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A First Look at Who Jesus Is

Introduction

Thanks for worshipping with us this morning. I'm excited because today we are starting a new series of messages... Jesus: Who He is and Why He matters.

I didn't know Jesus and He certainly did not matter to me until I was in college. He was like Santa Clause – some believed he was real but eventually they grew up and discovered “the truth.”

But talk to me now, talk with any Christian for that matter who knows who Jesus is, and you will find that Jesus has totally reshaped their life.

For Christians their opinion on Jesus changes from, “He does not matter at all” to “He supremely matters in all things!”

Why is that? Who is this Jesus person who so re-orientes peoples lives?

Christians believe that in Jesus they have found someone more special than any other. Lives change when Jesus becomes known.

Knowing Jesus changes the course of your life. I suppose such is the nature of truth:

- Knowing a hurricane is approaching changes your planned activities for the day.
- As does knowing an enemy is about to invade or a much anticipated package has arrived for pick up at the post office.
- Knowing you have cancer changes things, as does knowing that certain things cause it.

Truth changes the wise, in general and especially when it comes to discovering the truth of who Jesus is.

The New Testament book called the Gospel of Mark is one person's story revealing who Jesus is. There are other accounts of Jesus: Mathew appears first in our Bibles, Mark second, Luke third, and John fourth. All of them reveal who Jesus is from a slightly different vantage point.

Mark is the shortest and most concise. What can I say, I'm a guy, I don't like long books. Just tell me the facts and I'm good. And use lots of stories would you. And keep it moving, with lots of action.

That is the book of Mark. That is the book we are going to take a look at over the next several weeks. And during this time, I'm asking you to seek for answers to question, "Who is Jesus?"

We will be exposed to Him today, and then next week we'll know Him a bit more, and then the following week a bit more, and my hope and prayer is that at the end of this series, you will know exactly who He is and why He matters.

If you are someone who does not know Jesus for beans, you have come to a good place to discover who the Bible says He is.

If you are someone who knows Jesus well, then this will be a time of refreshing – sort of like a glass of milk to go along with your chocolate chip cookies. You may have grown up to the point where you don't drink milk at every meal, but it is still appreciated with cookies. Likewise, it is always good to remember Jesus.

Along these "milk and cookie" lines, I grew up in Hawaii. The natural beauty there is stunning. But you know what, I took it for granted and almost did not even notice it as my life got increasingly busy with job and parenting responsibilities. We lived in Kailua on Oahu's east coast. I had always loved the North side of the island, that's where the waves were in the winter and where the water was crystal clear in the summer. Lori and I moved to the Boston area so I could go to Seminary, and when we came back to visit, Kailua was stunning. The water I had previously thought less desirable on that coast was absolutely magical. With the combo pack of the warm sun and the gentle breeze it's hard to beat. But when I last lived there, I had taken it so for granted that I had lost my appreciation for what is truly so special.

We can do that as Christians, too. We can take Jesus for granted. He becomes the new normal in our lives and we forget to take notice and appreciate His goodness and value. Sad but true. So if you are a Christian already, my hope for you during this series is that you take note and appreciate the Jesus you know but may have forgotten just a bit.

There is probably a third group of people here, those who know Him and have been taking careful note of who He is. For you let me just entice you into this study by saying, I have known and followed Jesus now since 1980 and I'm still learning more about Him, and with each increase in my knowledge of Jesus, my life is enriched.

So this morning we are going to take a look at who Jesus is by looking into the Biblical book called the Gospel of Mark.

I trust that as we do so, your lives will be enriched and your general hope for a life worth living will be increased. As we come to know Jesus, hope can not help but to be increased.

Let's read the first verse of the Gospel of Mark and remember, we are pursuing the question, "Who is Jesus?"

[Screen: 1:1 NASB]

Jesus by way of Introduction – Verse 1

Mark here gives us the end of the story from the beginning in terms which will be defined in the rest of His gospel – His good news. Who is Jesus? Listen to V. 1: **"The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, Son of God."** Right out of the gate Mark tells us who Jesus is. He is Christ and He is the Son of God.

Mark does not go further immediately and explain these two terms, rather he unfolds the meaning in the rest of his gospel account. I'm content not to jump ahead but to let Mark fill out what he means by "Christ" and "Son of God" in his own way and on his own timing.

I did wonder as I read this what Mark's original readers would have understood already about these two terms. Mark wrote His gospel mainly for a Gentile (non Jewish) audience, most believe this book to be written to Romans. But this audience was not as unfamiliar as we probably are of Jewish customs. The Romans and Jesus shared the same city and did life together.

"Christ" is the Greek translation of the Jewish word Messiah or "anointed one" and they were probably aware that the Jewish community was expectantly waiting for a Messiah, although just what that Messiah would look like and do was variously interpreted -- Political ruler, King, Prophet, Priest....¹ So I imagine that Mark's original readers would have an understanding of "Christ" not unlike, "Hm, Christ, yeah, that person the Jews are expecting to come and ... do what now?"

"Son of God" is a title nowhere exactly used in the OT Scriptures, and only once used (other than referring to Jesus) in NT Scriptures. That use is in Luke's genealogy of Jesus calling Adam, the first man, "the son of God." Luke 3:38. So, "Son of God" would be new to the ears of Mark's readers and I imagine would raise more questions regarding meaning than it would provide meaning itself.

The name Jesus itself is worth taking a quick look at. It is the Greek translation of the Hebrew Joshua which in turn means, "Savior." It is interesting to note that when the angel told Joseph that Mary was to have a son, he said, ""She will bear a Son; and you shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins." Mat 1:21

These words, together with Mark's use of the word 'gospel' = good news, fashion a brief, simple, yet profound introduction: "The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God." This simple, straight talking, profundity is representative of Mark's whole gospel. [Say v.1 with animation: Jesus=savior, Christ=messianic ruler expected by Jewish folks, Son of God=divinity]

¹ What we CAN affirm is that a messianic expectation (broadly considered) was present in the wide range of Jewish groups that produced literature--throughout the time period-- and that for some of them, their expectations for the 'deliverer who shall come forth from Jacob' was intense, theologically-charged, and surprisingly detailed. It was into this world of mixed hopes, pre-conceived categories, and pre-built eschatologies that Jesus of Nazareth proclaimed that 'the Kingdom of God has drawn nigh'... Summary note from Glenn Miller posting, Messianic Expectations in 1st Century Judaism from: <http://www.christian-thinktank.com/messiah.html>

This one verse probably did grab Mark's readers' attention and have them interested in hearing more. That's an effective introduction.

When we get through listening carefully to the Gospel of Mark, this introduction to Jesus as the Christ the Son of God will be loaded with meaning and will prove to be a very clear and good summary of who Jesus is. Let's take a few steps down that road of discovery right now.

Jesus as Part of God's Existing Plan

Let's read verses 2-8 and we'll discover that this new and good news is set in the context of God's previous plan which He had announced via the prophets of the Old Testament. John the Baptist can be seen as the last OT Prophet. – As I read verses 2-8, hold in your mind the question, "Who is Jesus?" [Read V.2-8]

Let's make some very simple observations here: Who is Jesus?

- Mark begins not at the birth of Jesus which is a logical spot to start telling someone's story, but back several thousand years before Jesus was born in Bethlehem. Mark draws on three OT passages which speak of a "messenger" who will precede the coming of "The Lord." He then indicates that the foretold messenger is John the Baptist and that the "The Lord" who's way John prepares is Jesus. So, Jesus is someone who has been a part of God's plan from millennia gone by; someone who God had announced previously through His prophets. Jesus is One God had spoken of in the way past by the words of His prophets, but who has now come in person.
- In this passage we also see that Jesus is One who's way is prepared specifically by repentance which brings forth confession "for the forgiveness of sins." Repentance of course is more than an, "I'm sorry," it is by definition a change of direction away from one action or way of life and toward another. Specifically it is a turning away from sin and all the way to the opposite direction which is toward God. Mark says that John the Baptist called people to repent so that they would be able to receive the "forgiveness of sins." What does this have to do with our central question, "Who is Jesus?" Well we see here that Jesus is someone who's coming calls for repentance. Before people met Jesus, God directed His prophet John to call them to repentance. Having repented, the way was prepared for Jesus to come. Before the bride walks down the aisle a white runner is often run. Before the president steps out of his limo, the Secret Service shield him. Before the honored guests come, the gracious hosts clean the house and prepare the food. Before the coming of the Lord, John called people to repentance. Now we could leave this as an interesting discovery of facts unrelated to us, or we could wonder a bit, "For Jesus to come in my life I wonder if I too need to repent of my sins?"
- Who is Jesus? V. 5 says that all the people of Judea were coming to John and all the people of Jerusalem too, in order to be baptized in the Jordan river. Mark's use of the word "all" indicates that he did not have just a few folks repenting from their sin, but a large number. This was a significant movement. If John were preaching today, he would be famous, well known, one of those guys people would travel miles just to hear speak. John was a big thing. What does this have to do with who Jesus is? In v. 7 we see famous John saying that that "After **me** **One** is coming who is mightier than **I**, and **I** am not fit to stoop down and untie the thong of **His** sandals. 8 "**I** baptized you ^[b]with water; but **He** will baptize you with **the Holy Spirit**." Who is Jesus?
 - He is bigger than famous John the Baptist.
 - He is "mightier."
 - He is so much more worthy than unarguably worthy John that John sees himself as not even fit to do the most menial of jobs for him.

- He baptizes those who repent with the Holy Spirit. You don't even have to understand all that means to appreciate that it is something heavy. John Baptized with water, Jesus uses the Holy Spirit. You get baptized by John you get wet and prepared to meet Jesus. You get baptized by Jesus you get filled with the Holy Spirit of God.

Who is Jesus? We are just scratching the surface and don't worry, these introductory disclosures of who is will be filled out as we take a thoughtful look at the rest of this book. But we have seen from v. 1 that He is the "Christ" and also from v. 1 that He is the "Son of God." And from verses 2-8 we see that Jesus is part of God's plan from the beginning. He was to be announced by a messenger and have His way prepared before He came; John the Baptist was that announcer, that preparer. And famous as John the Baptist was, Jesus is a bigger deal than John. Jesus is mightier. Jesus is more worthy. Jesus baptizes not with water, but with the Holy Spirit. Let's read the rest of our passage for this morning.

Jesus in "the wilderness"

In verses 9-13 (and actually all along but I haven't yet commented on it) we see Jesus in relation to "the wilderness." We see that Mark begins his telling of the story of Jesus with the background of the wilderness. Now what is up with this? The wilderness it turns out is not only a relatively untamed land that people in Bible times had to deal with, but it is the place of God's special meeting with His people. Let me give you just a few examples:

Exodus 3:1-8 -- The Burning Bush

- God led His people into the wilderness when He was delivering them out of bondage to the Pharaoh in Egypt. Ex 13:18
- God provided water for His people in the wilderness (Ex 15, 17)
- God provided food in the wilderness when there was no food to be found. (Ex 16)
- God revealed the 10 commandments to Moses in the wilderness (Ex 19 ff)
- The Wilderness is the place where the Scapegoat was sent in the Jewish ceremony seeking atonement of sins (LV 16)
- The wilderness is the place God spoke to Moses (Nu 1:1, 3:14; 9:1...)
- The wilderness is the place of God's judgment (Nu14...)
- The wilderness was the place God had His people wonder, and God revealed much to them there. It was a harsh place from which the lord delivered them out of into the promised land. And interestingly, what river did they cross to come out of the wilderness and into the promised land? Why is/was the River Jordan, the same river, near the same spot, where we meet John now baptizing Jesus.
- The wilderness is the place God established His first covenant with man that was mediated with Moses.
- Summary: Mark can not help but bring up such a significant place as the wilderness. For to Him it is loaded with meaning. It is the place where God has met His people in the past and where – of course -- God in Jesus begins to meet man again. Although Mark was speaking to a Roman audience, he can not help but take note of this significant place of God's new work with His new people in Jesus.
- Like Nepal to a mountain climber, Oahu's North Shore to a surfer, the Gallapagos to an naturalist, the Bugaboos to a skier, Pebble Beach to a golfer...all these places to the informed conjure up many images to the initiated. So too, the wilderness does to Mark.

Who is Jesus? He is Christ, the Son of God, part of God's plan from the beginning. He is the fulfillment of God's previous prophecy, He is a bigger deal than big deal John: mightier, more worthy, baptizing with the Holy Spirit and here we note that Jesus is the new meeting of God with man from the old meeting place of God with man. Let me make a couple more observations about Who Jesus is and we'll call it good for today.

In verses 9-13 Mark presents Jesus in paradoxes: greatness and humility, divinity and humanity

On the one hand we see a man like any other

- Jesus is One who ⁽¹⁾came from Nazareth in Galilee
 - **John 1:46** Nathanael said to him, "Can any **good** thing come out of **Nazareth**?" Philip said to him, "Come and see."
- Jesus is One who was baptized by John. What in the world? Why would the greater be baptized by the lesser? [identifying with sinful humanity]

On the other hand we see a man like no other

- Jesus is One who after His baptism
- Saw
 - heavens opened
 - the Spirit descend upon Him like a dove
 - Have you seen this?
- Heard
 - God declare: "You are my beloved Son, in You I am well pleased."
 - Have you heard this?
- Jesus is One who after His baptism
- Was impelled by the Spirit into the wilderness where He was:
 - tempted by Satan for 40 days,
 - with wild beasts and
 - being attended to by angels.
- Have you had these experiences?

Who is Jesus? He is man like any man from a small un-noteworthy town, a man baptized like many others; yet He is a man with unique experiences and endorsements from God Himself who here declares that Jesus is His beloved Son.

Conclusion

THE most important question anyone could ask is, "Who is Jesus?" If He is who He says He is, if He is who the Bible says He is, if He is who Christians believe Him to be, the Savior that God has sent to secure forgiveness of our sins, if He is the very Son of God in whom God is well pleased, we can't do nothing about Him, He calls forth a response from us.

This morning as we close in prayer, I ask you to consider what the Holy Spirit may be nudging you to do with the new knowledge or the reminder of who we have seen the Scriptures to testify about who Jesus is.

Let's pray.