

What would Jesus say to...

SERMON SERIES



Mario
Balotelli

What would Jesus say to... Reminders

Each of these messages can be tailored towards a Gospel presentation and our hope is that they will be used to engage with those on the fringe of the Church.

Each 'character' we are exploring is a real person. Let's remember that as we speak. It's important that these sermons are not used to slam people but to affirm God-given attributes and speak into their lives. Think about three positive things we can say for every one thing we might like to see changed.

This sermon series should also help equip Christians in two distinct ways. Firstly, they should help us think about how we engage in faith conversation with friends. Secondly, they help us see that our faith is not only about a Sunday morning meeting but about how we engage with all of life.

Background Information

Adapted from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mario_Balotelli

Mario Barwuah Balotelli (born Mario Barwuah; 12 August 1990) is an Italian footballer who plays as a striker for Premier League club Liverpool and the Italian national team. Balotelli is nicknamed Super Mario after the Italian video game character Mario from the iconic Nintendo game Super Mario Bros.

Early life

Mario Balotelli was born in Palermo, Sicily from Ghanaian immigrants. The family moved to Bagnolo Mella in the province of Brescia, Lombardy, when he was two.

In 1993, the authorities suggested he be placed into foster care. The Barwuah family gave up the three-year-old boy to an Italian foster family, the Balotellis. His foster parents are Silvia, the Jewish daughter of Holocaust survivors, and Francesco Balotelli. They lived in the town of Concesio, Brescia, in northern Italy.

At first, he stayed at the Balotellis during the weekdays, and returned to his biological parents on weekends. But after a while he started to be indifferent towards his biological parents and adopted the surname of the Balotellis, and it was arranged for him to be permanently fostered by the Balotellis.

In June 2012, he dedicated his goals that put Italy in the final of the Euro 2012 football championships to his foster mother Silvia, and rushed over to embrace her as she wept after the win.

Balotelli had to wait until his 18th birthday to request Italian citizenship, as the Balotellis had not adopted him. Balotelli officially gained citizenship in Concesio on 13 August 2008. After the ceremony he released the following statement:

"I am Italian, I feel Italian, I will forever play with the Italy national team."

Mario has three biological siblings: Abigail, Enoch, and Angel Barwuah. Enoch Barwuah, two years his junior, had a trial at English Premier League side Stoke City in December 2011, and Sunderland in January 2012, before signing with Salford City on 16 November 2012. Enoch switched to Maltese Premier League side Qormi in July 2013.

Club career

Balotelli began his career at Lumezzane. At the age of 15 he was promoted to the first team, making his first team debut in a Serie C1 league match against Padova on 2 April 2006.

From there he has played at the following clubs... Inter Milan (2007-2010), Man City (2010-2012), Milan (2012-2014) and Liverpool (2014-2015).

Inter Milan

Having had an unsuccessful trial with Barcelona at the age of 15, Balotelli was signed by Inter Milan in 2006 on loan with a pre-set price of €150,000 to co-own the player. In June 2007 Inter exercised the option and purchased another half for additional €190,000. He gained national attention after he scored two goals against Juventus in the return leg of the Coppa Italia quarter-finals, being instrumental in a 3–2 away win for Inter.

In an April 2009 match with Juventus where he scored Inter's only goal in a 1–1 draw, Balotelli was racially abused by Juventus fans throughout the game. This led Inter owner Massimo Moratti to say that he would have pulled the team off the pitch had he been present. The racist chants were also condemned by Juventus chairman Giovanni Cobolli Gigli and Juventus were given a one-game home-fan ban because of the incident. Balotelli continued to be the subject of racist chants throughout the season, becoming the focus of Juventus fans even during games not involving Inter, leading to Juventus being fined twice and the club ultimately punished with a partial stadium closure.

In his second season with Inter, Balotelli had a number of disciplinary problems, most notably involving head coach José Mourinho who excluded him from the first team in the second half of January 2009. Earlier that season Mourinho had accused Balotelli of showing a lack of effort in training, stating "as far as I'm concerned, a young boy like him cannot allow himself to train less than people like Figo, Córdoba, and Zanetti."

Balotelli's disciplinary problems, and his difficult relationship with Mourinho, continued in the 2009–10 season. The tension between Balotelli and Mourinho reached its peak on the eve of the UEFA Champions League second leg against Chelsea after the young striker was not called-up, following an altercation with his manager. Despite Inter's 1–0 win at Stamford Bridge, London, Balotelli was criticized by several senior players, as well as by his own agent.

Balotelli released a statement of apology in Inter Milan's official website that read:

"I am sorry for the situation that has been created recently. I am the first person who has suffered because I adore football and I want to play, and now I am waiting in silence so I can return to being useful to my team. I want to put the past behind me, look to the future and concentrate on the upcoming commitments and make myself ready."

In March 2010 he came under heavy criticism from fans after he publicly sported an A.C. Milan (Inter's cross-town rivals) jersey on the Italian show *Striscia la Notizia*.

After a falling-out with Mourinho, Balotelli was recalled for Inter's April 2010 match against Bologna, and he marked his return with a goal in their 3–0 win. He again caused controversy in the Champions

League semi-final against Barcelona on 20 April 2010 as he threw his jersey on the ground after the final whistle, in response to Inter fans who had booed him for his poor performance. He admitted three years later that the incident was the only regret in his life. Amid these controversies with his club and manager, many Premier League teams, including Manchester United and Manchester City, indicated that they were interested in signing Balotelli in July 2010.

Manchester City | 2010–11

Inter reached an agreement for Balotelli's transfer to Manchester City on 12 August 2010 for €21.8 million. At Manchester City Balotelli reunited with his former boss, Roberto Mancini, who said, "His style of play will suit the Premier League, and because he is still so young there is a big chance for him to improve. He is a strong and exciting player, and City fans will enjoy watching him."

On 21 December 2010 Balotelli won the Golden Boy Award, saying that only one of the past winners was slightly better than he was – Lionel Messi. On 28 December 2010 Balotelli scored his first Premier League hat-trick in a 4–0 win over Aston Villa. Despite this success Balotelli still had disciplinary problems, and in March 2011 he was sent off in the second-leg of Manchester City's Europa League draw with Dynamo Kyiv. On 14 May 2011 Balotelli was man of the match in the 2011 FA Cup Final as Manchester City defeated Stoke City 1–0 to win their first trophy in thirty-five years.

2011–12

He was charged for violent conduct for the kick against Scott Parker and was suspended for four matches, three for violent conduct and one for his second sending off. On 8 April 2012, Balotelli received his fourth red card of the season, after receiving his second yellow card during City's 1–0 loss to Arsenal in April 2012. He was banned for three games. After the Arsenal match, Mancini appeared to have finally lost his patience with Balotelli, suggesting that Balotelli would not play any part in the remainder of City's season and be sold by the club. Despite this, Balotelli did make an appearance as a late substitute in the last game of the season, a title-deciding match against Queens Park Rangers. Balotelli provided the assist to striker Sergio Agüero, who scored in the 94th minute to give City their first league title since 1968.

2012–13

In December 2012, Balotelli decided to fight against Manchester City's decision to fine him two weeks' wages for his poor disciplinary record the previous season by taking his club to a Premier League tribunal. Balotelli missed 11 games domestically and in Europe last season because of suspensions. With less than a day remaining to the start of the hearing, Balotelli dropped his tribunal action and accepted the fine.

Milan | 2012–13

"I will remember my brilliant team-mates, the manager and all the supporters. They are the best, they were great with me and I will always have a very special place in my heart for City, it's a great club with a great future."

"I spoke with Roberto before I went to speak to the players. We spoke for some time about lots of

things. He was sad, and I was too. But it was a good conversation. I love Roberto, he has been very important for my career, and I will always thank him for having trust and faith in me."

Mario Balotelli on his transfer to A.C. Milan

On 29 January 2013, A.C. Milan's organising director Umberto Gandini announced that the team had agreed a deal to sign Balotelli from Manchester City on a four-and-a-half year deal rumoured to be worth €20 million plus bonuses and add-ons. On 31 January 2013, the Serie A giants completed the signing, and Balotelli was awarded the number 45 shirt, the same number he wore for Inter Milan and Manchester City. A.C. Milan's vice-president, Adriano Galliani, said "Balotelli in Rossoneri is a dream that has been realized. It is a transfer that everyone wanted: club, president and fans." Balotelli received a warm reception when he returned to Milan.

On the final day of the season, Balotelli scored his twelfth goal in thirteen games for A.C. Milan as the team beat Siena to qualify for the 2013–14 Champions League.

Liverpool | 2014–15

On 21 August 2014, A.C. Milan agreed a £16 million fee for Balotelli to return to the Premier League with Liverpool.

International Career

Balotelli was unable to answer call-ups to the Italian national under-15 and under-17 teams as he was still considered to be a Ghanaian immigrant.

On 7 August 2007, five days before his seventeenth birthday, Balotelli received his first senior International call-up for Ghana from their coach Claude Le Roy for a friendly against Senegal at the New Den stadium in London, England, on 21 August 2007. He declined the offer citing once again his willingness to play for Italy when he became eligible. He also stated his willingness to represent Italy at international level once he acquired an Italian passport.

Italy U-21 coach Pierluigi Casiraghi stated his intention to call up Balotelli once he obtained Italian citizenship.

On 10 August 2010, Balotelli made his first appearance for the Italian senior team, in a friendly match against Côte d'Ivoire – Italy's first match after the 2010 World Cup.

UEFA Euro 2012

Before the tournament in Poland and Ukraine kicked off, in June 2012 Balotelli was interviewed by a newspaper about the state of racism in the host countries. During the interview Balotelli reinforced his threats to walk off the pitch if any of the opposition's fans racially abuse him in any way, and said he would 'kill' anyone that threw a banana at him. He spoke about his increasing fears that black players will be targeted by racists and that he refuses to accept racism in any form, talking of his past incidents surrounding racism in football notably during his time playing in Serie A for Inter Milan.

On 10 June 2012, Balotelli also became the first black player to appear for Italy in a major tournament (Euro or World Cup) in a 1–1 draw against Spain, Italy's first match of Euro 2012. During the

tournament, Balotelli was subject to a case of racial abuse during the game against Croatia, which led UEFA to fine the Croatian Football Federation €80,000. Italy were defeated 4-0 in the final by defending champions Spain. Despite the heavy defeat, Balotelli was named as part of the Euro 2012 Team of the Tournament due to his performances. With 3 goals, Balotelli finished the tournament as the joint top scorer along with 5 other players, although the Golden Boot ultimately went to Fernando Torres, due to his assist in the Euro 2012 final.

2014 FIFA World Cup

After establishing himself in the side at Euro 2012, Balotelli remained the first choice striker for Italy's 2014 World Cup qualifying campaign.

On 1 June 2014, Balotelli was selected in Italy's squad for the 2014 FIFA World Cup. In Italy's opening match of the tournament, he scored the team's winning goal in a 2–1 defeat of England on 14 June. After the match against England, Balotelli says playing in the World Cup for the first time was "a wonderful sensation to experience" and dedicated the goal to his future wife. Italy lost their next two matches, however, and were eliminated in the first round, finishing third in their group.

Style of play

Agile, quick and powerful, Balotelli is credited with pace, strength, and technical ability, but criticized for a perceived poor and immature attitude at times. Balotelli is also a set-piece specialist due to his powerful shot, and is regarded by teammates and the media as a promising but undisciplined player. He is regarded as one of the best penalty kick takers in world football, a view backed by his former Manchester City goalkeeping team-mate Joe Hart.

Personality and public image

Balotelli has been given a reputation by the media for being a difficult character and taking part in questionable and often amusing activities. He was once described by Jose Mourinho as "unmanageable." [150] In June 2010, Balotelli and a group of friends fired air pistols in the open in Milan's Piazza della Repubblica.

Since joining Manchester City, Balotelli has gained a cult following. Manchester City supporters regularly sang a song with lyrics which made reference to his activities. Musician Tinchy Stryder recorded a song in Balotelli's honour, Mario Balotelli.

"I've finished my words for him. I've finished. I love him as a guy, as a player. I know him. He's not a bad guy and [he] is a fantastic player. But, at this moment, I'm very sorry for him because he continues to lose his talent, his quality. I hope, for him, he can understand that he's in a bad way for his future. And he can change his behaviour in the future. But I'm finished."

Mancini in April 2012 following Balotelli's dismissal against Arsenal.

Balotelli celebrated his goal against Manchester United in October 2011 by unveiling a shirt with the words: "Why always me?" on it.

The day before the match, Balotelli and his friends set Balotelli's house on fire when a firework was let off in it, and later that week Balotelli was unveiled as Greater Manchester's ambassador for firework

safety. On 5 November 2011, at the annual fireworks display at Edenbridge, Kent, a 12 metre tall bonfire effigy of Balotelli was unveiled – complete with a Super Mario hat, and a house in the right hand and a 'Giant TNT' firework in his left, which were reference to his recent incident.

On 1 December 2014, Balotelli was accused of racism and antisemitism for posting an image on Instagram of the video game character Mario, with the caption "jumps like a black man and grabs coins like a Jew". In response to criticisms, he wrote: "My Mom is Jewish so all of u shut up please". Balotelli was raised by his Jewish adoptive mother from the age of 3.

Personal life

In 2012, Balotelli featured in GQ where he was named as the best dressed man in the world; . He also appeared on the cover of the November 2012 edition of Time Magazine.

Balotelli is a fan of mixed martial arts, as he has stated in the past that he would love to compete in the sport professionally if he were not a footballer.

Balotelli owns several cars, including a Range Rover Evoque, Ferrari 458 Spider, Bentley Continental GT, Maserati GT, and Audi R8 V10.

In January 2013, Balotelli's net worth was estimated to be US\$40 million,[182] up from US\$25 million in January 2012.[183] Balotelli bought a £3 million mansion in the United Kingdom.[182]

Balotelli no longer drinks alcohol.[184]

In July 2012, Balotelli's former girlfriend Raffaella Fico claimed that she was pregnant with his child, while Balotelli responded by claiming that he would only assume paternal responsibilities upon a positive paternity test. Fico's daughter Pia was born on 5 December 2012. In February 2014, Balotelli finally acknowledged paternity of his daughter Pia following a positive DNA test.

In March 2013, Balotelli got engaged to his Belgian fiancée, Fanny Neguesha. They split in September 2014.

Biblical input & possible illustrations on Mario Balotelli

1. Mario God made you unique & celebrates who you are

- There is no one like Mario Balotelli – stories & quotes
- October 2011 Balotelli scores against Man Utd & unveils the T-shirt - Why always me? The day before he and some friends set off fireworks in his house and set the house on fire. A week later he was unveiled as head of Manchester fire safety campaign
- Many stories of Mario's antics e.g. Giving money to homeless dressed as Santa, playing with his ipad on substitute bench, throwing darts at a youth team player....

Biblical input & possible illustrations:

- Psalm 139v14 – Fearfully & wonderfully made
- God loves the fact that Mario is free to express himself – while everything that Mario does may not be right God loves the freedom that he exhibits. He is not influenced by those around him and will

do things regardless of public opinion

- Gal 5v1 – ‘for freedom Christ has set free!’ & Jhn 8v36
- God wants us to be free to be who God has created us to be. Let our character & gifts flow and shine!
- Not be intimidated by others – boldly be the man or woman God has created us to be

2. Mario God's love is not based on your performances it is grace that saves

- Mario has played for lots of different clubs e.g. Inter Milan, Manchester City, AC Milan, Liverpool, etc....
- There have been periods of great success Internationally for Italy e.g. Euro 2012 semi-final against Germany & times of being substituted & making no impact
- One moment Mario is one of the best players on the planet the next criticised & ridiculed by the papers for his poor displays

Biblical input & possible Illustrations:

- Eph 2v8-9 – Not works but God's grace
- Romans 3v23-4
- The world judges us and praises/puts us down based on performance
- God's grace is not about me & my performance but what Jesus has done for me on the cross
- Illustrations of Grace e.g. Have some kind of target and get 2/3 volunteers to make paper aeroplanes and tell them that they get a bar of chocolate if hit the target. They will almost certainly miss – do they deserve the chocolate NO! Give each of the volunteers a bar of chocolate – God's grace is not based on performance it's His undeserving love & kindness to us

3. Mario God loves every tribe and nation

- Mario has suffered racism at different times in his life from an early age
- He became the first black player to represent Italy at a major tournament in 2012
- On and off the football field he has received racist abuse
- Mario received over 8,000 racist messages on social media whilst at Liverpool this year 2015!!

Biblical input & possible Illustrations:

- Romans 10v12-13 & Gal 3v28
- God does not discriminate – He loves everyone equally. Whoever you are, from whatever background, whatever country – call on the name of the Lord & you will be saved
- Rev 7v9 – Heaven will be every nation together before the throne of God

4. Mario the gospel invitation is to be adopted into God's family

- Mario's life story is one of finding love and acceptance in a foster parents home
- Mario's foster parents meant so much to him that he dedicated his goals that put Italy into the Euro 2012 finals to his foster parents

Biblical input & possible Illustrations:

- Gal 4v7-9 – No longer slave but a son!
- Romans 8v15 – cry 'Abba father!'
- 1 John 3v1-2
- The gospel is the invitation to be adopted in to God's family. To receive all the riches and benefits that the son enjoys.
- Adoption is the most beautiful picture of becoming a Christian e.g. what it looks like in practice....

Creative Input

Symbolic – Mario hairstyles & pictures of how dressed

Symbolic – Different football shirts/clubs Mario played for

Re-enact some of the stories involving Mario – see website

Quotes of Mario Balotelli – see websites

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