

P Levy Intolerance 20180109ct

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[0 : 00] At the start of February I'm speaking at a week of events in Queen's University Belfast. There's an event every early morning, one at lunchtime and one at evening.

! It works out at about 15 talks. And they've given me a list of subjects, most of which I've never spoken on before. So it's a busy month of preparation and you are guinea pigs. And so I'm going to pretend you're students this morning.

Some more mature students than others. The first topic is this. Is Christianity intolerant? Is Christianity intolerant? What do you think?

I was going to ask for a show of hands that I want. Is Christianity intolerant? How would you answer that? I want to answer that in a very loud affirmative.

To say yes, actually. It's very intolerant, isn't it, to say that Jesus is their way, their truth and their life. And no one else can get to God except through him.

[0 : 57] That's what Jesus says. It's intolerant to say that there's no one else under heaven, on earth, other than Jesus, by which you can be forgiven.

That's what Peter said. It's intolerant to say that there's only one true God. As Jesus says in John 17. It's intolerant to say that trying to enter into heaven by any other way than by Jesus is actually to be a thief or a liar or a robber.

Jesus was intolerant to say that there's no one. Jesus was intolerant when he said, wasn't he, I am the only one who reveals God to people. Jesus was even more intolerant of religious hypocrisy when he condemned the religious know-it-alls and he called them hypocrites and deceivers.

Jesus was intolerant to say that there's no one who was. Jesus was extremely intolerant of the buying and selling of religion in the temple when he drove people out by force and he overturned the tables.

Jesus was intolerant when he said, love your enemies. Jesus was intolerant of ignorance when he taught people the truth.

[2 : 10] Jesus was intolerant of men who treated women as objects. Jesus was intolerant of men who abused women.

Jesus was intolerant of men who had double standards when it came to sexual ethics. Christianity is intolerant because its founder is intolerant.

Jesus was intolerant of racism. Christianity is intolerant because Jesus was intolerant. Christianity is intolerant of false gods.

The Bible teaches that Jesus is intolerant because there is a hell and Jesus is God in the flesh. God made man who died for our sins and he has made a way so that forgiveness can become a reality for you.

Through him alone. Through him alone. But if you won't accept him, then there is only judgment.

Now on the other hand, Christianity is very tolerant, isn't it?

[3 : 21] Christianity teaches its followers to be very forgiving. It teaches its followers to be patient and kind.

It teaches its followers to be generous and welcoming. It teaches its followers to be kind and honest and wholesome. Jesus taught us to love and to heal and to bind up.

To be examples of kindness and truth in the world. Jesus was intolerant. Jesus was intolerant of religious hypocrisy and bigotry. He was very intolerant of people that made religion something that was rigid and broke people.

Jesus was intolerant of pride and rebellion and sin and covetous and adultery and lying and cheating and stealing. And sex outside the covenant of marriage and murder.

He was intolerant of husbands treating their wives poorly. He was intolerant of pain. Jesus was saddened by suffering. And yet, if you know anything about the Lord Jesus, if you read anything of the gospel, you might not have.

[4 : 30] You will know that he demonstrated the greatest love and patience with those who are guilty of all those things. Why? Because he was God. Become a human being.

He was incarnate. That means made flesh. Incarnate love. Incarnate righteousness. Incarnate humility. And so the whole issue of our question this morning, this afternoon, is whether Christianity is intolerant.

Lies in who Jesus is and what he claimed. And what he said and what he did. And so I want to say Christianity is simply true.

And it is the world that is intolerant of that truth. It's true that Jesus lived. It's true that Jesus walked on water. That he was sick. That he calmed a storm with a command.

It's true that Jesus raised the dead. It's true that Jesus claimed to be God. It's true that Jesus was killed on a cross. That he rose from the dead. And I'm just giving you really what the gospels teach you. They're not feeble claims made by crazy people.

[5 : 31] Who wanted to gain power and fame. They are the claims of Jesus himself. And those who followed him. And suffered for him. And died for him. And so what you've got to decide is this. Is that true or not?

Either Jesus performed the miracles. Or he didn't. Either Jesus rose from the dead. Or he didn't. Based solely and completely on who Jesus is.

And what he did. Christianity is the truth. And if that is so. If Christianity is the truth. By necessity all other religions that disagree with Jesus.

Are not true. According to the Bible wrong. Because truth. Is by nature intolerant of falsehood. If Christianity is not true. Then Jesus is not God. Jesus did not do miracles. Jesus did not heal the sick. Jesus did not walk on water. Jesus did not die. He did not raise from the dead. After three days.

[6 : 29] But if he did all those things. And if Christianity alone is true. Since all the. In all the religions of the world. Only Christianity is the person of Jesus. Jesus alone said he was the way.

The truth. And the life. Christianity is only as intolerant. As Jesus is true. Now what I want to do. Is I want to kind of.

Show you this from the Bible. So if you've got your Bibles open. If you look at. Page 901. And John chapter 14. And verses 5.

To 7. I want you to see that. This really is Jesus teaching. It's not me. As some kind of intolerant. Welsh figure. 2000 years later. Trying to convince you. It's not. So in John 14.

Verses 5 to 7. There are three questions. In John 14. There's a question in verse 5. From a man called Thomas. And Thomas is a great man. Thomas is a skeptic.

[7 : 25] Thomas always needs reassurance. There's a question in verse 8. From a man called Philip. And there's a question in verse 22. From a man called Judas.

Where given their names. It's interesting isn't it. This chapter has got all the marks. Of an authentic narrative. Given to us by an eyewitness. So Thomas. He says in the first question.

How can we know the way? What Jesus gives you. Is politically explosive. And it challenges us. Very directly today.

It challenges. Religious pluralism. Now I will ask you. To treat this book. With respect. This book is not written.

By myth makers. Hundreds of years afterwards. It is an eyewitness report. By people that made careful investigation. And they wrote with a purpose.

[8 : 21] And they wrote soon after the death of Jesus. So those. Who had been alive at the time. Could say no that wasn't true. And so look with me at it's context. Look at the start of chapter 14.

There's a discussion. And the discussion is about heaven. It doesn't use that word. But it's about the future. It's about where Jesus says he is going. And he says I'm going to prepare a place for people.

He says doesn't he. In my father's house there are many rooms. Get rid of the vision that you've got. Of a massive stately home. That you drive up to. And there's loads and loads of rooms. That's not the point there.

What Jesus is saying. He's not talking about stately homes. He is saying. For all those who've believed. Believed in me. There's plenty of room. There's plenty of room. And so Christians. Down through centuries. Right through church history. Have found. The opening words of chapter 14. A very comforting verse. Maybe some of you have had this verse.

[9:20] Shared with you. In verse 4. Jesus says. You know the place to where I'm going. In verse 5. He told us he's a stickler and a sceptic.

He says. How can we know? And then you have these very famous words. Jesus said to him. I am the way. And the truth. And the life. And that sentence seems.

A little bit. Ambiguous. It is ambiguous. At first sight. You think. It's obviously referring back. To the father's house. Isn't it? I am the way. The truth. And the life. To the. I am the way.

To get to the father's house. No one will go to heaven. Except through me. But verse 7. Seems to challenge that. I am the way. The truth. And the life. No one comes to the father.

Except through me. If you'd known me. You would have known my father also. From now on. You do know him. And have seen him. And so.

[10:17] You might think. I'm being a little bit pedantic. But what I want to show you. Is that Jesus is saying. In verse 7. Is that here and now. Here and now. Right now. Jesus has brought Thomas.

To the father. Through himself. And so he is saying to Thomas. On earth. That little bit of Israel. He is saying. You have come to know. God in heaven.

The God who made you. The God who created all things. Through me. You have already come to know. The father. So you can know. Him. And you can enjoy him.

And that means. That you will one day. Go. To my father's house. He is talking about heaven. As he is at the start of the chapter. You can know God in heaven. But he says.

You can know him now. Going to heaven. And knowing God. Come through Jesus Christ alone. That is really the sense of the passage. That if we come to know the father.

[11:14] Now in this life. Through Jesus Christ. And that is the privilege. Of every Christian. You have a firm hope. For life after death. We know God in this life.

And we have a firm hope. That this life. Of knowing God. Will go on forever. And ever beyond death. So let me flip the coin with you. We cannot give.

The promise. Of heaven. And of eternal life. To someone who. Resolutely. Refuses the invitation. To come to the father. Now through Jesus.

We can't do that. I have to tell you. You cannot have. The future blessing. Of heaven. Without the present privilege.

Of knowing the Lord Jesus Christ. The two things go together. It's very simple. Know Christ now. And I shall know him then. Submit to Jesus now.

[12:09] And the father will open his heaven to me then. But there will be no father's home. For those. Who don't want to know the father now. That seems really straightforward.

I think that's really obvious. It's perfectly straightforward to anyone. It's not a threat to anyone. It's simply saying. If I don't want to know God. If I do not want to enjoy his family.

Here on earth. Then I won't enjoy his family. In the world to come. In fact. I feel like a fish out of water. Wouldn't I? To be doing something for eternity.

That I really don't want to do now. To end up in the father's house. With Jesus Christ. At the centre of it all. Well how can I possibly enjoy that then. If I don't want that now.

It's very simple. Let me run through it again. Disciples. I'm going to prepare a place in my father's house. You know how to get there. No we don't. Says Thomas. I am the way. I am the way.

[13:10] And if you come to know me. You will know the father now. And enter the father's house. So let's just look at this simple verse. In verse 6. So let me talk you through it.

And then I'll sit down. And I'm done. It's very important. That you don't tip X out. The second half. Of verse 6.

Jesus said. I am the way. The truth. And the life. No one comes to the father. Except through me. You have to take the two halves together. They're not isolated. We mustn't read part A with part B.

And if you read John's gospel. Which would be a brilliant thing to do in January. That is so characteristic. He states the positive. And then he gives you the negative. He says.

Christ is the way. There's no other way. John had the delight. Of slamming the door on your fingers. Until you kind of say. Ouch. He won't let you get away.

[14:06] He won't let me get away. With vague. Abstract. Truth. About Christianity. And let you believe it. He says. There's no other way.

And if I don't take 6A seriously. I won't take 6A seriously. Until I take 6B seriously. And it's only when I take 6B seriously. That I realise how important 6A is.

We can't have A without B. We can't go around just saying. The only way is Jesus. It seems so narrow. Doesn't it? It seems so bigoted. We can't go around saying.

Jesus is the only way to God. And that is the Christian way. We can't do that. Unless we tell people. 6B. Who is this Jesus. That we're talking about. It isn't that we Christians.

Think we're right. It isn't that we Christians. Think we're better than anyone else. It is that Jesus is the way. Because he is the truth. And the life. And if he's not the truth. And the life. Then he cannot be the way. And that's so vitally important.

[15:05] We need to spend a little bit of time on it. Let me come with me to. John 1 verse 18. It's very hot. Isn't it? And so try and stay awake. John chapter 1. And verse 18. It's just a few pages.

This is on page 886. It will wake you up if you turn there. If you turn there. John chapter 1 and verse 18. And it's so typical. Just look what he says.

It's a negative statement. You see it again and again in John. He slams the door on my fingers. No one has ever seen God. The only God. The only God.

Who is at the Father's side. Has made him known. Do you see what he's saying? The Son is at the Father's side. Through all eternity. That is his natural world.

Jesus existed before he came to this earth. His habitat where he existed from the beginning to the end. But he has become flesh. He's taken on a human body.

[16:04] And he's come to this world. From heaven to earth. And so at last. I can know and you can know what is going on in heaven. And you and I can know what God is like. And what he thinks. Because he who is at the Father's side.

Has come and made him known. Jesus is the way. And the truth. Because he's the only being in the Holy Universe. Who's come from heaven. Come from heaven to earth.

To bring us the light that shines in the darkness. But the darkness. And the darkness has not been overcome. Has Mohammed been to heaven? Has Mohammed come from heaven?

Did Buddha come from heaven? No such claim is there from either. No religious leader has made such claim. Jesus made that claim every day of his life.

Jesus makes that claim in every chapter in John's gospel. Jesus came from God. From the Father's side. And he opens to us the truth. About who God is. And what he's like. And that you can know him.

[17:04] Secondly he's the way. Because he is the life. John chapter 11. And verse 25. Let me read it to you. It says this.

Jesus said to her. He said to Martha. I am the resurrection. And the life. Whoever believes in me. Though he die. Yet shall he live.

I want you to notice. That is not a university setting. He's speaking. It's not a lunchtime talk. It's not a church service.

Where he says. I am the resurrection. And the life. It is to two sisters. By a graveside. Where they and he are in tears. And so it's very important.

That you realize. That at the start of this year. We are not here playing games. We're not talking about abstract things. That don't matter. And he says. I am the resurrection.

[18:00] And the life. Do you believe this? It's a brilliant question. What a question. To ask. To be able to say that.

Has anyone ever proved it? Like he did? That he went. Into the grave. Didn't he? He died. All historians. Would agree with that. And he came.

The Christians claim. Out of the grave. Three days later. He rose again. And historians support that. The test. Of being able to say. I am the resurrection. And the life.

Is. Can you conquer death? Not a single doctor. In this country. Would make that claim. Would they? Jesus says. He is the conqueror of death. And he proceeds. To draw that man. John 11. From the grave.

And Jesus dies. And three days later. He rises again. Apart from Jesus. There is no truth. And you remain in the dark. About God. Apart from Jesus. There is no life. And you remain under the reign of death.

[18 : 58] And when we make the statement. Of John chapter 16. And verse 4. Can you just turn there? Which is on page 901. Jesus says.

Abide in me. Dwell in me. And I in you. As the branch cannot bear. Oh sorry. That's the first chapter 15. It should be John chapter 16. This is on page 902. Jesus says. But I have said these things to you.

That when their hour comes. You may remember what I told them to you. I did not say these things. To you from the beginning. Because I was with you. It's not the right verse either.

Let me find it. Let me find you. No one comes to the Father. But through me. That's the problem. Not writing the notes properly. Someone Google that.

14 verse 6. Not 16 verse 4. It was close. Look what it says. In chapter 14. And verse 6. Jesus said. I am the way. The truth. And the life. No one comes to the Father.

[20 : 03] Except through me. That's right. It's the verse I'm speaking of. It's ridiculous. That's why the Christian church. Is so adamant. And so. If you want to call it intolerant. He is the truth.

And the life. He is unique. The God man. And dare we say. That he is the only way to God. We're not saying. We've got the only philosophy.

We're not saying. And we're not saying. We're the only ethic. We have the only ethic. We're not saying. We've got it all together. And we're not saying. We're better than anyone. We're saying.

That the Jesus we worship. Is the truth. And is the life. And by necessity. He is the way. And that really. Was the message. Of the first part of the Bible. The Old Testament. That there's one God.

And there's one way. And Israel lived. Didn't they. Surrounded by. Thousands of nations. That had thousands of God. They had safety in numbers. They spread their bets.

[21 : 00] But the message. Of the Bible. Is there's one God. And there's one way. And if there's only one God. There can be no other saviour. That's taken for granted. In the New Testament. He is from God.

One with God. And there's no other way. Ask any child. In the Old Testament. They can have told you that. And so what Jesus is saying. Is absolutely explosive.

Isn't it? And the truth of Jesus is. Revolutionary. And it is intolerant. And he calls you to believe on it.

And to act on it. And to consider it. And to read about it in the Gospel. And to keep on coming. Join the revolution.

Let's pray.