

**Series: THE ANSWER NO ONE EXPECTED - April 10, 2011**

## **WHY WOULD ANYONE HATE JESUS?**

**Luke 4:14-29**

1. How many of you, at one point in your life, watched Mr. Rogers? **[pic]** He used to come on TV **every day**—and his theme song brings back a **lot** of memories. One of my sons recently commented, “Mr. Rogers was **awesome!**” Remember his opening song? **It’s a beautiful day in the neighbourhood. Won’t you be my...please won’t you be my neighbour?**

-Lori and I visited Mister Rogers's neighbourhood once—an area called **Fox Chapel** near Pittsburgh—and it was a really **nice** neighbourhood! There’s even a statue **[pic]** of him in Pittsburgh! **Yes! I’ll be your neighbour!** He was an amazing guy—just spread love and warmth over everyone’s childhood! I can’t imagine **anyone** having a problem with Mr. Rogers!

-A lot of people in our world would tend to think of Jesus as kind of the Mr. Rogers of 30 AD. Just...really kind and nice, going around healing people, holding children, kissing babies, teaching about peace and love—being a Good Samaritan, the Good Shepherd carrying the lamb in his arms, the old Dad welcoming his prodigal son home.

-People would say, “Jesus was a **really** nice, sweet, kind man. He was a dreamer—not really in touch with the high pressure world we live in, mind you—but **nice guy!** We really oughta be more like him—but, of course, that’s impossible. Not in the **real** world!”

-And, of course, that raises the question—**who could hate someone like that?** I mean, can you imagine someone hiring an assassin and saying, “You know this Mr. Rogers guy who does the kid TV thing—he’s just too dangerous. Maybe it’s King Friday X111—or the sweater and sneakers. I don’t know—but He’s goin’ down!” **Nobody** said that about Mr. Rogers!

-But, Jesus—as kind and good as He was—**was** a dangerous man. And that’s why they killed him. And this matters because, see, when people like you and me start to follow Him really closely--we get dangerous too. And that’s the question for me—and maybe for you. Will we get **dangerously** close to Jesus—close enough to his mission, the way He gave, the way He loved—to be dangerous?

2. There’s a story in Luke’s account of Jesus’ life that takes place shortly after Jesus started his ministry. It’s the day Jesus comes back to the synagogue in Nazareth he’d attended every Sabbath for almost 30 years. Let me read a part of the story:

**He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written: “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the**

prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour."

Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him. He began by saying to them, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing." All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his lips. "Isn't this Joseph's son?" they asked. (Luke 4:14-22 NIV)

-So far, so good. The title, to this point, could be, "Home town boy makes it big!" Listen to how the story ends:

**All the people in the synagogue were furious when they heard this. They got up, drove him out of the town, and took him to the brow of the hill on which the town was built, in order to throw him off the cliff. But he walked right through the crowd and went on his way. (Luke 4:28-30 NIV)**

-Now, doesn't that make you scratch your head? As you read the narratives of Jesus' life—what happened here isn't really abnormal. One time, he cast the demons out of a guy who'd been terrorizing an entire community for **years**. The demons went into a herd of pigs—which then ran down a hill into a lake and drowned. First case of devilled ham on record! And it started a protest; **Solve our problems...save our pigs!** Well, not really—but the people **did** come to Jesus and say, "Please—just **leave!**"

-On another occasion, Jesus healed hundreds of people in this massive crowd—and then miraculously fed all 4000 of them by multiplying bread and fish. People were so impressed—they wanted to make him king! By the end of the day, Jesus had narrowed the crowd from thousands—to **twelve!** Even the larger group of friends and disciples ditched him!

-One of the problems people had then—and **still** have—is figuring Jesus out; **labelling** Him. Jesus was like Teflon—labels didn't stick!

- a. The one topic Jesus talked about a lot that caught **everyone's** interested in that culture—was the **Kingdom of God**. It caught the interest of the Jewish people—because **that would be their moment!** Every person in Israel knew **immediately** what He was talking about. The **Kingdom** was the time when Israel's God was going to come with power and set them free. Then a descendant of David would sit on the throne, their enemies would be defeated, and all the nations would envy them. **They would have everything they'd ever dreamed of having! They would be the head, not the tail; they would be the victors, not the victims!**

-As you can imagine, talk like that put the Romans on high alert, too. A number of Messiah wannabes had come along, gotten the people stirred up into revolutionary mode—which then had to be squashed. More blood. More crosses. More resentment.

-See, the Romans had their **own** version of the Messiah. They claimed that **their** leader, Caesar, was Divine. And there were Roman slogans that went with that. For example, **There is no name under heaven by which men can be saved than...Caesar!** Their **favourite** saying, though, was: **Caesar is LORD!**

-The Roman coin [pic] being used by everyone in the world of that day said it all. Under an engraving of Caesar's profile where the words, *Divi filius*. Does anyone know what that's saying? **Son of God!** Now, do any of those descriptions sound familiar? They were **all** used to describe Jesus—and the Romans were **very** touchy about competition!

- b. If that weren't enough, there was the neighbourhood bully; Herod—**very** sensitive about anyone who was called the **King of the Jews!** And he was also very sensitive about the temple—and criticism of the high priests. His Dad, Herod the Great, had begun the construction—and he himself was in charge of appointing the High Priest. The Rabbis taught that when this Kingdom came, the Jewish Messiah would clean out—and reclaim the temple!
- c. So, you can imagine how inflammatory this whole idea of the Kingdom was. The people were asking, "God, we can't stand the pain and humiliation of the Romans—**when** is your Kingdom going to come—and **how?**" And the rulers were on high alert, too. "Let's make more crosses—because another Messiah talking about the Kingdom is sure to come along!"

-And anyone in Jesus' position as a Rabbi **had** to address this question about the Kingdom.

3. Well, in **that** day, like ours, there were several political parties to choose from. Most of you know we're approaching an election here in Canada, right? And, of course, there are three major choices when it comes to who will be Prime Minister for the next leg of the journey: Conservative, Liberal and NDP. So, I thought it would be interesting if we all declared ourselves—and said who we're going to vote for! Actually, not. We don't usually broadcast that info, do we? These three choices represent **very** different ideologies about how a government or kingdom should be run.

-In Jesus' day, there were three very different solutions to the problems Israel faced—especially when it came to the Roman occupation. And everyone thought that the Messiah would **surely** agree with them!

- a. The people in the first group were called **Zealots**. The Zealots believed that the Kingdom would come to Israel when there were enough people who were angry enough to revolt against the Romans. The strategy? Kill off the Romans and all of those who are **in bed** with them. What we know about the Zealots is that they would use whatever means possible to get rid of the Romans—including violence. Some of them were, in fact, assassins—who, if they had the chance, would kill Roman soldiers or tax collectors for the Romans.

-They saw themselves as **freedom fighters**. If you can imagine how a Canadian soldier in Afghanistan would feel about **al Qaeda**—that's how the Romans saw Zealots. Hidden, violent, unpredictable, and dangerous. Now, did Jesus know any Zealots? Luke 6, in recording the names of Jesus' inner 12 lists, **Simon who was called the Zealot**.

-Now, how do you think the Romans felt about Jesus—when they knew that one of his closest followers was a Zealot as one of his closest followers? And why would Jesus choose someone like that? I mean, this guy was a **radical political extremist**—totally dedicated to overthrowing the existing government by any means possible?

- b. Well, there was another group in Israel—with a very different ideology--called the **Essenes**. You don't find this word in the New Testament—but we **do** know a lot about them since the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls. They were a community of people—the **Qumran** Community—that lived in the wilderness. See, they figured that because of the Romans—and because the whole temple system had compromised with Rome—the whole **thing** was totally corrupt. And the only way to **not** be corrupted—was to withdraw. In our world, they might identify with the Amish.

-They believed that the Kingdom of God would come when people, like them of course, had withdrawn and become pure. They called themselves the **Sons of Light**—and when they were pure enough, God would respond to their purity—and bring his Kingdom back to earth and nuke everyone else that they referred to as the **Sons of Darkness**.

- Now, the Pharisees—whom we **do** read about in the New Testament—were fairly diverse as a group—but they would probably identify with this group more closely than any other.

- c. And there was yet **another** group—with completely different political strategy on how to cope with the situation Israel faced. They are called **Sadducees**. Acts 23 describes their belief system; they didn't believe in the Resurrection, spirits, angels or the afterlife. Two slogans in our culture they might identify with are, '**You only go around once, so grab all the gusto you can**' and '**if you can't beat 'em, join 'em!**'

-Their response to this crisis of the Kingdom God had created was to collaborate with the Romans. In doing that, they supported and got along with the tax collectors, paid allegiance to Caesar, and helped Herod, manipulate the whole temple system. And that's why all the positions of power in Jerusalem—the High Priests and Chief Priests—were given to them.

-And the temple system in Jerusalem was **big** money! Every Israelite had to pay a temple tax—enough to support 18,000 priests and Levites—and 20,000 construction workers on the temple. These would've been the money and power people!

- d. But Jesus' teaching about the kingdom didn't fit neatly with **any** of these groups—the Attackers, the Isolationists, or the Collaborators. And **that** got him into trouble. **That** got Him hated—and eventually executed. The New Testament records make it clear that Jesus pretty much offended **everybody!**

-Let me give you some examples. In Matthew 8 we're told that a Centurion—a military leader who commanded 100 Roman soldiers—came to Jesus—a Jew—and asked for help for a servant who was very sick. And Jesus offers to **go** with him! But this guy says, "No—I get it. I'm a man under authority—I understand how it works. Just **say the word** and he'll be healed.

-Jesus makes this statement:

**"Truly I tell you, I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith." (Matthew 8:10 NIV)**

And as if it's not enough to publicly praise a Roman, Jesus goes on to say that it will be the **outsiders—like this guy**—who make it into the kingdom, not the religious professionals!

-Now, who would be offended by watching this go down? The Zealots **hate** these guys! The only good Roman soldier is a dead one—but Jesus **affirms** his faith and heals his servant! But Jesus doesn't just stop there—in his inaugural address for his ministry, he tells his followers that if someone slaps your face, turn your cheek—and let them slap you again! That if a Roman soldier made you carry his equipment one mile—carry it two! He also said, "Blessed the **peacemakers!**" Jesus was **clearly** saying to the Zealots—"Yeah, this is tough, and our world **is** a mess—but your solution is **wrong!**"

- e. But Jesus didn't limit his offense to the Zealots. A leper comes to Jesus and asks for healing. Jesus **touches** him—something a person trying to stay pure would **never** do—and heals him. And Jesus talks to prostitutes. Jesus is at a dinner—hosted by a Pharisee—and a prostitute crashes the party, comes to Jesus, wets his feet with her tears—and then loosens her hair and wipes his feet with it. The whole scene was **absolutely scandalous!** And this wasn't unusual; Jesus is **always** eating a meal with tax collectors and other contaminated people. Who would that offend? The Separatists—the Essenes—the Pharisees! They thought, "How could **anyone** that impure know anything about the Kingdom?"
- f. But **wait**—there's **more!** Toward the end of Jesus' life, a bunch of leaders—some of whom supported Herod—came to trap Jesus in his words. Think about this; did anyone ever try to trap Mr. Rogers. "Okay, Rogers—what do you **really** mean by **neighbour?** And why do **you** want to be **my** neighbour?"

-Mr. Rogers wasn't dangerous—but **Jesus** was! So, they cook up this scheme around taxes.

**“Teacher,” they said, “we know that you are a man of integrity and that you teach the way of God in accordance with the truth. You aren’t swayed by others, because you pay no attention to who they are. Tell us then, what is your opinion? Is it right to pay the imperial tax to Caesar or not?” (Matthew 22:16-17 NIV)**

-Jesus *immediately* knew what was going on. It was a trick question—somewhat along the lines of, “Have you stopped beating your wife, yet?” You’re stuck if you answer **yes** or **no**. Taxes were a big deal in that culture. Now, I know for us it’s a non-issue. I mean, we *all* look forward to April 29, right? But back then, taxes were the ultimate offense. The Romans stole their land—and then **taxed** them on it. It would be a little like someone stealing your car—then leasing it to you!

-The Zealots said, **“No way we’re paying taxes!”** When Jesus was a boy, a Zealot named Judas had led a tax revolt against Rome—and he and all 2000 of his followers were nailed to crosses within eyesight of Nazareth and left to rot. Not paying taxes could actually ruin your day! If Jesus says, “Yes—pay your taxes!” a lot of people will hate him. If he says, “No!”—well, Rome has a **lot** of crosses—ready to go!

-So, Jesus asks for a coin. Interesting—since Rabbis like him didn’t carry them. Remember? It had a picture of Caesar on it—with the inscription, **Son of God?** Get this—the guy who asked the question **handed him the coin**. The silent but obvious question from Jesus was, “You mean **you** carry one of these things around? You’re already in bed with Rome—and you come to **me?**”

-But what Jesus actually says is, “Give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar—and give to God what belongs to God”—because Caesar is **not** God! Anyone who lets money and power determine their allegiance is in **serious** trouble with the Kingdom of God.” Can anyone guess who Jesus is in trouble with **this** time? The Sadducees.

- g. And that’s what Jesus did all through his ministry. He didn’t side with **any** party. His message was, “Hatred, anger, violence? That’s not the way. Withdrawing from the world—and those stuck in the system? That’s not the way. Compromise—go with the flow and make money off of it? That’s not the way, either. **I am the way, the truth, the life. Follow me!**

-And Jesus called the **strangest** group of people to follow Him. He says to Simon, “You’re a Zealot. You hate the Romans and tax collectors—you be a part of my community!” He says to Matthew, the tax collector, “You’ve traded your country, your family and your God to make money. Follow me! You can room with Simon!”

-Jesus calls Nicodemus, a Pharisee, to follow Him. “I know you’re **really** into purity—and I’ll take you.” Then he meets a Samaritan woman at a well—who was the wrong gender, wrong race, wrong religion, wrong sexual history—and says, “I’ll take you! That will mess with Nicodemus’ head!”

-All through his life and ministry, Jesus **refuses** to be pinned down. Categorized. He didn't adopt any campaign slogans, wear any pins, wave any banners. But He creates a community that is **dangerously loving!** His pep talk, inaugural speech, goes a little like this: **We've got not money, no connections, and no status. We've got no buildings or soldiers or weapons. We'll just tell all these people—the money and power people, the attackers, the withdrawers—that they're all wrong. And when they hate us—and they will, we won't give in—but we will love them. And when they kill us and throw us in prison—we will love them in return!**

-Sounds dangerous, doesn't it? It was! It **is!** They couldn't be stopped—because they didn't have a price tag! They **gladly** laid their lives on the line, usually saying, as they were beheaded, crucified, stoned, or thrown to wild animals, "Don't forget—**Jesus is Lord!**"

4. Jesus refusal to buy into the agendas and political persuasions of his day made all three groups angry. But I'll tell you what finally took it over the top and got him killed; it was the claims He made for himself. See, it's one thing to be an unconventional teacher who doesn't fit **anybody's** mold. It's quite another to claim to be God. They put people who claim to be God in mental institutions. A psychiatrist in one mental hospital, "Yeah, we've got 4 Messiahs, one God and two Napoleons in our place."

-What made Jesus' claim different was that He was a perfect example of emotional and mental stability. And there were a **ton** clues around his life that matched his claims. He publicly performed astounding miracles. Hundreds—maybe thousands of them. My guess is that in his day, it would be hard to find a single person who hadn't either **seen** or in **some** way been touched by Jesus' power. Jesus' miracles climaxed with Him raising a well-known man who had been dead **four days**.

- a. Something else. All through his ministry, Jesus had been making open claims for his own authority; He would firmly—but calmly—say, "This is what you've heard/what the law says, but **I** say..." He totally bypassed the temple and the sacrificial system—and forgave people's sins. Outright. He did things that only God can do; like turn water to wine, like multiply a meal 5000 times, like speak **directly** to the wind and waves—and have **everything** instantly go calm. He knew what people were thinking. He knew precisely what was going to happen to him when he got to Jerusalem.

-He claimed to be One with the Father. He claimed that He was the Son of Man—a title for God used in the book of Daniel. He claimed to be the One and Only Son of the Father—and accepted people's worship. He claimed the same Name for Himself that the Lord had given to Moses—...**before Abraham was—I AM!** He told people that unless they believed that He was the **I Am**—they would die in their sin.

-And people understood **exactly** what He was saying. On several occasions, they tried to stone him for blasphemy. And, in the final analysis, that's what the

High Priest charged him with before sending him to Pilate to be executed on a cross.

- b. But that's not all. Jesus replaced religion with himself. He claimed that **His Body** was the temple. He claimed that **He** was the way to the Father—not the religious system. He told people to pray to the Father in **His Name**. He claimed that **He** would send the Holy Spirit. And He said that **He** was the Lord of the Sabbath—the most sacred day of rest in the Jewish religion. He came and threw the money changers out of the temple courts—claiming that His Father's House was to be a house of prayer for **all** nations—not a den of thieves! He told his disciples that if they'd seen Him, they'd seen the Father.

-Can you understand **why** everyone in the entire religious system hated him—and felt that the **only** way to deal with him was to have Him executed? Jesus was **not** Mr. Rogers! Jesus was **dangerous!** Jesus flipped the value system of that world upside down and called them to follow **Him!** They said, "You've **got** to be kidding!"

5. I need to confess to you this morning that, as I've thought about this—I think I've spent **more** time in my life trying to make Jesus like me—than trying to be like Jesus. There's usually enough ammunition in the writings about Jesus to point out a phrase or two and say, "See, Jesus and I agree—as we do on so **very** many things!" Over the years, I've heard pretty much everything. If you're a Conservative, well, lo and behold, you can find evidence that seems to say Jesus was too! If you're liberal in your politics—why, it's **amazing! Jesus was a liberal too!** Jesus has been almost everything—a socialist, a Republican, a freedom fighter, a revolutionary, a fundamentalist—blue collar, white collar, CEO, hard hat, hippie, yuppie...

-The problem is—Jesus never left use the option of labelling Him. Jesus stands **above** culture. Jesus loves Conservatives, Liberals, Republicans, Democrats, NDPs, socialists, communists, gay rights activists, poor, rich, members of Al Qaeda, red necks, blue bloods. But if you **wait** for Jesus to agree with you on your politics or lifestyle or sexual preferences or pet peeve—you'll wait a long time. Because Jesus is God in Flesh—Lord of all—He stands in above everything. And I can **guarantee** you that there is something about everyone's politics or lifestyle or attitude that He would say, "Come on. Don't put my name on that and say I approve—cause I **don't!**"

-If you try to stuff Jesus into some category—then you've totally missed the point of Who He is. If you think, "Oh, Jesus is just loving, peaceful, nice, inoffensive—He agrees with **everybody!**" you've **also** missed the point!

- Tiberius Caesar died in 37 AD. Imagine his surprise when he found out that he was **not** Lord; that even though he had been called the Son of God—he wasn't. And he was accountable to the **true** Lord and Son of God—who died on one of his crosses—then rose again. Quite a shock, I would imagine.

- a. We humans actually get quite arrogant when it comes to what we believe. As broad minded as we pretend to be, we can actually be quite narrow-minded in our snobbery and contempt for people who don't think like we do.

-Have you noticed that people with a conservative bent tend blame the liberals for the problems in the world—and people with a liberal bent tend to blame the conservatives. Truth is that Jesus doesn't fit **our** biases either! Jesus is not dying to be like me—or like you. Truth is, He died so you and I could be like **Him**. And the question He continues to ask, whoever He speaks to, is—**Will you follow me?**

- b. Here's the real challenge arrogant people like us face. Can we...Will we...follow, listen to, obey, love, give our lives for someone who will likely offend me—because He doesn't agree with me, my opinion, my biases, or my definition of success. See, there are a **lot** of people in our world who say things like, "Well, I could **never** love a God like that!" I want to say, "**Really?** You mean, the Son of God who created **everything—including you**—has to fit some arbitrary definition of Him that you've cooked up based on your **opinion**—and your opinion is so doggone important to you that you'd lay eternity on the line for it? **Really!**" Then God is likely to offend you.

\*See, He calls you and me to moral standard that is **way** different than the gang you hang with, trade stock with—or talk to the dating hotline

\*He's more interested in your character—than our approval

\*And, strange thing, He sometimes calls us to **delayed gratification** in an **I want it now!** Culture

\*He calls us to love, respect, and be patient with people we might label as morons, or misfits, or racists, or bean-eaters or trailer trash.

\*He will generally call us to trade in our little **fiefdoms** for His Kingdom. He is likely to ask us to give more of our money and time and personal space than we'd like. Through the years, Jesus has asked those who choose to follow Him to lay **everything** on the line. He said, "You'll find your lives if you lay them down—but you'll have to trust Me." Jesus was **dangerous!**

- c. See, this really gets to an even more important issue. Who decides what's right and true in your life? Is it you? Has Jesus become the mixture, the stew of all books you've read and speakers you've kinda liked over the years? Over the years, have you edited Jesus' life and words and power down from the razor sharp sword that cuts right through all the sophistication and pretence and excuses—and turned Him into a butter knife? Jesus is Lord of all!
- d. Does Jesus have the right to Jesus offend you? Can He be more conservative—or more liberal than you think He should be—and his ways **still** higher than your ways—and his thoughts **still** be eons beyond yours? Even if you can't explain them or defend them? Can Jesus ask you to downsize your life—or your ego—without telling you why? Can He tell you to stop trying to control Him and others? Can He comfort you? Help you? Humble you? Shock you? If He can't, then you probably shouldn't call Him Lord.

**Q & A**

6. We are tempted to do some of the same things Jesus' contemporaries did. ***Make*** things happen ourselves. ***Circle the wagons and isolate ourselves and wait for Jesus to rescue us***—or just ***blend in; compromise***. Jesus didn't go for ***any*** of them—and we can't either, or we'll lose our ability to be salt and light in a world that ***desperately*** needs us to be! Jesus is Lord—and He is dangerous to anyone that tries to tame Him down and make Him fit!