



Try Jesus!

MEETINGS AT LIFE'S CROSSROADS

Christian Salcianu



Try Jesus!

MEETINGS AT LIFE'S CROSSROADS

Christian Salcianu

Copyright © The Stanborough Press Ltd. 2027
Published in 2027 by The Stanborough Press Ltd., Alma Park, Grantham, UK.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced in any form without prior permission from the publisher.

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data. A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN 978-1-80706-027-5

Publisher's note: The publisher is responsible solely for the content presented in this title and does not assume any responsibility or liability for any other written or spoken content expressed by the author outside of this publication.

Scripture quotations throughout this book have been drawn from the New International Version® (Anglicised). Copyright © 1979, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.® Used by permission of Biblica, Inc.® All rights reserved worldwide.

All emphases in Scripture quotations throughout this book are those of the author.

Designed by David Bell
Printed in UK



Try Jesus!

MEETINGS AT LIFE'S CROSSROADS

Christian Salcianu

Table of contents

Introduction.....	7
Chapter 1 – The voice	9
Chapter 2 – ‘Come and see!’	15
Chapter 3 – A man born twice	23
Chapter 4 – Knowing the gift of God	31
Chapter 5 – To seek and to save	39
Chapter 6 – Writing in the sand	45
Chapter 7 – ‘Remember me!’	53
Chapter 8 – ‘In memory of her’	67
Chapter 9 – On the road to Emmaus	79
Chapter 10 – The doubting one	89
Chapter 11 – ‘Do you love me more than these?’	95
Chapter 12 – The least of all	105
Chapter 13 – The Lion and the Lamb	115
Conclusion	127

Introduction

Can anyone change your mind? Probably not . . . surely not on the things that matter, such as values, personal tastes or beliefs. But at times you may simply discover something so good, so powerful, that you cannot unsee it, and then choose a different path. I have not written this book to change your mind. (Each one of us comes with our own story, shaped by years of experience and pain, and nobody walks up and says, ‘*Here I am. Change me.*’) Rather, I have written it so that you may have an encounter. Let me tell you the reason why.

Honestly, life is beautiful when it is. But when it’s not, it badly hurts. And that’s when we might want to change . . . typically looking for a quick fix. We’ve learnt to hope that something new will bring the change we’re after, only to be disappointed, again and again. Think of the last diet, the famous treatment, the ‘proven’ method that worked for others but failed for you.

People, especially, play this role to perfection: another group of friends, a rising political party or movement, a different church, a recently launched social media platform, a fresh candidate for office – they all arrive with a promise . . . sometimes a *messianic* one. Rooted in religious culture, the word ‘messianic’ has come to describe the arrival of someone who can finally deliver what all the others have failed to. And so people hope, and wait, and follow. Some are satisfied, whether out of genuine conviction or comfortable loyalty. Others part ways in disappointment. And some, still, are ready to fall for the next one who comes along with the same old promise.

‘*Been there, done that,*’ you might say. Fair enough.

But what if the others were genuinely poor substitutes? Imposters, even? And what if, in rightly dismissing them, you quietly accepted the idea that no real solution exists at all? What if that conclusion, reasonable as it feels, is itself a kind of practised resignation?

What I’m inviting you to is not a debate; not a weighing of arguments or a presentation of evidence designed to prove a point. Those things have their place . . . but not in this book.

The invitation is simply this: *come and see* for yourself – not through someone else’s lens of interpretation. We all want the eyewitness account; we look for the unbiased source; we strive to be objective. So why not

give yourself the benefit of the doubt – just this once – with no strings attached?

Since you've made it past the cover, you have already noticed the book's title: *Try Jesus!* It doesn't hide anything.

I get it; this name comes loaded: for some, it is the name above all names; for others, it is the one used to justify unspeakable things. Whatever it means to you, I'm not here to sell you *my* version of Jesus.

Let me tell you about two friends we will meet later in this book – Philip and Nathanael, two young men from the region of Galilee.¹

When Philip found Jesus of Nazareth – believing him to be the long-awaited Messiah – he went straight to his friend with the news. Carrying his own baggage of preconceived ideas, Nathanael was quick to dismiss it: *Come on. Your Jesus . . . from Nazareth, of all places? He cannot be the Messiah. Certainly not mine.*

And Philip's reply? A confident, unhurried invitation: *'Come and see.'*²

I call this: 'Try Jesus!'

And what you'll find in the pages ahead is a series of encounters where real people, people like you and me, met Jesus of Nazareth two thousand years ago. I will mainly use the gospels and a few other passages and books in the Bible, reading the stories as they are: no complex theology to decode; no religious checklists of dos and don'ts; and no hidden agenda – just walking alongside the people who *tried Jesus*: what they came with, what they found, and how they left.

Can anyone change your mind on crucial things? Probably not. What I hope is that you will simply discover something so good, so powerful, that you will not be able to unsee it, and will try that different path. I wrote this book to facilitate an encounter. It's up to you what you do with it.

¹John 1:44, 45

²John 1:46

The voice

Few people inspire us more than the ones standing for something right at any cost. Every century, every generation has had those men and women who, despite all the challenges, took the side of truth over comfort. We like it even more when their stand is courageously taken against the powers of the age and in favour of those who are suffering. Such heroes herald the coming of a new era, and they quietly take their place in a history forever changed from that day on.

John was one of them. Born in Judea, in the household of an old priest, John was never a man of religious formality. He left home quite early,¹ focused entirely on the calling of his life – being a *prophet* of God.

When we hear about prophets and prophecies, we risk imagining them as some people in a trance, tied up in heavenly things, uttering some more or less intelligible or credible communication about what's going to happen here or there. Not so for a biblical prophet. John, like all the other prophets of the Bible, was a real man, down to earth. He preached against corrupt power and the evils of society while proclaiming a new order to come – always anchored in the present, calling for the changes needed to face a future that was soon to visit them.

John came one day to the bank of the River Jordan with a strong message, 'preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins'.² If I were to summarise it using his key word, that would be '*Repent*.'

Depending on your upbringing, your understanding of this word may have drifted far from its basic meaning. Some see it as an invitation to a monastery; others think of a fiery rebuke coming from a street-corner extremist with a megaphone in your face; for those already burdened by guilt, it lands like a fresh accusation.

¹ Luke 1:80

² Luke 3:3

For John it meant *change*.³

Some honest exchanges between the preacher and his audience illustrate this well.

‘“What should we do then?”’ the crowd asked. John’s answer was practical and immediate – share with those in need: ‘“Anyone who has two shirts should share with the one who has none, and anyone who has food should do the same.”’

Then came some public officials, collecting the taxes for the Roman authorities: surely not the most loved people in town. ‘“Teacher,” they asked, “what should we do?”

‘“Don’t collect any more than you are required to,” he told them.’

Finally, some Roman soldiers stepped up and asked him, ‘“And what should we do?”

‘He replied, “Don’t extort money and don’t accuse people falsely – be content with your pay.”’⁴

John was fair, a preacher of righteousness – and people listened, confessed from the heart, and followed.

The most intriguing feature of his ministry was the practice of baptism. What was that like?

You may be used to the image of a little baby being immersed in a basin of water by a priest; or a child, or someone older, sprinkled with water or having it poured over their forehead. But this was not the case back then!

What John did, following adult people’s confession of their sins, was to immerse them in the waters of the river. (Thus he became known as *John the Baptist*.) Far from being a new practice, it had been reserved for ages for newcomers, pagans coming to have faith in God.⁵

Shockingly, John was asking the Jews to repent and to be baptised!

Why was this shocking? Because many of them considered themselves saints, chosen people, sons of Abraham, a blessing to the nations. But they weren’t.

³The Greek word *metanoō*, translated as ‘repent’, literally means ‘to think differently after’, ‘to change one’s mind’. John’s mission was not to effect the change in people’s hearts himself, but to make them aware of their need to make up their own minds about it.

⁴Luke 3:10-14

⁵Probably the most famous case was the Syrian general Naaman (see 2 Kings 5:14). It was not yet called a baptism; still, his subsequent confession of faith qualified him to be a believer. While Jews used ritual baths, the baptism of John was a clear call to repentance – not a rite of repeated purification (see ‘Mikvah’, *Britannica*, britannica.com/topic/mikvah).

The preacher didn't spare them for a moment, asking them to walk the talk – ‘“Produce fruit in keeping with repentance”⁶ – highlighting the gap between what they said and what they did.

* * *

I guess by now you might have taken a liking to John the Baptist: he wasn't involved in politics, wasn't playing with the big boys, but was rather focused on righting the wrongs of the age – unafraid, vertical, a voice;⁷ far from fomenting a secular revolution, yet preaching a spiritual message of a coming kingdom.

As a forerunner of the Messiah, he told everyone that the water baptism was only a stage, a symbol of what was yet to come: ‘“After me comes the one more powerful than I, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. I baptise you with water, but he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit.”⁸

And then – having baptised hundreds, maybe thousands; having heard countless stories of broken lives waiting to be mended; having prayed for new beginnings for them all – one day John faced One unlike any other.

Impossible to make it up, the dialogue speaks for itself:

‘Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptised by John. But John tried to deter him, saying, “I need to be baptised by you, and do you come to me?”

‘Jesus replied, “Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfil all righteousness.” Then John consented.’⁹

This is the first instance of someone being called to *try Jesus!* John the Baptist did it.

The Messiah did not come with a show of power, no halo of light, no accompanying angels. He came as a man, so much like everyone else and yet entirely different. As a man, he confidently stepped into the water. What John had sensed all along was now confirmed beyond any doubt: ‘Just as Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: “You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.”¹⁰

⁶Luke 3:8

⁷See John's full dialogue with the religious leaders who monitored him and came to interrogate him about what he claimed to be (John 1:19-23).

⁸Mark 1:7, 8

⁹Matthew 3:13-15

¹⁰Mark 1:10, 11

Instantly John's *try Jesus* invitation was confirmed by two celestial witnesses: Jesus' ministry would be Spirit-led, and God the Father's seal was unmistakable: "You are my Son."¹¹

John saw it and heard it. It was not a trial anymore. From now on, he waited only for the moment to step aside and leave the scene to Jesus.

* * *

That day eventually came, when 'John saw Jesus coming towards him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"'¹¹

The description of Jesus as 'the Lamb of God' is a compact yet rich metaphor, echoing key moments in the history of God's people.¹² It conveyed an image of the innocent bearing someone else's guilt – a gift from God.

A gift for whom?

John's message stretched beyond any nation – it was for the entire world, for all time. Jesus, the Messiah, would take away the sin of the world.

Then John publicly testified: "I myself did not know him, but the reason I came baptising with water was that he might be revealed to Israel."¹³

John's mission was to prepare a revelation. He went on, "I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptise with water told me, "The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is the one who will baptise with the Holy Spirit." I have seen and I testify that this is God's Chosen One."¹⁴

Mission accomplished.

So far, people had come to John, whether as crowds, groups of tax collectors, soldiers or spies sent by religious leaders. He had even gathered a small group of disciples. Then John had tried Jesus. Now it was their turn.

"The next day John was there again with two of his disciples. When he saw Jesus passing by, he said, "Look, the Lamb of God!"

¹¹ John 1:29

¹² A sacrifice provided by God in the story of Abraham and Isaac (see Abraham's answer to Isaac's specific question about the lamb, Genesis 22:7, 8); the Paschal lamb at the Passover (Exodus 12:3-11); the suffering Servant/Messiah depicted as a sacrificial lamb (Isaiah 53:6, 7; see also Acts 8:30-35).

¹³ John 1:31

¹⁴ John 1:33, 34

‘When the two disciples heard him say this, they followed Jesus.
Turning around, Jesus saw them following and asked, “What do you want?”
‘They said, “Rabbi” (which means “Teacher”), “where are you staying?”
‘“Come,” he replied, “and you will see.”’¹⁵
‘*Come and see!*’ Let’s turn now to the experience of the first disciples.

¹⁵ John 1:35-39