

# “Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord’, and not do what I tell you?”

*A sermon by John Botha*

## Introduction

For those who are listening to this sermon as opposed to watching it, you can download a PDF of my notes including the images and slides from <https://willows.org.za/sermons>. Today’s sermon is the one of 12 September, 2021.

I want to start in prayer. Not because it is expected, but because I *want* to, and I want to because I *need* to, which is something I shall return to at the end.

*Dear Father, thank You for being with me during the preparation of this sermon. I ask You, Lord God, to be with us all now during its delivery. Please send Your Spirit to work in our hearts and minds as we hear Your Word, and be with me as I speak, so I may say all of and only what You want me to. We thank You for Jesus, through Whom all of this is possible. Amen.*

One of the things which made my high school pretty unique was that it had kids from almost every sector of society. My group of friends sounded like the beginning of a joke: amongst others we had a Jew, a Christian, and an Irishman who was an atheist. Not only that, but their economic backgrounds ranged from struggling to make ends meet, all the way to the super-rich. Such a melting pot in a high school can easily lead to factionalism: the Portuguese against the Greeks, the Rooinekke against the Rocks (that’s English against Afrikaans), the boarders against the day boys, ... the list goes on, but it shows that people have a longing for *belonging*. People want to feel part of some kind of group.

Most of the kids in my high school lugged their books around in back packs made of nothing more than unbleached denim and some stitching. They had no pockets or internal dividers: they were just a big bag with a flap and shoulder straps. There was no padding nor any other nod in the direction of concepts like comfort or ergonomics. The considerations were simple:

- Can you use it to carry enough stuff? Check.
- Does it keep that stuff dry? Check.

Voilà! School bag!

By now some of us may be thinking along the lines of discomfort or bad posture, but that’s not where I am going with this. Two specific words I used, link in with this sermon: *unbleached denim*. That stuff is amazing to use for a teenage boy’s back pack. Amazing from his parents’ perspective, because it takes a very long time to break, and from *his* perspective because you can draw on it. Why draw on it? Most parents forbid their children to get tattoos, so what remains?: drawing on your bag!

We had slogans and artwork on our bags identifying what we supported — whether a sports team or something else. When you put your bag down you usually did so with the straps facing up, which exposed

the largest single part of the bag: that part which is against your back when you carry it. This was the part you used for your most impactful art or slogan. Mine was the “One Way` sign.



1

No, not that one. It has nothing to do with traffic: instead it was the sign popularised in the 70s and 80s by the Jesus Movement. Take the iconic raised fist, but with the index finger pointing to heaven and put a cross in the area between the knuckles and the finger; like this:



2

I saw it as part of my witness. I was hardly overcome by people asking what it meant though, so was that a success or not? We'll return to this question at the end.

I also mentioned slogans on the bags. These were used to tell others a bit about your view on things, or were simply things you found funny, which actually does the same because what you put on your bag was in some way representative of *you*. One of the humorous slogans I had was this: “Maybe your sole purpose in life is to be a warning to others.” It’s funny until you are the one it describes.

These are the three main points I have identified thus far:

1. Our need to belong, to be part of something bigger than just ourselves.
2. The One Way sign: our witness and whether or not it is effective.
3. Our purpose.

3

# Main section

In my devotion of this past Thursday I said that it would link to today's sermon, so let's recap. I started by asking some questions which quickly became uncomfortable. Here they are:

- Do you like everyone?
- Does everyone like you?
  - Should they?
  - Why / why not?
- Can you be trusted?

4

I started at a safe-ish level, since I trust we'd all agree that there are some people we actually don't like. In the devotion I used political figures from widely different parts of the political spectrum. As we progress though, the questions become more uncomfortable, until we get to the clincher: "Can you be trusted?" Of course we would like to believe so, but honest reflection in the context of the other questions may very well lead us to agree with what we read in Isaiah 64:6

We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment.

5

The NIV translates it as "a filthy rag", but when we look at the Hebrew we see that it refers to a menstrual cloth. Quite vivid imagery, particularly when you consider that this is being likened to our *righteousness*!

David Pawson, a late Bible teacher who has really helped me in my walk, used to say that when we read prose in The Bible (in other words, those parts which are not poetry), then we can see that as reading about God's *thoughts*, but when we read poetry, then we are reading about God's *feelings*. For those who might be concerned, understand that God most definitely does have feelings, and they are not limited to anger and love. Some people like to say that God revealed His anger in the Old Testament and His love in the New. That is an over-simplification: God's emotions are revealed to us throughout His Word. Feel free to chat with me if you'd like to know more about this.

With that established, notice that the reference on the slide says Isaiah 64:6(a). That implies there is a (b), and indeed there is. Sadly (a) is where most people stop when quoting from here. Let's look at (b) and see how powerful the poetic imagery is:

We all fade like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.

6

That imagery is just *so* rich in meaning! Imagine putting *that* into prose: it would sound wooden and cold and is why I believe God uses a lot of poetry in His Word. Here is the amazing thing: if one is familiar with the imagery used, then it is easier to understand translated Hebrew poetry than poetry translated from other languages. We don't have time to go into that now, but ask me if you would like to know more.

We then moved on to focus in on two aspects mentioned in Ephesians 4.

- We must live differently to non-believers in a different life given to us by God
- Our anger should not lead us to sin, be short-lived, and must not give the devil a foothold

Notice that both are *oughts* — what we ought to do or ought not to do — they aren't detailed *hows*, though the bit about anger does give us some insight into the how.

Spend some time meditating — thinking and praying — on Ephesians 4:15&16. Start there. Let The Spirit guide you as you think about living your life in a way which reflects the meaning of those two verses.

Make a note of it now: Ephesians 4:15&16. Start with just those two verses.

Those two points were used as a springboard to give you links to resources to help you in studying The Bible, and I referred you to our web page to download a PDF containing the notes and the resource links. In the PDF I prefaced the resource links with these words:

Remember the questions at the beginning? Just as you don't like everyone and not everyone likes you, so there are some points in these resources where you may think differently. Just don't throw the baby out with the bath water — consider what is said, read widely in The Word, and pray to God that He would keep you from heresy as you continue in your study of His Word.

Though I find the following resources useful in many ways, each has its points where at the very least I go, “Mmm. Not so sure about that. I need to look into that more deeply.”

As you refer to other people's writings (or YouTube videos, podcasts, etc.), at some stage you will come across weird interpretations. Some are obviously from cloud cuckoo land, but others could seem like they make sense before careful scrutiny reveals a crack somewhere. Some will be so couched in academic terms that you might be afraid to voice your opposition. This is sadly the case with idea like the so-called Documentary Hypothesis, or almost anything put out by adherents of what used to be called 'German Higher Criticism'. These days it goes by other names, such as the historical-critical method or historical criticism, and is in contrast to what used to be called 'Lower Criticism', these days textual criticism.

I'm going to stop there, because this is not a lecture, but I wanted to point out that there are many very learned people in Theology departments at universities and at seminaries who are not only not Christians, but who actively oppose those who are and try to “enlighten” their students by coaxing them away from what they see as the narrow-minded approach that Christ is the only Way, Truth, and Life.

The thinking goes that Christianity is but one of many equally valid spiritual paradigms — that is if they even believe in the spiritual, and are not so-called naturalists. Can you defend your faith? Can your children? Do you (and your children) have access to good material on this? Feel free to ask, because you (and they) need it.

Traditionally the Methodist Church has made use of Lay Preachers — people who travel around a circuit preaching pretty much the same sermon everywhere. When they get back to the beginning, they start with their next sermon. It could be adapted to circumstance, but the main thrust is the same. I dare say that Jesus would have repeated many of His teachings as He travelled around. To my mind this is the simplest and most likely explanation for why similar passages in the Gospels also have differences. When your starting point is that The Bible is God's Word, then you don't need to apply the mental gymnastics required when you approach it as literature.

When people don't believe in the spiritual, they will always try to come up with non-spiritual reasons for everything. Arthur C. Clarke is best known as a science fiction writer, but he was also a scientist and foresaw many technological advances before they had been invented. One of his famous quotes is “Every

sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic.” To naturalists there is always a non-spiritual explanation, because they start off with the base assumption that God does not exist.

We need to be aware of this and heed Christ’s words in Matthew 10:16,

“Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves, so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves.”  
8

Be aware you will definitely run into people who not only do not share our faith, but that some of them will have an agenda to unseat your faith. Often such people are “evangelical” about it as they equate belief in God with a lack of education: you haven’t understood the technology, so to you it is magic. They, however, do understand the technology, and they seek to release you from the shackles of your mind.

I have spent most of this sermon laying the foundation for the question God asks which we are looking at today. That was on purpose, and it fits the context of the verse (which you must read and study yourself). It is a very penetrating question, and we find it in

Luke 6:46.

“Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord’, and not do what I tell you?”  
9

Let that sink in a bit.

Every single one of us stands accused by this verse and if we remember Isaiah 64:4 (both parts), we realise that there is nothing we can do about it. So much we all know, but I want to encourage you: it is *not* futile! The book of Ecclesiastes ends with this paragraph:

The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of mankind. For God will bring every deed into judgement, with every secret thing, whether good or evil.  
10

What is our duty? Simply this: fear God and Keep His commandments.

He has given us his Word, and we need to study it to know what we are to do. Though Christ has risen with our sins forgiven, we have a lot to do! My first sermon at Willows was on 21 July, 2019, and was titled “So, Why are You Still Here?” You are still on earth because you have a job to do. This is not what you might dream up for yourself, but it is the job that *God* has in mind for you. In this context people like to quote Esther 4:14,

And who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?  
11

Wouldn’t it be nice to receive a card saying that? It’s a beautiful sentiment, but notice that it is not the whole verse. It is the second half, because the first half doesn’t sound nearly as nice on a schmaltzy card.

For if you keep silent at this time, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another place  
12

In other words, God’s purposes *will* be achieved with or without you, but there could be other consequences, too:

For if you keep silent at this time, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father's house will perish.

13

This is an example of God's purposes (called His perfect Will) not being challenged, while giving someone liberty in whether or not to be part of it (this is called His permissive Will). It is also an example of the fact that our actions and our inactions have consequences, like it or not.

That said, it is important to understand that Christianity is not a list of dos and don'ts — instead

Christianity is you living your life as you seek to do the Will of The Father through the transforming power of The Holy Spirit as the result of your personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

14

## Closing

Last Saturday morning I had the radio on while pottering about in the kitchen and in a family segment the person pointed out how our children pay *way* more attention to what we do and don't do, and to how we behave than to what we say. I think we all agree with that, but it continues into adulthood and to a far wider group than just those we know.

I said that we would return to the question of the “one way” graphic art on my school bag: was it a success? We are witnesses to the impact of our faith in our lives all the time. Non-Christians can be quite perceptive when it comes to our lives and to how well we live up to what we claim to believe. Obviously I have no idea how much of an impact just that icon had by itself, but I can tell you this: it was part of the whole picture, part of what the other boys in the school used to judge me.

This was brought home to me quite forcibly on the last school day before our Matric finals. Our class teacher had the idea to ask the class what we would remember of each other as we parted ways after so many years together. From the day I got there, I was in the same class as the school's most feared bully, and all I remember about that period is what he said. He spoke in a calm and collected way about two people: me and one other outspoken Christian who was in one of the other Matric classes. What he said was an eye-opener. Basically it was that he used what we had *said* to see whether or not we lived up to it. To him, our actions were what counted, and he was *very* direct in what he said.

All these years and only then did it dawn on me that though I had never directly spoken to him about my faith, he had not only been watching me, but had been studying me and weighing up my actions against how he thought I would behave if I was serious about my faith. The Word puts it very well when — in the context of the ministry of reconciliation — we are told, “...we are ambassadors for Christ, God making His appeal through us.” (2 Corinthians 5:20)

I also quoted this bit of twisted humour in the Introduction: “Maybe your sole purpose in life is to be a warning to others.” In our darker moments I know that some of us feel that way, and I want to bring you (and me, for that matter) encouragement: that is *exactly* why we are still here. We *are* God's ambassadors! He is making His appeal through us! We need only do what He says, and *He* will see to it that we have what we need to accomplish His Will. That is made clear in Matthew 6. Read that chapter — all of it! — and use something like the two example analyses from Ephesians 4 which I did in my devotion. Then do it again, using some of the resources I highlighted for you.

What I am about to say should be a sermon or a devotion all of its own, but I want to introduce it to you now, because I believe it is very important.

My personal goal is to move from where I am now to this:

## Goal

- Conscious dependence upon God
- Subconscious disciplined living

15

Reality dictates that I first need to achieve this:

## Intermediate step

- Conscious dependence upon God
- Conscious disciplined living

16

Discipline needs practice in order for it to become practise.

Like it or not, but our dependence upon God is total. The the moment I forget that I depend on God I become self-centred, so I never want to forget that; I always want to remain conscious of it, because then thankfulness and humility are not far behind.

I want to urge you: live consciously as a Christian especially once your discipline becomes subconscious. I believe that will make our Christian witness – especially our *unconscious* witness – all the more powerful.

We belong to one another in Jesus Christ

Our purpose is to be an effective witness

17

Let us pray while the worship team comes up to lead us in our closing song.

<PRAYER>

## Links to copyrighted resources

1. The traffic one way sign:  
<https://safetysigns.co.za/image/cache/safety-signs/Road%20Signs/Control%20Signs/one-way-right-road-sign-r4.2-500x500.png>, retrieved on 2021-09-11.
2. The One Way to Heaven graphic is an edited version of this file:  
<https://jesus-freaks.weebly.com/uploads/1/9/3/9/19391307/1366215382.jpg>, retrieved on 2021-09-11.