

# The Real Jesus

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[0:00] Amen. So in today's gospel reading from Matthew, we get kind of what I think of as the condensed version of the birth of Jesus.

Unlike what is probably the more familiar account from Luke, we're pretty much just getting the bare facts in Matthew. But I think that what we do get in Matthew is absolutely essential to understanding who Jesus is and why he came.

Now, in fact, this week we were reading from Mia's storybook Bible one evening, the portion taken from Luke 1, where the birth of Jesus is foretold.

As we started to read what Gabriel said to Mary, that she would have a son, Mia said, that's Jesus who saves us. Now, I could have found myself wondering if she had been looking at my sermon text for this morning.

I know your tricks, little one. That's Jesus who saves us.

[1:36] Isn't that pretty much what the angel tells Joseph about who the child is and what the child is going to do? The angel says, Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.

She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins. She'll call his name Jesus.

Jesus. Yahweh saves. God saves. You can often tell a lot about a person from their name. And you definitely can in this case.

The salvation that comes only from God is at the core of what this child will accomplish. As we can see from what follows immediately afterwards.

Because the angel follows it up with this. For he will save his people from their sins. You shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.

[2:44] Is that the Jesus that you know, the one whose birth you're about to celebrate? I hope so. We need to be sure that we know, that we celebrate, that we put our trust in the real Jesus.

The one who saves his people from their sins. Because he is the only one who can save us from our sins. We will never find salvation outside of Christ, because there is no other way of salvation. And the trouble is that there are so many counterfeits out there. So many false promises. So many idols that we are tempted to cling to. And so many deceptions that we can fall into.

And some of these deceptions, some of these idols, are called by the name of Jesus. Not the real Jesus. Not the real Jesus who is who he says he is.

Not the real Jesus who saves his people from their sins. Not the real Jesus who calls us to place our faith in him as Savior. Who calls us to follow him as Lord.

[3:52] Not the real Jesus, the eternal Son of God, who took on human flesh, who was born as a baby, to live the perfect life we could not live, to die in our place as our substitute, to rise again to win eternal life for all who put their trust in him.

Because that is what the real Jesus has done. But have you seen that there are counterfeits out there, manufactured by the idolatry of the human heart?

This isn't a new problem. We see it already at work in the New Testament era. We see it, for example, in 2 John chapter 1. For many deceivers have gone out into the world.

Those who do not confess the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh. Such a one is the deceiver and the antichrist. John goes on. Everyone who goes on ahead and does not abide in the teaching of Christ does not have God.

Whoever abides in the teaching has both the Father and the Son. So already in the New Testament era, the church is dealing with the problem who proclaimed a kind of Christ, but not the real Christ.

[5:13] The Son of God who came in the flesh to save his people from their sins. And that problem is still with us today. This morning, I want us to think about a few contemporary examples of that problem.

So that first of all, we're not vulnerable to falling into that trap ourselves, but also for the sake of our gospel witness to a culture that in so many ways really has no clue who Jesus really is.

Now on social media recently, I ran into a meme that said this. Buddha was not a Buddhist. Jesus was not a Christian.

Muhammad was not a Muslim. They were teachers who taught love. Love was their religion.

Feeling warm and fuzzy yet? Now a couple of really obvious errors jumped right out at me as soon as I saw this.

First, there is this assumption that all religions are the same. That Jesus taught the same thing as other religious teachers. And that just isn't true.

[6 : 25] Jesus was and is more than just another teacher. And what he taught was really distinctive. And he was very clear that he was more than just another teacher.

Jesus taught that he himself is the only way to salvation. The only way to eternal life. Jesus said, John 14, 6, I am the way and the truth and the life.

No one comes to the Father except through me. Now whoever came up with this meme probably wanted to suggest that there are many paths to God.

And then they tried to claim Jesus in the service of this idea, which is the exact opposite of what Jesus himself claimed. There is one path to God.

And that path is a person, the Lord Jesus Christ. The other problem I see in this quote is the suggestion that just like other moral teachers, Jesus was primarily concerned with teaching us to be nice to each other.

[7 : 32] Jesus does tell us to love, to love God and our neighbor, but he approaches that in a completely different way than other teachers, doesn't he? He starts with God's love for us, for sinners who did not love God.

It's what we read in John 3, 16, for God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life.

That's God's love for those he loved first. Those who didn't love him. And that's what we see reflected in 1 John 4, 10-11.

In this is love, not that we have loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. And then that's followed with, Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

God loved us when we didn't love him, and he sent his only Son to die for us. And if we love one another, it's because we know the love of God in Jesus Christ.

[8 : 46] Jesus is unique. No other teacher has ever taught us about love by dying for our sins.

Only Jesus. So Jesus, as a mere teacher like other teachers, that is not the real Jesus, the one who saves his people from their sins.

Now there's another really common error in our culture, one that I think is pretty closely related.

Jesus as the self-help coach. You probably encountered that false Jesus as well.

Studies on religion in America are showing that a lot of young Americans do believe that there is a God, that he wants us to be good and nice.

That's his primary concern. And of course, good and nice people go to heaven when they die. God wants us to be good, and we'll get to heaven when we die by being good.

[9 : 48] Have you ever heard that one before? In this scheme of salvation, Jesus, if he is mentioned at all, is the self-help coach.

He shows you how to be nice and how to pull yourself up by your own bootstraps. And of course, is a good example to you so that you can learn to be good and be saved by being good.

Anyone see a problem there? Is there any suggestion in Scripture that we can rely on our works for our salvation?

What do we see in Galatians 3.10-11? For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse. For it is written, Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the book of the law and do them.

Now, seeking salvation through our own goodness leads to misery and ruin, but that doesn't stop us as human beings from trying it. We do the same thing and expect different results.

[11 : 03] Now, we should have learned by now that we cannot be good enough to meet the standards of a perfectly righteous and holy God. But, there is one who is able and who is worthy.

And that is Jesus Christ. Not a self-help coach, but a Savior. And the answer to how can we be saved? It's not through being nice. That's not the grounds of our salvation.

The only answer is the gospel of Jesus Christ. Writing on Galatians, the great theologian and reformer Martin Luther said this, I must listen to the gospel.

It tells me not what I must do, but what Jesus Christ, the Son of God, has done for me. In other words, brothers and sisters, it is about Christ's perfect righteousness, credited to us as a free gift by faith.

His blood shed for the forgiveness of our sins. It is about what Christ has done. He is the one doing the saving, not our niceness. He is the one who can and will save his people from their sins.

[12 : 18] So, Jesus isn't the religious teacher like every other religious teacher. He isn't the self-help coach. And here's another thing he isn't.

The political figure, just like every other political figure. Now, there's a tendency that's pretty common in our time to view Jesus primarily as a failed political revolutionary.

Try to overthrow the Romans, it didn't work out, he got crucified, and that's a bummer. Well, when the election was going on, I saw plenty, this past election, I saw plenty of people claiming Jesus as a Jewish socialist.

Now, I'm not trying to pick on socialists in particular here. A lot of people from all kinds of angles want to claim Jesus as a political mascot, as though what Jesus really came to teach is nothing other than their own political program.

Here's something we keep missing the memo on, and that's this, my kingdom is not of this world.

We don't get to claim Jesus as a mascot for our preferences. Jesus isn't an idol or a tool that we can manipulate or use as propaganda.

[13 : 35] Jesus is Lord. He claims us, not the other way around. He is not a political idol, he's not a mascot, and he certainly isn't a failed revolutionary.

He is the king of a kingdom that will triumph over every enemy and will reign over every other king and kingdom that this world has ever known.

He will reign in victory as king of kings and as lord of lords, and every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

not a failed political revolutionary, not a self-help coach, not merely a good teacher. We need the real Jesus, the Savior who saves his people from their sins.

The other day, I ran across a really incredible quote from Tim Keller. Anyone else read Tim Keller? Everyone reads Tim Keller. Tim Keller had this to say, We are more sinful and flawed in ourselves than we ever dared believe, yet at the very same time, we are more loved and accepted in Jesus Christ than we ever dared hope.

[14 : 54] The bad news is that we are so sinful and flawed and broken that a political theorist or a coach or a good teacher wouldn't be enough to fix us.

Our problem, which is our sin, runs so much deeper than that. But here is the good news. We have a Savior, Jesus, the Son of God.

He can do what a coach or a good teacher can't do. He can put away our sins forever through His one sacrifice of Himself.

He can defeat death on our behalf through His resurrection. He can reconcile us to the Father. And in Him, we can find new life and a hope that nothing in this world can match.

Here is what it comes down to. The false images of Jesus can't compare to the real thing. They can't save us. We need more than that.

[16 : 03] The self-help coach might make us feel better, but the self-help coach is going to make us feel better about being dead in our trespasses and sins. To look upon the glory of Jesus, to see the beauty of the Lord, to place our faith in Him, in His blood and righteousness, He who cannot fail, what can compare to that and why would we settle for less?

So this morning, do we know Jesus? The real Jesus? The one, the only one who can save us from our sins?

Jesus, the only way to eternal life. And if we do know Jesus, do we sometimes find ourselves tempted not to submit to Him as Lord, but to view Him as a safe coach or teacher who minds his own business and doesn't ask too much from us?

Find ourselves tempted to manufacture a counterfeit Jesus that's safer than the real thing? We need to be aware of that temptation, brothers and sisters, because it's real.

Our hearts are really good at making and worshiping idols. final question. Do you have friends? [17 : 24] Do you have neighbors? Do you have loved ones? Do you have co-workers who don't know the real Jesus? Who don't know who He is? Are you going to tell them about Him?

Here's a suggestion for where to start if you're wondering. Invite them to church on Christmas Eve. I hear that we're going to be talking a little bit about Jesus. And let's prepare our own hearts to celebrate the greatest gift the world has ever received.

The gift of God's own Son, Jesus, who saves His people from their sins. In the name of the Father, of the Son, of the Holy Spirit. Amen.