

Luke 21:5-19

Some of his disciples were remarking about how the temple was adorned with beautiful stones and with gifts dedicated to God. But Jesus said, 'As for what you see here, the time will come when not one stone will be left on another; every one of them will be thrown down.'

'Teacher,' they asked, 'when will these things happen? And what will be the sign that they are about to take place?'

He replied: 'Watch out that you are not deceived. For many will come in my name, claiming, "I am he," and, "The time is near." Do not follow them. When you hear of wars and uprisings, do not be frightened. These things must happen first, but the end will not come right away.'

Then he said to them: 'Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be great earthquakes, famines and pestilences in various places, and fearful events and great signs from heaven.'

'But before all this, they will seize you and persecute you. They will hand you over to synagogues and put you in prison, and you will be brought before kings and governors, and all on account of my name. And so you will bear testimony to me. But make up your mind not to worry beforehand how you will defend yourselves. For I will give you words and wisdom that none of your adversaries will be able to resist or contradict. You will be betrayed even by parents, brothers and sisters, relatives and friends, and they will put some of you to death. Everyone will hate you because of me. But not a hair of your head will perish. Stand firm, and you will win life.'

A photograph of a person holding a protest sign that reads "WHO DO YOU BELIEVE?". The sign is white with black text. The background is a blurred crowd of people, suggesting a public demonstration or rally. The sign is held in front of a person's face, which is partially visible on the right side of the frame.

Dear God,

Lord, where I am a leader in my home, at work, my church or elsewhere, I ask you to help me lead well. Give me courage to lead in the right way and do the right things. Lord God, help me always to remember, that you go before me and you will be with me; you will never leave me nor forsake me. Help me to know I need never be afraid; I do not need to be discouraged even in the face of what seems difficult. In Jesus' name, Amen

I wonder how you decide whether something is right or wrong, true or false – particularly in relation to religious teaching. It used to be the case that anyone who was a religious leader, for example a priest like me, would be automatically believed if they said something was right, correct or the will of God because wearing a clerical collar gave a minister a form of authority.

Now though, and quite rightly, people are far more likely to question religious leaders, rather than just automatically believing what they say. Sometimes that's because religious leaders have made serious mistakes or are saying something that doesn't sound quite right but in other ways, it's also because our society has changed. That can be a good thing, but how do you know who and what to believe? There are no easy answers to that question but part of figuring it out relates to how your beliefs grow and change throughout your life so here are a few suggestions:

First, ask questions. If a religious leader ever suggests you shouldn't question what they say, that should set alarm bells ringing. We are human beings, just like you. Second, don't be afraid of having doubts or being unsure about issues of faith. It is normal for your faith to grow and evolve over time. Having doubts does not mean you've lost your faith, it means you're wrestling with it and that's perfectly ok – even if that means you're wrestling with whether some religious teaching is right or wrong.

Finally, if a religious leader tells you to do something that would hurt other people, steer clear. Faith and religion should always be about peace, and treating others in the same way you would like to be treated. Every single major world religion has a version of the golden rule somewhere in their scriptures. If a religious leader is suggesting that a form of unkindness is acceptable, that's a red flag!

These three things aren't everything you need to consider but they're a good start. Oh and finally, remember that we all make mistakes, whether we wear a bit of plastic around our necks or not!

A photograph of a person holding a protest sign. The sign is white with black text that reads "WHO DO YOU BELIEVE?". The person is wearing a dark jacket and a dark hat. The background is a blurred crowd of people and a brick wall.