

Mythbusting

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[0 : 00] Some of you might remember a TV programme called Mythbusters. I don't actually know if it's still going, but 10 or 15 years ago it was a very popular programme.

I think it was on the Discovery Channel to begin with, but it probably moved on to others after that. And the idea of the programme, if you never saw the programme before, it was a very simple idea. The presenters would take myths and they would test them to see whether or not they were true or false.

Usually the myths were taken from the movies or from TV programmes or something like that. And if they found that the myth was false, then the myth was busted, hence the title.

Mythbusters. One episode I've only watched it once or twice, but one of the ones I watched was all about Night Rider. Now if you're over, I've got to judge the age. Anybody too young will remember Night Rider.

Night Rider, one of the coolest programmes ever. 80s TV show with a very cool black card, driven by David Hasselhoff. And part of the scene in Night Rider that was quite often happened was that there would be this lorry driving along the motorway.

[1 : 08] And Night Rider, the car, would come behind the lorry and the back of the lorry would open, and Night Rider would drive up into the lorry while it was going along on the motorway.

And it was very cool, part of Night Rider, just so cool. But the myth was people would say, well, that can't be real, because they're saying if a car is going along at 60 miles an hour, and if a lorry is going along in front of it at 60 miles an hour, as soon as the car hits the ramp, it's going to go flying through the lorry and crash.

Because they're saying, well, if it's going 60 miles an hour on the road, it's going to then start going 60 miles an hour in the trailer. And it would crash. And so people were saying, oh, that can't have been real on all that kind of thing. And so they tested this myth to see whether or not that was the case.

That if a car came into the back of a lorry, it would go flying forward at whatever speed the car was moving. And the myth was busted because what they discovered was that because of inertia, when the car hit the ramp, instead of the car racing forward, the wheels actually slowed down, because the inertia of the car made the wheels, the rotation of the wheels, slow down.

So they busted that myth. And there were other myths that were busted on other shows, things like, you know, quite often in the movies, if a door is locked, someone just shoots the lock and then the door is unlocked.

[2 : 28] So they tested whether that was a myth or not. They tested whether or not you could cause an explosion at a petrol station with a mobile phone. You'll notice that when you go to fill up your car, there's loads of signs saying, don't use your phone.

And they were saying, OK, well, why is that? Can we actually blow up the petrol station with a mobile phone? What else was there? How hard does it define a needle in a haystack? Does the colour red make bulls angry?

All that kind of thing. So that was the programme Myth Busters. The reason I mentioned that programme is because I think it's the case that the verses that we are looking at today are doing exactly the same thing.

These are myth-busting verses. And that's our title today. These verses are correcting many of the myths that can very easily hinder us in our walk with Jesus, or even prevent us from following Him in the first place.

So our title is Myth Busting. And there's five myths that these verses point towards. We'll go through them one by one.

[3 : 37] Myth number one is the myth that Christianity is a negative message of condemnation. Verse 17, For God did not send his son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

For many people today, I think particularly in Scotland, particularly in the context of Scottish Presbyterianism, there is among people a general perception that Christianity is a negative message of condemnation.

Or if not so much of Christianity as a religion, people would, I think, very often make that accusation regarding the church as an institution. Now that's true of people who are on the outside looking in.

People think that that's how we are. I've shared with you before, but some of you may not have heard me say this, that I was once in a meeting two or three years ago with a media group that were going to do some work with the free church.

I was on a committee that was related to that. And part of the discussions, I asked these people who didn't go to the free church at all, I said, what's the one word that comes into your mind when you think of the free church?

[4 : 54] And the woman kind of nervously said, judgmental. And, you know, at one level we find it hard hearing something like that, but at another level we probably can see why she would have said that.

Often the Gospel has been presented as primarily a message of condemnation. And so we've often, I think, fallen into the trap, and I've done this myself, fallen into the trap of criticizing behavior that we consider to be wrong, of restricting what people can and can't do, and of judging people who don't think or behave like us.

So from the outside people look in and they think that Christianity is a negative message of condemnation. But it's not just people on the outside who think like that. People on the inside think like that as well.

Even us as Christians, we can so easily view and understand the Gospel primarily in negative terms. So we're so thankful that we're saved, yet all the time we think that we're just one mistake away from infuriating God.

We want to grow in our faith, but yet every time we look at ourselves, all we see is failure and filth. And we can constantly feel like we're under the scrutinizing watch of other people, and we're scared to say or do or change the wrong thing.

[6 : 27] All of that kind of stuff is feeding the myth that Christianity is a negative, gloomy message of judgment and condemnation. Now, some of you might be thinking to yourself, well, hang on a minute, Thomas.

The Bible does say things that are negative in terms of our condition. The Bible does tell us that we're sinful. You can see that Romans 3 tells us that there's no one righteous, not one.

Romans 6 tells us that the wages of sin is death. Galatians 3 says, cursed is everyone who does not abide by all the things written in the book of the law. And all of that is absolutely true.

Our sin has created massive problems for us. It's left us broken. It's left us alienated from God, guilty of sin, lost in darkness, and blindly marching down a road that's going to lead to hell.

But the key point is that God did not send his son to tell us all of that. He did not send his son to condemn us.

[7 : 38] Verse 17 tells us that he sent his son so that the world might be saved through him. In other words, Christianity is not a negative message of condemnation.

It's a magnificently positive message of hope. And that makes perfect sense because God does not need to send Jesus into the world to pound us with a message of condemnation.

Why not? Because we already know it. We already have that message of condemnation. We have it loud and clear every single day.

We are reminded that the world is broken and that sin is a massive problem. In all of that brokenness, the gospel gives us hope.

This is so crucial for us as a church because it's telling us about what we need to be as a church. Because all through this week, people in this community, people around us, they're going to get repeated reminders that they're condemned.

[8 : 43] So you turn on the news tomorrow morning, I guarantee you it's going to be depressing. You go to work this week, there's going to be pressure, stress, battles, struggles.

You interact with people, some of it will be really good, but a lot of it you'll interact with people and you'll find yourself meeting with their insecurities, with defensiveness, there'll be tension, there'll be fallouts.

Even looking at your own body, you might feel pain or see illness. And you're confronted with your fragility, so aware that you're getting older.

Or maybe you just feel regret about something that you've said or done either last week, last month, last year or 20 years ago, something that you wish you'd never done and you're so aware of your mistakes.

This week is going to give us all constant reminders of the problem. Go to the news, problems, work problems, relationships, problems, health problems, our conscience problems, our self-esteem problems.

[9 : 45] Now, I'm not saying that everything is going to be awful this week, but what I am saying is that we all know that this week will give us many reminders that humanity has serious problems, problems, problems, problems, all week.

And then you come to church and you get told, you don't know half your problems, let me tell you how awful you really are. No. That is not what we are here to do.

That is not why God sent His Son into the world. He did not send His Son into the world to compound your problems. He sent His Son into the world to be the solution to all of these problems.

That is exactly what verse 17 is telling you. He's not sent you. He's not sent His Son to you to condemn you. He sent His Son to you so that you might be saved.

And this is what gives church the potential to be the best thing that we do every week. That's why it's the first thing that we do every week, because it's the best thing that we do in a world so full of problems, we have the ultimate solution.

[10 : 54] Jesus has come to fix these problems. He's come to give peace, to bring comfort, hope, healing, forgiveness, restoration.

He's come to put everything right. And that's why it is good news. And that's why any idea that Christianity is this negative message of condemnation, it's a myth that has got to be busted.

And it's so crucial because it's reminding us that as we come together as a church family, we're here to be a magnificent glimpse into the fact that Jesus has come to be the solution to the world's problems.

That's why the church of today is to be a glimpse into the church of that day, a glimpse into heaven, where you find joy and kindness and gentleness and encouragement and above all where we love God and love one another with all of our hearts.

And that is so crucial because that is what the people around us need so much. If people have a week full of problems of stress and tension and coldness and selfishness and judgmentalism, if they come to church and find the same things, then they're just going to conclude that the solution lies elsewhere.

[12 : 10] And that's a desperate tragedy because the solution to life's problems lies nowhere else. In Jesus, in Jesus we find the salvation, the healing, the restoration that we desperately need.

He has come to give the healing, the security, the restoration, the peace that we all so desperately, desperately crave.

Myth number two is the myth of religious neutrality, verse 18. Verse three, 18, whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already because he's not believed in the name of the only Son of God.

Now, I've spoken about this before, this myth of religious neutrality, but it's worth speaking about again because this is one of the most widespread myths held by humanity today, especially in the West.

The Bible tells us very clearly that Jesus has come and the general view is that that leaves us three options. We can accept him and follow him, we can reject him, or we can stay neutral.

[13 : 28] And that third option is where most people are. I have not met many people who are outrightly and blatantly hostile to Christianity.

People do exist, but there are not many of them, particularly in our own culture, both in Ireland here and in Scotland. There's not that many of these people. What I have met a lot of is many, many people who just want to be neutral.

And the key point is that verse 18 is telling us that that neutrality is a myth. It does not exist.

We are saved by Jesus through faith in him and in whom there is no condemnation, or we are on the path to condemnation and we're exposed to all the destructive power of sin.

There is no middle ground. There's no third way. There's no neutral territory.

[14 : 39] And this is so crucial to think about because neutrality is so tempting, yet it's so dangerous. It's tempting because it looks as though it's wise, measured, cautious, non-judgmental, and that makes it attractive, but it doesn't exist. It doesn't exist.

And that myth of its existence is so dangerous because it leaves people thinking that when it comes to your accountability before God, it leaves people thinking, if I do nothing, then I'm neutral.

And it's not true. When it comes to God, if you do nothing, you're going to hell.

Now what I'm saying there is instantly offensive to the world around us, and it's quite possibly offensive to some of you as well. It's not an easy thing to say. It's not an easy thing to hear.

And part of the reason why it's offensive is because it backs us into a corner with only two options. And that's a big problem for people who live in a culture like ours, because we don't tend to live our lives like that.

[16 : 02] We live in a culture that is very much driven by kind of being a customer, and when you're a customer, you've got options. So as customers, we're neutral. We choose which shop we go to. We just choose whether we go to Tesco or Co-op and start on our way.

If you live in the mainland, you've got even more choice. We choose what we buy. We choose what we watch on TV. We choose what we wear. We choose where we go on holiday. And we are constantly making that choice as customers standing on neutral territory.

And with that kind of mindset, we can so easily make the Gospel another shop that we may or may not go into.

Another product that we may or may not want to have. And that is a complete misunderstanding of Christianity. It's a complete misunderstanding of how it works.

Christianity does not belong in the category of things that we choose. Christianity belongs in the category of things that we cannot survive without.

[17 : 11] So can you be neutral about whether or not you need oxygen? Can you be neutral about whether or not you need food?

Can you be neutral about whether or not you need exercise? For oxygen, if you go neutral, you might survive for five minutes.

For food, if you go neutral, you might survive for five weeks. For exercise, if you go neutral, you might survive for quite a few years. But ultimately, you cannot survive without these things.

You cannot stay alive without these things. Neutrality in all of these areas will condemn you. And it's exactly the same with Jesus.

Jesus has not come to be an option that we can choose. He's come to be the Savior that we desperately desperately need. In the face of eternity, we can't survive without Him. That makes neutrality a complete and utter myth.

[18 : 27] Myth number three is the myth that if you love something, then it must be good. If you love something, it must be good.

Verse 19, and this is the judgment. Light has come into the world and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil.

Here, John echoes a principle that he's already given us at the very start of the Gospel. Back in chapter one, verse nine, he said, the through light that comes into the world, the through light which gives light to everyone was coming into the world.

We can pop that onto the screen, I think. The through light which gives light to everyone was coming into the world. He was in the world, the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him.

He came to his own and his own people did not receive him. So Jesus has come as the light. He's the great revealer of God, of who God is and of his amazing plan for salvation.

[19 : 25] But that light that Jesus brings is something that humanity has recoiled from. And the reason that, well, one of the main reasons that humanity rejects Jesus is because we love something else.

We love darkness. Now, that's another verse that can easily offend us. And it is offensive to all of us because none of us want to be called lovers of darkness.

If I introduced myself, I said, hi, my name's Thomas, I'm a lover of darkness. I would never say that. I don't want to say that. I don't want to think like that. And yet that's what Jesus calls me in this verse.

And the reason he does so is because he needs to bust another myth in my heart and in yours. It's the myth that if you love something, it must be good.

And this is so, so relevant to the way that the world and the culture around us thinks today. I think of all the words in the English language, love is probably the best one.

[20 : 30] It's the word that makes us write poetry and songs. It's what the best movies and the best novels are all about. It's what prompts the great masterpieces of art and music.

The word love is a jewel in the English language. And it's the same in Greek. You have this word agape, which is the Greek word for love that's used in this verse.

It's a magnificent word. It describes the deep love of a husband to his wife, of a father to his child, of a friendship, of family, and above all of God's immeasurable love for us.

You have this beautiful word, this Greek word agape. Here in verse 19, Jesus is talking about how we can have agape for darkness.

And I'm not sure if there's a verse that speaks more powerfully into the human condition than this one. We are the one and only part of creation that is capable of this kind of love.

[21 : 35] That love that's the pinnacle of experience. We're the one part that's capable of it. And yet we are also capable of directing that love towards things that are dark and wrong.

It seems impossible. We take our greatest attribute, our ability to love, and we give it to darkness. Now two things we have to say about that.

First, we have to accept that it's true. And it's not easy, not hard to prove that it's true. You just have to ask yourself whether doing something wrong has ever felt good.

But secondly, this verse is teaching us that loving something doesn't mean that it is good or right. And that's the myth that needs to be busted.

And it needs to be busted because all around us, people think that. People think if you love something, it's okay. And it's been used, that mindset's been used to justify all sorts of behavior, all sorts of things that are wrong.

[22 : 37] Especially in regard to relationships. I remember reading of a celebrity who had left his wife for somebody else. He'd left his wife for another woman.

And in doing so, he spoke about this new woman that he had gone off with. And he said, are we supposed to just ignore the feelings that we have for one another?

And I felt like shouting at him and saying, yes! Of course you are! That's exactly what it means to be faithful to your wife. You don't let feelings for somebody else stir up in your heart.

You don't give them any countenance at all. You don't let them take root. But he was not thinking like that at all. To him, to the world around us, his behavior was fine.

Because it was justified by love, supposedly. And I'm sure you can all think of a million and one examples of exactly the same kind of thing. And it's a really important lesson for us. It's teaching us that love can never be a unilateral vindicated of behavior.

[23 : 42] In other words, we can't use love as the only factor determining our moral standards. Why not? Well, because if we do that, people will just do whatever they like.

And that's exactly what happens. The idea that love on its own makes everything okay is a myth. What we need is someone to show us an ethical standard.

We need a light to shine in our darkness to show us what is right and wrong. Now here we discover that these verses are such a mix, aren't they?

These verses are such a mix in terms of how they make us feel. Because at one level, there's this wonderful emphasis that Jesus has come with good news. And yet at the same time, we're confronted with these piercing challenges that highlight the seriousness of our sin.

And the fact that we're drawn to things that are wrong. And so there's kind of hope, comfort, invitation, rebuke. There's such a mix in these verses. And all of that kind of stuff can fill us with fear and fill us with shame.

[24 : 51] And those kind of feelings will lead us to our fourth myth, the myth that hiding from God is a good idea. Verses 20 to 21.

For everyone who doesn't wicked things, hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his work should be exposed. But whoever does what is through comes to the light so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God.

When we're confronted by the reality of our fragility and of the seriousness of our sin, it's so easy to think that the best thing we can do is hide. If we feel vulnerable or ashamed or afraid, the last thing we want is for our brokenness to be exposed.

And even worse, we can also want to stay in the shadows because sometimes we think, well actually, you know, maybe, you know, part of me quite likes doing this thing that I know is wrong. And part of us resents our accountability towards God.

Sometimes we want to hold on to sin because we can find pleasure in it. Whether it's because we feel ashamed or whether it's because we feel offended or whether it's both at the same time, we can so easily think, I am just going to hide from God.

[25 : 59] And there's loads of ways we can do it. We can do it by running and many, many people try to keep God as far into their lives as possible. We can do it by distraction. We're just like, I'm not going to think about it. I am not going to think about it.

We can even do it by acting. We can give the impression that we're interested in God, that we're interested in church, that, you know, that we're really committed to this thing.

We can put on this act when all the time it's just a front that we use to hide our true selves. Many people do it. It's easy to do it.

It's tempting to do it because hiding from God can seem like a good idea. It's a myth. Why?

Well, it's a myth for two reasons. One, because it's ridiculous. Jesus is the Word. He's the Logos, the great revealer of God.

[26 : 56] He's the one in whom all reality finds coherence. He's the one in whom everything holds together. That means that whatever it is you want to hide, he knows it.

He is the light. Nothing is hidden from him. Trying to hide from him is ridiculous. But the second reason is even more important.

It's completely counterproductive. Hiding from God is completely counterproductive. Why do we hide?

Because we don't want our problems to be exposed. We don't want to face the consequences of all the stupid things that we've done in our lives. And yet the one way that you can perpetuate these problems, the one way you can keep them, is to stay away from God.

Because by staying away from God, you're staying away from the one person who can fix them. That's the whole reason why Jesus has come. To take away our sins, to take away our darkness, to cleanse us, to heal us, to restore us, to fix us.

[28 : 06] That's why staying away from him, hiding from him, is the worst thing that we can do. If we come to him, we will be healed.

And this is where Jesus' power is so magnificent. I used this illustration several years ago. So if you've heard it before, just pretend you've not heard it before. But some of you won't have heard it before. You want you to imagine a box. You've got a little box this size.

And I want you to imagine that you walk through, there's a cupboard in the toilet behind this wall, about here. And I want you to imagine that you could go into that cupboard and it's dark, completely dark.

And you've got your box, you open the lid, the darkness in that room fills the box. The box is dark, you close the lid. And I want you to imagine that inside that box, the darkness from inside that little cupboard behind that wall, that darkness is all your sin, all your brokenness, all your insecurity.

So you've got everything that's wrong with you. You're in the cupboard, you've got it in your box, right? That's all your sin. You bring it in here, you bring it into the light. In other words, you bring it to Jesus.

[29 : 13] You've got your box full of darkness. You open the lid. What's happened to the darkness? It's gone.

That's exactly what Jesus does. That's what He's come to do. That's how powerful He is. That's how merciful He is. He will cleanse us.

And that's why all He's looking for us, all He's looking for from us is that we're genuine. He talks in this verse about doing what's true. You can see that second line down, whoever does what's true.

That doesn't mean coming to Him and pretending that, you know, I've never done anything false or wrong in my life. It doesn't mean coming to Him and saying, you know, I've done everything right, I'm perfect. It means coming to Him and saying, Lord, have mercy on me, a sinner.

That word true, right there. It's not a test of greatness. It's a test of genuineness. And if we come to Him, opening our box of darkness, open and honest, confessing your sin, asking for forgiveness, His light will flood in and He'll heal us.

[30 : 23] The idea that hiding from God is a good idea is a myth. So, four myths we've busted. The myth that Christianity is a negative message of condemnation.

The myth of religious neutrality. The myth that if you love something and it must be good, the myth that hiding from God is a good idea. None of these are true. They all need to be myth busted.

But there's one more and for many people, this is the hardest myth of all to overcome. This is the one that I think everybody in here will struggle with more than any other.

It's the myth that you are unlovable. Life will so often leave you feeling like you are unlovable.

You feel like a failure. You feel like you're a pain to other people. You feel like you're a fraud. You feel like you're a waste of space. That you're an underachiever, that things haven't worked out the way you wanted them to.

[31 : 33] That you're a disappointment, that you're an outsider, that everybody else has got something that you don't have, that you're on the fringes, that you're just not that lovable.

And because life makes us feel like that, it is so easy to think that God feels exactly the same way.

That myth that you are unlovable is spectacularly busted by verse 16.

For God so loved the world that he gave his only son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

God gave his precious, beloved only son to bust that myth. To show you how much God loves you.

[32 : 36] And that's why he's busted all these other myths as well, because you need to know all of this stuff. I need to know it all, because all of us will lead us to him.

And it's only in him that we'll find healing and hope. That's why when you look at the cross and you see Jesus dying for you, you are seeing the greatest myth buster that the world has ever seen.

Because back in Genesis, the devil told Eve that God doesn't really care about her. And that myth has led humanity into brokenness, desperate brokenness ever since.

Jesus has come to bust that myth forever. So that you can be his, that you can know him, and the eternal life that only he can give.

I want you all to do me a favor this afternoon. I want you all to go away and think about these five myths. And I want you to think about which one is the biggest one for you.

[33 : 51] If we go back a slide, we'll put them up again. There we are. I want you to sit down at lunchtime and say, to whoever you're having lunch with, say, which one's your myth?

Which one do you struggle with? Because we all struggle with them. And I want you to think about these five myths, and whichever myth is your stumbling block, please remember that it has been busted.

Amen.