

Amazing Claims

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[0:00] Please be seated. Super size. Extra crispy.

New improved flavor. Bonus features. Jumbo special. If you've been anywhere near a supermarket this week, you may well have had some or perhaps all of these slogans jump out at you as you walked along the shopping aisles.

Super sized potato chips. Extra crispy chicken strips. 50% more mils of soft drink.

New improved beef stock flavor. Bonus features for your dishwashing detergent. Jumbo special on juicy ripe tomatoes.

And all of it done to convince us of one simple thing. That product there. It's new. It's different.

[1:13] And I better get one. Friends, be it super sized or extra crispy or whatever, we can't help but love the new, the different, the improved.

Our eyes scan the department store shelves, hypersensitive to anything that looks remotely new or improved, or which offers some exciting extra feature.

I must admit, I once naively thought that there had to be at least some things that weren't extra special. I thought, surely there's something out there that retains an ordinariness about it.

Toothpaste. Surely toothpaste will be my answer. Not the super duper gel variety. Not new improved minty fresh flavor.

Not comes with bonus toothbrush. Just basic, un-extraordinary toothpaste. Well, unfortunately, I was disappointed. For just the other day, I reached for my Colgate toothpaste.

[2:22] And what do I see on the box? Quote, great regular flavor. Great regular flavor.

Even the normal. Even the ordinary. Even the regular. Even the non-special. Is being marketed as special. Even regular. Is great.

And sometimes, what's new and different is just a repackaging of an old product. Sometimes, what's new and different is just the same product with a different spin.

And sometimes, what's new and different really is a superior product. But, what's new and different?

But, is he just the repackaging of an old prophet? Is he just the same man with a different spin? Or is he, in fact, a superior being?

[3:31] These are questions that people of Jesus' day were forced to confront. And 2,000 years later, we as a church and as a world must confront them also.

Jesus Christ. How are we to understand this new and different man? Before answering that, we should be reminded of just how Jesus has already proved his newness according to Mark's gospel.

He did this in four ways. He said, follow me to his prospective disciples. When potential disciples were meant to approach the teacher, this was new. This was different.

Secondly, in Mark 1, 41, he heals the leper. The uncleanest of the unclean. To touch them was to be stained. But Jesus chooses to touch.

I do choose. Be made clean, he said. This was new. This was different. Thirdly, Jesus claimed authority to forgive sin. In Mark 2, the scribes cried, no, no, only God can forgive sin.

[4 : 35] This man is blasphemous. This was new. This was different. And finally, Jesus eats with tax collectors and sinners. In Mark 2, 16, he's ruining his credibility.

But his response, I have come to call not the righteous, but sinners. This was new. This was different. And so the verdict was clear.

This Jesus was unlike anyone who'd gone before him. He threw convention to the wind. He wasn't interested in conforming to social practices. Instead, if Jesus were a supermarket item, we'd expect bold lettering, flashy catchphrases, perhaps a glitzy product launch, all in an effort to convince us of one simple thing.

This Jesus, he's new. He's different. But is that enough? Jesus is new and different.

Is that enough? Friends, this morning, I want us to answer no. Regarding Jesus as new and different is not nearly enough, not by half, if we are serious about believing the whole truth about this man.

[5 : 53] It's not enough to believe that Jesus is a new radical. It's not enough to say that he's a non-conformist. Plenty of unbelievers think that Jesus is worthy of admiration for being a radical.

But it's not enough that Jesus is just new and different because he is more than that. He is superior. Yes, he's new.

Yes, he's different. Yes, he's radical. But if we stop at this, Jesus Christ is no different to any of our latest whiz-bang, god-like figures with their new theories about the meaning of life.

No. Jesus the radical is also Lord Jesus, the superior Lord. And this is what our passage in Mark 2, 18 to 28, is about.

Radical Jesus is Lord Jesus. Radical Jesus is Lord Jesus. And he demonstrates his superior lordship in three ways.

[6 : 58] As Lord and Messiah, as Lord of the new order, and as Lord of the Sabbath. And we'll look at each of these in turn. Firstly, Jesus shows he is Lord and Messiah in chapter 2, 18 to 20.

Though I'm sure you'll agree there doesn't seem to be much in the people's question about the Messiah. After all, their question is about fasting. Look at verse 18. Now John's disciples and the Pharisees were fasting, and people came and said to him, why do John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast.

Now fasting in the Old Testament was often an expression of repentance and mourning. And both of these aspects came together for the one mandatory day in the year when all of Israel was called to fast.

That is the Day of Atonement. On this day, to fast was to mourn over sin in preparation for being cleansed from it. Fast forward some thousand odd years and it had become Jewish custom to fast once a year and twice a week on Mondays and Thursdays.

Not only this, the act of fasting had taken on another level of meaning. For Jews of Jesus' time, to fast was also seen as a means of hastening the coming of the Messiah and His Kingdom.

[8 : 24] In other words, fasting had become a Jewish equivalent of that great Christian prayer, Come Lord Jesus. For the Jews, it was, Come Messiah.

Come quickly and redeem your chosen people. Come and rise up against our Roman oppressors. And although this twice-weekly fasting was voluntary, it seemed to be an unspoken expectation, so much so that Jesus' disciples are noticed for not fasting.

And thus, the question is posed to Jesus, Why do your disciples not fast? You can understand the criticism, can't you? I mean, if the act of fasting was designed to anticipate the Messiah and speed His coming, then failure to fast was equal to putting an obstacle in the way of the coming Messiah.

So why indeed, Jesus, do your disciples not fast? Well, as He often does, Jesus answers their question with a question of His own.

Read verse 19. Jesus said to them, The wedding guests cannot fast while the bridegroom is with them, can they? As long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast.

[9 : 41] Well, what does that mean? Here was a question about fasting and suddenly, Jesus has got us at a wedding. Has He misheard the question? Is He avoiding the question? Not likely.

In fact, Jesus' response gives us a crystal clear lesson about His superiority as Lord and Messiah. He is calling Himself the bridegroom and His guests, His disciples, His guests.

And the emphasis is about the bridegroom's presence among His guests now, and that being the reason for the guests not fasting. Why is this language significant?

Well, if you return to the Old Testament, we find this wedding language is in fact not new. Jesus is picking up on phrases used by the prophet Isaiah. Isaiah 62 says this, You, that is Israel, shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the Lord and a royal diadem in the hand of your God.

You shall no more be termed forsaken and your land shall no more be termed desolate, but you shall be called my delight is in her and your land married.

[10 : 54] For the Lord delights in you and your land shall be married. For as a young man marries a young woman, so shall your builder marry you. And as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you.

As the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you. God is likening himself to a bridegroom and he likens Israel to his bride.

Jesus is the bridegroom and he's now living among his followers, his guests, who will be his church, his bride, at the end of the age.

Are you getting the significance of this? Jesus is saying he is God or he is the bridegroom of Israel. In other words, he is the Messiah.

And if the act of fasting was meant to speed the coming of the Messiah, Jesus is saying there's no need to fast because I am here. I am the messianic age.

[12 : 02] I am the redemption. I have arrived. That's why his disciples don't need to fast for the bridegroom is already present among his guests.

That is, the Messiah has come in the person of Jesus Christ. It's not a time for waiting. It's not a time to be sorrowful and glum.

It's a time of celebration. But even Jesus admits in verse 20 that the celebration will not last as he speaks about his coming death.

The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them and then they will fast on that day. Yes, that day will be a time for sorrow.

It will be a time when the faithful believers wait expectantly for the promise to be kept that the Son of Man will rise on the third day. As most of you know, I recently got engaged and as I was thinking about how these verses relate to us, I couldn't help but speculate about what my wedding day would be like.

[13:08] And it led me to thinking, what if? What if I was waiting at the church and finally my lovely bride Camille walked down the aisle and what if she eventually stood beside me and said, no, I don't believe you are my bridegroom.

You are not who you say you are. I'm waiting for someone better. Well, suffice to say I'd be a bit shocked. But friends, that is what we say to Jesus when we deny his superiority, when we fail to admit that he is Lord and Messiah.

We're saying, Jesus, you might be new and different but you're not superior. We're saying, Jesus, you're not the Messiah, you're not from God, I'm still waiting. we need not wait.

The Messiah is here. God has come in Jesus. There is no new fad that would be better than Jesus. There is no new theologian who would be better than Jesus.

There is no new cure for terrorism that will be better than Jesus. There is no new theory of everything that will be better than Jesus. There is no new revelation that will be better than Jesus.

[14:25] In superiority, he has come. And all we need to do is ask that he come back again and soon. So how is Jesus superior? He shows it by being Lord and Messiah.

The second way in which Jesus displays his superior lordship is in being Lord of the new order. Read verses 21 to 22. No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth and an old cloak.

Otherwise, the patch pulls away from it, the new from the old, and a worse tear is made. And no one puts new wine into old wineskins. Otherwise, the wine will burst the skins and the wine is lost, and so are the skins.

But one puts new wine into fresh wineskins. From what Jesus is saying, we're led to believe that the new and the old cannot coexist.

Just like putting a new patch on an old cloak is nonsensical, so pouring new wine into old wineskins is wasteful. The new and the old cannot coexist.

[15:34] Well, we can understand that pretty easily, can't we? We can say, yeah, you're right, Jesus. There's no point buying a new outfit and then wearing old shoes. It doesn't make sense to buy a new car with an old engine.

And there's no point making a sandwich with fresh bread and old cheese. It's a pretty straightforward kind of teaching, isn't it? But what Jesus means by new and old is so much more significant than shoes or cars or sandwiches.

Not only was it nonsensical to combine the old and the new, it was also impossible. Look at the text. Torn cloaks, burst wineskins.

These were the results of trying to fuse together the old and the new. It doesn't work. It will not work. But why, Jesus? What is so old and what is so new that the two things cannot exist together?

Judaism, the old, and Jesus, the new, could not and cannot coexist. The new patch, Jesus, cannot be patched onto the old cloak of Judaism.

[16:52] The new wine, Jesus, cannot be poured into the old wineskins of Judaism. The fundamental difference that made this coexistence impossible is the same difference that divides Jews and Christians today.

One faith is still waiting for the Messiah to come. The other faith knows he has come in the person of Jesus Christ. Just as it's inappropriate and damaging to patch up or pour in the new with the old, any attempt to blend Jewish belief with faith in Christ is not right.

Jesus stood as Messiah before this group of people and this was his plea. I am the new cloak. I am the new wine.

No one can patch me onto their old way of life. No one can pour me into their new creation, into their new and their old way of thinking. Anyone who tries will tear and burst with failure.

Rip up your old cloaks. Break apart your old wineskins. For I am the superior revelation. I come to do away with old religion.

[18:14] I come to bring a new and superior order to everything. Those who come to me are a new creation. I will give them fresh wineskins.

Wineskins which will be able to hold my truth and enjoy its fruit. This is all well and good, but what's the reality? The truth is the world wants Jesus and a dash of the Dalai Lama and snippets of Scientology and a chunk of consumerism and a superb Sunday sleep in.

When it comes to Jesus, people want to have their cake and eat it too. And they can't see the contradictions. They only see their customized Jesus.

The type of Jesus you might get at McDonald's. They end up believing in McJesus. The world wants to water down the new wine of Jesus.

But the Jesus of the Bible will not stand for this. The Jesus of the Bible did not come to be placed alongside other gods and other passions and other treasures.

[19:27] The Jesus of the Bible came to be superior wine poured into all of you. Your mind, your heart, your present, your past, your future.

Have you let him in? Have you let this new wine of Christ flow through all of you? Do you believe in a religion or a relationship?

Have you repented of the old and welcomed the new? You don't have to be Jewish to have belonged to the old. All of us were once living with the old. Our old way of life, our old sin-soaked selves.

But the promise of Christ is that he is Lord of the new order. The Lord of new life. Life in his name. Well finally, the third pointer to Jesus being new and different and superior is his status as Lord of the Sabbath.

Verses 22 to 24. 23 to 24. One Sabbath he was going through the grain fields and as they made their way, his disciples began to pluck heads of grain.

[20:37] The Pharisees said to Jesus, Look, why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath? Here were Jesus' disciples on the Sabbath day walking through the grain fields hungry from the journey so they plucked some ears of corn.

No harm in that, surely. The Old Testament law permitted hand-picking a neighbour's corn. So where's the problem? Well, according to the Pharisees' law, precisely because it was a Sabbath day, their plucking of the heads of grain was equivalent to reaping, one of the 39 Sabbath activities explicitly forbidden.

So it seems that by condoning his disciples' behaviour, Jesus himself was a lawbreaker. This should not surprise us. Jesus has already broken the laws of expectation by being the Messiah living amongst his people.

And he's broken the old mould of Judaism by claiming to be the new wine. Indeed, we'd almost expect him to break the Sabbath just to round off the trifecta of lawbreaking.

We might expect this, but we'd be wrong. Because even Jesus, as a Jew, would have to admit the seriousness of apparently breaking this Jewish day of rest.

[22:00] Even Jesus would have to give a pretty good reason for this apparent failure to observe the Sabbath. So what's his reason?

Again, he answers a question with a question. Verses 25 to 26. And he said to them, Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry and in need of food?

He entered the house of God where Abiathar was high priest and ate the bread of the presence, which is not lawful for any but the priest to eat. And he gave some to his companions.

The story that Jesus recounts there is found in 1 Samuel 21 when David is on the run from Saul and he arrives hungry at the tabernacle where the priest offers David holy bread or the bread of the presence.

It was bread only the priest could eat because it had been consecrated. But it was given to David and his companions who were not priests to eat anyway. Why? Because, verse 25, they were hungry and in need of food.

[23 : 03] Now, why does Jesus use this story to justify his disciples' actions? It doesn't seem to have anything to do with the Sabbath. Or does it?

In both cases, godly men, that is, David and the disciples, did something forbidden. But the fact that God does not condemn David and instead allows him to eat of this bread indicates that the Pharisaic law that warned him never to eat it was not God's law.

God is bigger than human law. Which is precisely the same point that Jesus is making in relation to the apparent Sabbath breach. God is bigger than human law.

God is bigger just like God made clear to David that in God's eyes the supposed forbidden bread wasn't really forbidden at all. Jesus makes clear that the Pharisees' stranglehold on the rules of the Sabbath are legalistic and are in fact stricter than those found in God's word.

Strict, legalistic, ungrateful observance was not God's original plan for the Sabbath. You'll remember in Genesis 2 the Sabbath was instituted as God's rest day.

[24 : 27] The seventh day was intended to be rest from labor a time of joy and refreshment. In short the Sabbath was made for humankind's enjoyment. Does that sound familiar?

It should. Verse 27 Then Jesus said to them the Sabbath was made for humankind not humankind for the Sabbath. But in the hands of sinful men the Sabbath had become a heavy burden full of do's and don'ts that was simply not scriptural.

Jesus' concern is to reclaim his father's sovereign purpose in establishing the Sabbath. That is it was made for humankind's enjoyment. And how is it possible for Jesus to reclaim the original Sabbath purpose?

How can he pronounce judgment on these righteous men like the Pharisees? How does he dare question their interpretation of Scripture? Verse 28 The Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.

Through his breaking down of human law through his exposing the legalistic Sabbath system and through his gracious invitation to make people truly free Jesus Christ proves himself to be Lord Master Ruler of the Sabbath.

[25 : 54] As Christians our ultimate Sabbath day is yet to come. It's the day when Christ shall return and we shall receive as Hebrews talks about our Sabbath rest.

But isn't it wonderful that Jesus is Lord even of that Sabbath that his authority and his superiority extends to the end of time to being even King of Kings and Lord of Lords forever and ever.

Have you put God in a box lately? I have. I do it all the time. I box God every time I despair that my non-Christian friends aren't saved yet.

I box God every time I say that's just a coincidence. I box God every time I ignore the fact that Jesus could come back today.

The point friends is that in our sinful state we can get very legalistic about things be it styles of worship church membership or even who does the flower arrangements.

[27:02] We can put limits on God and what he can do. Worse still we can believe things that God himself has not commanded which is why it's so important for us to be constantly reformed by his word.

Brothers and sisters it's not enough to believe in Jesus the radical. we must also confess Jesus the superior Lord.

Without his superiority Christ is merely relegated to the spiritual supermarket shelf next to other gods and other philosophies and other ways of life.

In truth Jesus belongs not in equal comparison to Buddha or post-modernism or Satan or materialism no he is over and above all gods.

Lord and Messiah Lord of the new order Lord of the Sabbath Jesus the Lord of all. Let's pray. Lord of all Lord Jesus Christ we thank you that you came from your high place to be humbled and to live among us as Messiah.

[28:29] You came to die for us and now you're seated at the right hand. Please help us to acknowledge your lordship in all ways in all areas of our lives.

Help us to give over areas of our lives where you are not Lord where we are in fact Lord ourselves on the throne dictating our own lives.

Lord Jesus help us to know day by day that you are Lord and Messiah you have come we need not wait. That your new wine can flow through us and give us new life.

And Lord that we don't need a legalistic rules and Sabbath system we need is faith in you and that is what saves us by your blood. Jesus name we pray these things.

Amen.