

What
would
Jesus
say to...

SERMON SERIES



Russell
Brand

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

(from <http://www.biography.com/people/russell-brand-20793249>):

"You stick a few rings and bangles about your person and it makes you incredibly bohemian, but really I'm a guy from Grays in Essex who was brought up by a single mum."

Russell Brand

Synopsis

Born in 1975, comedian Russell Brand discovered acting in school. He attended the Italia Conti Academy in London in 1991, but he was kicked out for his destructive behaviour. Brand later turned to stand-up comedy and landed a job at MTV in Britain in 2000. His next major breakthroughs came with his 2007 memoir *My Booky Wook* and his 2008 film *Forgetting Sarah Marshall*.

Early Life

Known for his clever, edgy and sometimes lewd humour, Russell Brand has enjoyed a successful career as a stand-up comedian, actor and writer. Many of his jokes stem from his own difficult experiences, including his battles with drug and sex addiction.

Born in 1975, Brand grew up in the small working-class community of Grays, England. His parents split up when he was just a baby, and he was raised by his mother. Brand's childhood was marked by many personal challenges. Around the age of seven, Brand lived with relatives for a time while his mother received treatment for her first battle with cancer. (She would go through two more bouts with the disease by the time Brand was 16.) While always close to his mother, Brand clashed with her boyfriend, which made the times he lived with her more difficult. He suffered from depression and had an eating disorder around the age of 11, Brand told *The Observer*. "It was really unusual in boys, quite embarrassing. But I found it euphoric," he explained. At another point he was sexually assaulted by a tutor.

At school, Brand sought attention through painful and gross stunts, including eating ants. One teacher described his behaviour as "acting the fool" and called him a "waste of space." He got kicked out of a boarding school for having girls in his room. The young troublemaker found some salvation

in drama club. Playing a gangster in a school production led to an interest in acting. At the age of 16, Brand went to London to study at the Italia Conti stage school. There he impressed his teachers with his talent and started experimenting with drugs. But he was kicked out of that school and the Camden Drama Centre "for smashing things up, crying and cutting myself, breaking down in tears all the time."

Early Career

While he landed a few television parts in the mid-1990s, Brand's career really started to take off with his stand-up comedy. He competed for New Act of the Year at London's Hackney Empire theatre in 2000. While he didn't win, Brand soon landed a gig on MTV as a presenter. He was fired the following year, however, after showing up to work dressed as Osama Bin Laden on the day after the September 11 terrorist attacks. "Put bluntly, it was a very stupid thing to do and I put it under what I call the 'drug-brella'—stuff I did while on drugs," Brand later told *Entertainment Weekly*.

In 2002, Brand appeared in the short-lived series *Re:Brand*, which featured the comedian taking on several disturbing challenges. He got into a boxing ring with his father, bathed with a homeless man and performed other odd acts. In an interview with *GQ*, Brand later called the show "psychological self-harm." He went to rehab around this time to face his drug addiction and found enough humour in his struggle to incorporate it into his 2004 stand-up act, *Better Now*.

In 2005, Brand tackled another personal demon. He spent time in a Philadelphia treatment centre for his sex addiction. At one point, Brand estimated that he had slept with roughly 2,000 women. He turned his life into a British best-seller in 2007 with *My Booky Wook: A Memoir of Sex, Drugs, and Stand-Up* (which was published in the United States in 2009). With his addictions in check, Brand continued to stir up controversy with his often outlandish humour. He made a series of prank calls to actor Andrew Sachs with Jonathan Ross in 2008 on his British radio show. The pair made lewd comments about the actor's granddaughter, which created a firestorm of outrage after the segment aired. In addition to issuing an apology, Brand resigned from the show.

While he had trouble in Britain, Brand had a career breakthrough in America in 2008. He appeared in the comedy *Forgetting Sarah Marshall* with Kristen Bell and Jason Segel. In the movie, Brand played a rock lothario, which was not unlike his stand-up stage persona. He also introduced the nation to his distinctive type of humour as the host of the 2008 MTV Video Music Awards. Once again, Brand made waves, joking about the Jonas Brothers' purity rings and comparing singer Britney Spears to Jesus Christ. He also had a role in Adam Sandler's comedy *Bedtime Stories* that same year.

With his acting, stand-up comedy and writing, Brand has maintained a hectic schedule in recent years. He reprised his role of wanton rocker Aldous Snow for 2010's *Get Him to the Greek* with Jonah Hill. That same year, Brand lent his voice to the animated hit *Despicable Me* and appeared in Julie Taymor's film adaptation of William Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. He also published his second memoir, *Booky Wook 2: This Time It's Personal* (2010).

In *Booky Wook 2: This Time It's Personal*, Brand wrote about his relationship with pop singer Katy Perry. The couple met in 2009 at the MTV Video Music Awards. Despite having previously sworn off marriage, Brand wed Perry in India in 2010. They seemed to be an odd couple that somehow worked—the sober, vegetarian comic and the much younger pop princess.

Brand plunged into several film projects after his marriage. He played a rich, bumbling young man in the remake of the Dudley Moore classic comedy *Arthur* (2011) and gave voice to the Easter Bunny in the animated smash *Hop* (2011). Unfortunately, Brand's union with Perry didn't last. Brand filed for divorce in December 2011, claiming irreconcilable differences. "Sadly, Katy and I are ending our marriage," he said in a statement. "I'll always adore her and I know we'll remain friends." The couple officially ended their marriage the following year.

Recent

(adapted from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russell_Brand):

From 2009, Brand began to get involved in politics, campaigning over Gaza; sharing in a parliamentary committee about drug addiction; and speaking as a protester at the G20.

In recent years, his political opinions have been evident in his work. In 2013, Brand presented and toured his comedy show *Messiah Complex*, in which he tackled advertising, the laws on drug addiction and the portrayal of his heroes, such as Gandhi, Guevara, Malcolm X and Jesus, and how he is, in comically contrived ways, similar to them.

His book *Revolution*, published in October 2014, sets out how a revolution could work with the aim "to improve life now for as many people as possible." It had massively mixed reviews.

Brand was selected by the Dalai Lama to host the Buddhist leader's 2012 youth event in Manchester. The Dalai Lama's representatives explained that Brand was selected because he had proved "the power of spirituality to effect change in his own life", while Brand stated to the BBC after the event: "I said yes because he's the living incarnation of Buddha and I thought, if you're around the Dalai Lama, that can only be good for your spiritual quest through life. He's an amazing diplomat, an incredible activist, a wonderful human being and an inspiration to us all."

Since 2013, Brand has appeared more frequently as a campaigner for serious issues rather than an entertainer. On 23 October 2013, Brand was interviewed by Jeremy Paxman for the BBC's *Newsnight* and was challenged about his call for "revolution" and whether someone who had never voted could edit a political magazine. In the issue of the *New Statesman*, published on 24 October 2013, Brand's essay explained his objection to the destruction of earth through greed and exploitation, and called for a change in consciousness to accompany political and economic measures to achieve a more sustainable future.

British commentator Joan Smith dismissed Brand as the "canny self-publicist" who indulges in "waffle about 'revolution'" as "one celebrity, I'm afraid, who's more idiot than savant." Former Independent editor Simon Kelner largely defended his appearance on *Newsnight*: "It sounded rather attractive, even if it wasn't exactly worked through. But Brand's rhetorical flourishes made up for the lack of detail".

Brand launched his YouTube series *The Trews: True News with Russell Brand* on 27 February 2014, in which he "analyses the news, truthfully, spontaneously and with great risk to his personal freedom." In addition to news analysis, he regularly has guests on the show, including economists, journalists and activists. By the end of the year, more than 200 episodes had been released on the channel.

In March 2015, readers of *Prospect* magazine voted Brand the fourth most influential thinker in the world, behind Thomas Piketty, Yanis Varoufakis, and Naomi Klein.

In April 2015, ahead of the general election, Brand interviewed Labour leader Ed Miliband on an episode of *The Trews*. Miliband claimed that he took part in order to win over people like Brand who do not vote, although his opponent David Cameron deemed the entire interview a "joke".

Brand and director Michael Winterbottom worked together to produce a documentary, *The Emperor's New Clothes*, that had its international premiere on 24 April 2015 at the Tribeca Film Festival. The film features archival footage with appearances by Brand in London and New York City, examining the financial crisis of 2007-2008 and global economic inequality. The documentary is produced by Brand's *Revolution Films* company and distributed by StudioCanal UK.

Next up, Brand is playing 'God' in a new film due out in 2016 in which Nicolas Cage stars as Gary Faulkner, a handyman from Colorado who receives a vision telling him to go to Pakistan to capture Osama Bin Laden.

Preaching Points

NB Quotes are from Brand's book, *Revolution*.

1. Russell Brand knows pain

- Tough Childhood – what would Jesus say about his parent's divorce, the way he was sexually abused, his mother's sickness with cancer?
- I think this story would bring tears to Jesus' eyes? The words 'compassion' (Matt 9:36) was a new word coined by the Gospel writers. They did not find one in the whole Greek language that suited their purpose - It is expressive of the deepest emotion; a striving of the bowels—a yearning of the innermost nature with pity.
- "I suppose that when our Saviour looked upon certain sights, those who watched him closely perceived that his internal agitation was very great, his emotions were very deep, and then his face betrayed it, his eyes gushed like founts with tears, and you saw that his big heart was ready to burst with pity for the sorrow upon which his eyes were gazing. He was moved with compassion. His whole nature was agitated with commiseration for the sufferers before him." Spurgeon
- "The reason I became a drug addict was because it was too painful not to." P34
- "Aren't we all, in one way or another, trying to find a solution to the problem of reality?" P10
- "Drugs and alcohol are not our problem, reality is our problem; drugs and alcohol are our solution to that problem."
- "If taking drugs worked I'd still be doing it, if promiscuous sex was continually fulfilling I'd've carried on, if fame and fortune were the answer I'd hurl this laptop out of the window and get on with making movies. They don't work..." p51
- Jesus would congratulate Brand on overcoming addiction. Brand's life also reveals that life is not made significant in escapism and success. We were created with a purpose – to know our Creator.

2. Russell Brand is deeply concerned about injustice

- The driving force behind his political activism is social justice.
- “The richest 1% of British people have as much as the poorest 55%. Some people like me were in the 55% and are now in the 1%, but mostly normal people are getting poorer. Globally it’s worse. Oxfam says a bus with the eighty-five richest people in the world on it would contain more wealth than the collective assets of half the earth’s population – that’s three-and-a-half billion people.” P13
- “When I was poor and complained about inequality they said I was bitter; now I’m rich and I complain about inequality they say I’m a hypocrite. I’m beginning to think they just don’t want to talk about inequality.” P113
- Jesus would affirm this vision. God’s heart has always been for justice. Eg Micah 6:8

3. Russell Brand is calling for a revolution

- His book on Revolution is an attack on inequality and injustice.
- Brand writes about Jesus that “He in fact seems much more interested in the corruptive power of money... The only time he ever let himself go and knocked over tables was when the financial industry was prioritised over normal people.” P66.
- “We’re told there’s nothing we can do about it, that this is ‘the way things are’. Naturally, of course, that verdict emanates from the elite institutions, organisations and individuals that benefit from things being as they are.” P14
- His revolution would be for equality, non-violence and ecological responsibility. Jesus would affirm much of this revolutionary manifesto.

A. Equality

- Brand believes people should not be defined in economic terms.
- Galatians 3:28 – all equal in Christ. The Church is a place where all are equal.
- “Money and the economy are just symbols, ideas, tools. If they don’t serve us, if they don’t serve the planet, then they have to change.” P97

B. Non-violence

- Brand marvels at the way Gandhi brought about revolution with non-violence.
- Explore Matthew 5:38-39 – Jesus said, if someone “strikes you on the right cheek” then you are to turn your face to him in such a way as to present your left cheek. The implication being that he may hit you again. What is the significance of the “right” cheek. Why not the left cheek? Picture someone getting hit on the right cheek. What is the most likely way for that to happen? Since most people are right handed and would hit someone with the right hand, then the only way for them to hit someone on the right cheek is to do it as a backhanded slap. What Jesus is speaking about here is not letting someone pummel you into a pile of broken bones. Rather He is talking about taking an insult. A backhanded slap is just that. It is an insult that challenges you to retaliate. It is an attempt to shame you and get you to either back down in utter humiliation or lash out and escalate the conflict. To turn the other cheek is neither humiliating nor retaliation. It is rather a response of strength that says, “I will not seek revenge because I am stronger than that”. It also says, I will not respond in shame because I have dignity in Christ. My dignity is not found in if I can hit you back

and hurt you. My dignity is found in Christ and I will respond in just the way He would respond. (The Provocative God)

C. Ecology

- Creation Care – Man has been commissioned by God to nurture his creation and not to exploit it, this is in agreement with Gen 2:15 where Adam is placed in the garden to serve (abad) and preserve (samar) it.
- Powerfully Brand recognises that “There is no doubt that I as much as anyone have to change.” P112 I think Jesus would affirm this recognition that Brand has that his failings and mistakes are part of the problem.
- “The most potent tool in maintaining the status quo is our belief that change is impossible.” P21
- Jesus believed change was possible and Brand’s Manifesto is a lot like Jesus’ Manifesto in Luke 4 (quoting Isaiah 61). It begins in relationship with the ultimate revolutionary and the Spirit of God will anoint you for the task.

18 “The Spirit of the Lord is on me,
because he has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.

He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners
and recovery of sight for the blind,
to set the oppressed free,

19 to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour.”

4. Russell Brand is deeply spiritual

- Profound understanding that the revolution needs to begin in ourselves.
- “How will this revolution work? How can we change the world? How can we change ourselves? Can we really overthrow the corrupt and the powerful, not just the corrupt in society but the corrupt in ourselves?” P4
- Back to Luke 4 and the starting point for transformation is accepting Christ and inviting His Spirit into your life. You could also draw on 2 Cor 5:17.
- Brand talks about God and defended the existence of God against Stephen Fry. “The reason I keep mentioning God is because I believe in God. A lot of people are surprised by that, what with it being 2014 and this being a technologically advanced secular culture.” P22
- Before going on Newsnight, Brand remembers... “That’s why I’m on my knees now, in the toilet of the lobby of the Landmark hotel. Praying. ‘God please make me a channel of your peace.’”
- In his book there is a whole chapter exploring the Lord’s Prayer.
- Brand is definitely on a spiritual journey. “Since I’ve been clean and have increasingly made spiritual pursuits my priority, these neglected traits have become more and more definite. Don’t get me wrong, erring is for me a daily occurrence. Each evening when I reflect on the day’s events, like a match of the day highlights show which is just about the stuff I’ve done, there’s usually one or two clips where I wince at my selfishness or missed opportunities to move closer to the source.” P146
- But Brand’s theology draws upon different faiths and different ways to meditate. He explains “the

only meaningful interpretation of any religious teaching is to honour the divine within ourselves and love the divine in one another." P68

- I believe Jesus would say to him, I am not just a generic 'god' but I have a name. I can be known... I am more than just a spiritual force! I know you intimately. I put those passions for justice in you.
- Jesus may then say, revolution begins by making me Lord.
- Have we made Jesus Lord?
- Explore what it meant to say Jesus is Lord and not Caesar is Lord!
- Illustration of putting Jesus in the driving seat of your life.

Creative Input

Oxfam poster

<https://stormystickbox.files.wordpress.com/2015/01/b7yyonsiaax7al-jpg-large.jpeg>

Russell Brand Rips Stephen Fry's Atheism

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_Te862VIUBo

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