly concentrate the mind. And yet you see, what we have here is the reality that it's more comfortable to live with the deadness of your religion.

[ 17 : 53 ] It's more comfortable to live even with symbols in the midst of the very powerlessness of what you're tying yourself to than it is to face the unnerving power of Jesus Christ in the present.

The Pharisees would rather have this guy stay the way he was and have their own little self-contained system of self-righteousness than have Jesus shake up their whole world and challenge them with what that meant.

The real implications of his mission. Isn't that extraordinary? They couldn't care less about this man and yet if one of their sheep fell down a hole they'd be straight down there after it. Sabbath or no Sabbath.

That's what happens when you lose the plot. When you lose the plot of what the Bible is really about when you leave God and his kingdom and what he's doing out of the center of things you don't just become legalistic about God's law you forget whose law it is you forget it's about the loving God who gave it for us become legalistic but also you become inhuman because you forget who God has done it for.

You forget it's for the good of man. You forget that God has precious invested energy and value in men and women. It's another amazing paradox isn't it that when we when we make our ethics man-centered and not God-centered far from becoming more humane as the humanists would like us to believe actually we become inhuman it dehumanizes us.

[ 19 : 34 ] Far from preserving human worth it diminishes it. Sheep become more valuable than humans. We're beginning to see that in our society all around today aren't we?

Where animal rights are protested for by the same people who march for the right to abort the unborn child in your womb. Of course here sheep in this passage is more to do with value it's more to do with property and wealth and well-being.

And when man becomes at the center of our religious world instead of God when he is the focus of attention well that's what happens to our careers our standard of living our prosperity all of that becomes much more important than life.

So we'll get rid of an unborn baby rather than mess up our career. Or we want to be able to have euthanasia so that the problem of the lingering elderly can be dealt with.

Well maybe as a Christian church let's think about this a little bit closer to home. Maybe we find ourselves in our hearts saying well what does it really matter if spiritual cripples helpless people what does it matter if they just go on being like that as long as I can progress in my career as long as my ambitions can be met.

[ 20 : 55 ] what does it matter if there's thousands of those spiritually crippled people actually dead spiritually all around us walking down the streets of this city living in the suburbs where we live what does it matter if they just stay where they are as long as my comfortable church life doesn't get rubbed up too much as long as church gives me what I want it doesn't start interfering and asking me to do all sorts of things that take me out of my comfort zone.

What does it really matter? But you see that's what the presence of the real Jesus Christ actually does. He messes us up. He stirs us up.

He challenges us to that kind of mentality that sees not just this world but the next world. Because the reality of the gospel is all about world transformation.

It's all about the kingdom of God breaking into now. It's the kingdom of heaven. It's all about everything being shaken up. for an eternity to inherit.

You see you can't have comfortable self-centered manageable religion in the presence of the real Jesus Christ. Can't have it. And that's why when we're confronted by the spirit of God and the word of God about Jesus the reactions are fierce as verse 14 shows.

[ 22 : 21 ] I mean the irony the hypocrisy is breathtaking. They're complaining about Jesus healing on the Sabbath and yet they're planning murder on the Sabbath. But that's religion.

And the real Jesus Christ so often finds that reaction in the professing church of Jesus Christ today. But we must go on.

The second section begins in verse 22 through to verse 37. And here we have the Pharisees faced with the irrefutable works of God's spirit in the presence of Jesus Christ.

Here we have religious people faced with the real implication of the spirit's work in man as Jesus authoritatively exhibits it. And it's a devastating exposure as he of the illusion of self-sufficiency of a religion that's devoid of the spirit of God that in reality is actually in bondage to evil.

It's in bondage to the devil himself. That's what Jesus is saying here. That's the stark message of this verse. That's why the reaction is so fierce. In verse 24 they call him a devil.

[ 23 : 33 ] You see the true message of Jesus' kingdom is a message about the transformation of the whole universe by the power of God's work in the cross of Jesus.

And that is an enormously threatening message to the religious heart of man. It exposes the illusion that we like to hold that we're doing fine that we've no need to change.

It demands that yes a total life transformation is needed to fit us for that kingdom. And yet it shows us up that our religion is absolutely powerless to effect that.

We are absolutely unable to make that transformation ourselves. Only by the power of God from outside getting a grip on us can that happen.

And you see we hate, we hate our helplessness and our impotence being exposed. I was just thinking about that with the Russian submarine.

[ 24 : 37 ] Do you remember the last time? And it was the Kursk and all those people died because they could not bring themselves to ask for help from the outside world because it would have displayed the impotence and the rusting wreckage of the Russian armed forces.

Praise God this time they did ask for help. But that's the vivid picture we have in verse 22, this demonized man. You see he's blind. He can't see the truth about himself.

He's dumb. Even if he wanted to, he couldn't ask for help. He's utterly impotent, he's powerless and behind it all, causing it all, he's in the grip of demons, the power of the devil himself.

And only Jesus has the power to set him free. Now do you see how terribly offensive all of that is? the message of the coming of the kingdom of God you see implies that there is also a kingdom of the evil one, of Satan.

That's what Jesus is talking about here, that's what this is all illustrating. There's a kingdom of Satan to be overcome. And in verse 30 he makes it plain, you're either in one kingdom with Jesus or you're in the other with Satan, there's no in between.

[ 25 : 54 ] You're either with me or against me. And only Jesus can get you from one into the other because it involves a victory over the power of the evil one.

The strong man must be bound before his kingdom can be plundered. There's no other way. You see, you're utterly helpless like the blind and deaf man. It doesn't matter how religious you are.

And that's terribly offensive. How many churchgoers do you know who would appreciate being told, well, you're blind and you're dumb and you're helpless and you're in the grip of Satan. That's what Jesus is telling this congregation of churchgoers.

That's what the gospel of Jesus does say, even here. All these presbytery ministers sitting listening to him, these teachers of the law. people. And Jesus says, if you haven't come to me for the kind of transformation that you need by my Holy Spirit, you're under the grip of Beelzebub.

But of course, coming to him means a radical change of life. It means being shaken upside down. It means everything changing. And many people, even very religious people, can't stomach the thought of that.

[ 27 : 13 ] And so they have to respond like they responded in verse 24. They have to say, no, no, that's all demonic. It's a cult. That's over the top, that evangelical zealotry, that fundamentalism.

They couldn't refute what they'd seen, though. That's the trouble. So they had to question the source of power. And that's what people do, isn't it, when they see somebody whose life is absolutely unquestionably changed by the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Maybe it's a young teenager, and the parents are horrified. They can't refute the change. So they explain it away, oh, it's a fad. Or they got in with some very religious people.

Or there were some mischievous adults at that camp that they went to, who took advantage of the vulnerable young people. It's a scandal, it should be banned. See, in verse 25, Jesus exposes just how absurd their rationalization was.

Absolutely idiotic logic. If he was casting out devils of the devil, well, he was destroying his own kingdom. What absolute nonsense. But you see, the only alternative to them thinking that and speaking that was accepting the truth that he actually was who he says he was.

[ 28 : 28 ] He was God himself. And when the only alternative is accepting that Jesus is who he says he is, and submitting to his lordship, well, it's extraordinary, isn't it, what people will manage to convince themselves to believe.

The most absurd things. They believe almost anything rather than admit to the truth of the gospel of the real Jesus Christ. The kingdom has come upon them.

Jesus isn't just dealing with the consequences of sin. He's dealing with that which is behind it all, the kingdom of the evil one. It's a clash of two kingdoms, and there is no neutrality, either you are the one or the other.

And that's why verses 31 and 32 are so solemn. To be faced with such irrefutable evidence about Jesus and his kingdom means that the choice that you make against him is not a choice of ignorance.

If you reject him, it is culpable. So to resist is blasphemy against the Holy Spirit who's revealed the truth to you so unmistakably, who's offered the gospel to you so patiently, so graciously, who's pleaded with you through Jesus himself saying, come to me.

[ 29 : 49 ] To reject that is unforgivable. Sometimes there are tender and anxious Christian people who worry, oh, could I have unwittingly committed this sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit?

No, of course not. even to think like that betrays that for you that's been impossible. What Jesus is speaking about here is a settled attitude, an attitude of refusal in the face of all the evidence that God has given to submit to Jesus Christ.

An attitude that comes from a heart that's hard and against Christ and his gospel. And Jesus says that's revealed, verse 33, tree in your words and your acts. It's the fruit that tells you what the tree is like.

Look at my fruit, Jesus says. Isn't this good fruit healing this man? Well, surely that must come from a good tree. But what about you? Verse 34, you're exposed by your words, words of hatred and rejection, revealed to be snakes, serpents.

Jesus. It's very solemn, isn't it? Jesus is speaking to a crowd, including a whole lot of preachers and ministers. And he's saying the verdict of the day of judgment is being decided now.

[ 31 : 12 ] By your words. By your response to Jesus Christ. Very solemn warning, isn't it? What do our words and works expose about our heart's response to Jesus?

That brings us on to the last section, verse 38, to the end of the chapter, where the Pharisees are faced with this inevitable and unavoidable warning of God's Spirit in the presence of Jesus.

Jesus gives his final assault on a people so taken up with their religion. And it assaults their self-assurance that their religious way of life has made them right.

It exposes it as nothing but arrogance and self-righteousness. Religion, you see, can be extraordinarily brazen, extraordinarily resistant to the command of God to be humbled, to submit to him for transformation.

We hate that. We resist it. We cling to the belief that we don't really need to be changed by God. We want to change God instead to fit him with us.

[ 32 : 20 ] We want to tame him. We want to make him serve us. We're always doing that. It's around us all the time. We can't have a God who says this is wrong, so we'll change the Bible. We can't have a God who's politically incorrect and talks about a wrong way of living in a sexual relationship, so we change the Bible.

We can't have a God who says there's only one way to salvation, so we change him. We tame him. That's the spirit of verse 38. You give us a sign.

You accommodate yourselves to us and maybe then we'll take you a bit more seriously, God. You can't be that kind of God now. This is the 21st century, so you give us a sign the way we want.

But notice what Jesus says about that in verse 39. He doesn't say, well, that's good, let's start a dialogue here. He doesn't say, this is great, it's good to question, and perhaps we'll come to some consensus.

No, he says that's wickedness, spiritual adultery. It's apostasy. So you'll get no sign, except you will get a sign.

[ 33 : 31 ] You'll get a scandalous sign, the sign of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, the same sign that pagan Nineveh, that terrible city got, of the messenger of God's covenant raised up, as it were, from the dead to go and preach a message of a coming judgment, and preach a call to repent or to perish.

And pagan Nineveh did repent, that's the extraordinary thing in verse 41. They repented at the preaching of Jonah. In verse 42, the pagan queen, she responded to the hearing of the message of God, the God of Israel, through the wisdom of Solomon.

And here's Jesus, greater than the temple, the very presence of God in the flesh, greater than Jonah, greater than Solomon, speaking God's very words of judgment and warning and of wisdom and salvation.

salvation. And yet this generation refused. They wouldn't hear. And so the time is running out, and this is Jesus' final warning.

Repent or perish. There's only two responses, and these are what are laid out in the last two paragraphs there, beginning verse 43 and verse 46. It just won't do to refuse the radical gospel message of transformation by Jesus.

[ 34 : 51 ] It just won't do to refuse a real submission to his authority. You can't just maintain a kind of religious neutrality. Whoever's not with me is against me.

God's kingdom, you see, he's been telling us, has been sweeping in since John. But a choice has got to be made. Unless Jesus, the real Jesus, by his presence comes and occupies the house fully, then the last state is going to be worse than the previous one.

You can't just listen to Jesus and say, well, that's all very interesting. I'll remain an open mind and we'll see what happens. There's no, says Jesus. When Jesus has made the way open, you must make that choice or else you'll be recaptured by a world of evil that is far, far worse than ever anything was before.

And so the message is very simple. It's just this. Don't mess about with the message of Jesus and the kingdom. There can be nothing, friends, in all eternity. Let me tell you this.

than to have stared the grace of God in the gospel of Jesus Christ in the face and then to have rejected it. To have heard it offered to you, to have seen the evidence as others have responded, to have seen the transforming power of Jesus displayed and still ultimately to have rejected it.

[ 36 : 24 ] Jesus says, the last state of that person will be worse than the first. Christ. And maybe there's somebody here this morning that that especially is a word for, I don't know you, but if God is saying that to you, listen.

The final verses in verses 46 to 50 tell us the only way that we can and must respond. To respond truly to Jesus is possible.

Only one way is to be in his presence and to accept him. Verse 49 describes it as being a disciple, a follower. And also as one who is one of his family.

Notice, though it's not the language of natural family, but what is it? Verse 50. It's those who submit to his lordship. It's those who do the will of his father in heaven.

They're the ones Jesus wants to be with. They're the only ones Jesus can be present with. Remember, back in chapter 7, verse 21, the end of the Sermon on the Mount, many will say on that day, Lord, Lord, and they will not enter the kingdom of heaven.

[ 37 : 43 ] He'll say to them, depart from me, you workers of lawlessness. Very religious people who had all the language of the Christian church. And Jesus says, I have no idea who you are.

I began with a question, can the church stand the presence of the real Jesus? I might end by phrasing it another way and saying, can the real Jesus stand the presence of the professing church?

That's a challenge to us, and it's a challenge to every church. We can be as orthodox as we like, but either either we have truly bound ourselves to the person of Jesus Christ, manifest in a love for his presence, a love for his words, a love for his ways, and in a love for his people, his family, or he will not be able to stand us being in his presence.

Jesus. And he will withdraw himself, and ultimately he will do so forever. That's the challenge of Jesus' warning, the warning of the Holy Spirit in the words of Jesus.

It's a tough word, isn't it, for a Sunday morning congregation? Christian, but that's the people Jesus was speaking to, the professing church. So can the church stand the presence of Jesus Christ?

[ 39 : 14 ] Let's pray that we can, or we will have to realize that he can't stand the presence of any except those who are his family, who do the will of his Father in heaven, who are his brother and sisters and mother.

let's pray. Lord, forgive us, we pray, for the way we seek to silence you, to ignore you, to tame you, to protect our comfortable existence, to avoid the challenge of your real call.

May the light of truth pierce the dark fog of our hearts, that our eyes may see the reality of your power and glory. In the knees of our hearts, bend truly to your lordship, today and forever.

In your mercy, hear us. For Jesus' sake, amen.