

Who is Jesus?

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[0 : 00] at Sunday worship when the preacher constantly asks you the question, who is Jesus? And some of you may tune out right away thinking, yes, I know who Jesus is.

Jesus is the Lord. I've heard it over and over again. Can we talk about something else now? And if I'm honest with myself, I love to proclaim that Jesus is Lord, and I can talk about it all day long, just ask Susie.

But very rarely do I actually sit down and consider what in the world does that mean for my life? So, Friday afternoon, I sat down.

I pulled out a pen, and I pulled out a journal, and I said, if Jesus really is the Lord, then what? If Jesus is the Lord, then I'm not.

If Jesus is the Lord, then my friends are not, and my boss is not, and my spouse is not. If Jesus is the Lord, then Barack Obama is not, and Oprah Winfrey is not, and Justin Bieber most definitely is not.

[1 : 16] Money and sex are not. Food and drink are not. School and work and success and reputation and popularity are not.

If Jesus is Lord, then he has the right to save and the right to judge. He has the right to determine what is right and what is wrong.

If Jesus is Lord, he has the right to forgive sins and the right to give life. He has the right to show me how I was actually designed and meant to live.

If Jesus is the Lord, then he has the right to receive all the affections of my heart and to receive all honor and all glory and all praise.

If Jesus really is the Lord, then love must be more powerful than fear and hate.

[2 : 13] Then forgiveness must be more powerful than vengeance and bitterness. Then sacrifice must be more powerful than violence, and truth must be more powerful than deceit.

If Jesus is Lord, then light must be more powerful than darkness, and life more powerful than death. Humility must be more powerful than pride, and trust more powerful than anxiety.

And if Jesus is Lord, then giving must be more powerful than receiving, and following more powerful than leading, and prayer must be more powerful than self-determination.

If Jesus Christ really is the Lord. So who is Jesus? And in our passage today, my friends, Jesus gets asked a whole lot of questions, but it's this who is Jesus question that is undergirding them all. In our passage, Jesus is in the temple. For the last two days, he has had the audacity to get on a colt and ride into Jerusalem, symbolically proclaiming that he is God's king coming into his holy city.

[3 : 27] And not only that, but he has the audacity to proclaim judgment upon the temple. And so people are absolutely outraged. They are really mad, and a whole onslaught of religious leaders are coming up to Jesus as he's teaching, asking him question after question.

In verses 13 to 17, we get the Pharisees and the Herodians. And they ask Jesus about paying taxes to Caesar. And then in verses 18 to 27, we get the Sadducees.

And they ask Jesus about what marriage is going to be like in the resurrection. And in verses 28 to 34, we get a scribe who asks Jesus about what the most important commandment of the whole Old Testament is.

But then in the last section, there's a bit of a reversal. Jesus finally gets the opportunity to ask a question. And somehow, in a very cryptic way, Jesus asks this who am I question.

So that's where we're going. Let's begin with the Pharisees and the Herodians in verses 13 to 17.

The Pharisees and the Herodians come to Jesus, Mark tells us, in order to trap him.

[4 : 45] And we read that they come to him and ask and say, Teacher, we know that you are true and that you do not care about anyone's opinions. For you are not swayed by appearances, but

truly teach the way of God.

Now this, my friends, is good old-fashioned brown-nosing. This is just sucking up for the sake of deception. They come to Jesus wanting to get him to say something that's going to get him in trouble.

And so they ask, Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar or not? Should we pay them or should we not? And although the question seems simple enough on the surface, there's actually something much deeper happening here.

The question is designed to reveal who Jesus is. Is Jesus a political revolutionary or is he a religious compromiser? The Pharisees and Herodians want to force Jesus into revealing his identity.

See, the thing is, if Jesus says he is against paying taxes to Caesar, then he would be considered a political revolutionary who is against Caesar's power and the Roman Empire and Herodians would be very quick to crucify him.

[6 : 01] But if he says that he is for paying taxes, then it would reveal that he's a religious compromiser who gives Caesar the devotion that really only belongs to God.

And the Pharisees would be very quick to disregard him and scorn him. Do you see the dilemma? This is actually about who Jesus is.

It's about his loyalties. But luckily, Jesus sees right through their question and he calls a spade a spade. Look at verse 15.

Knowing their hypocrisy, he said to them, Why do you put me to the test? Bring me a denarius and let me look at it. And so they bring him a denarius and then Jesus says, Whose likeness and inscription's on it?

And they say Caesar's. And he says, That's right. Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's. What a cryptic thing to say.

[7 : 02] At first glance, it seems like Jesus is saying, Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's. As if these are two completely separate realms. Caesar has power and authority over the political realm and God has power and authority over the spiritual realm.

They're separate. I'm going to put it simply, that's not what Jesus means. He's saying something much more profound, I think.

He's saying something like this. You see the coin right in front of you? With Caesar's face on it? That's right. It's his. He can have it. But render to God the things that are God's.

Which begs the question, What in the world belongs to God? And the people would have known their scriptures. They would have known that God made every human being in his image and they belong to him.

God would have known, they would have known that God deserves all glory and honor and praise. And they would have known that there's not one square inch of the whole entire universe that does not belong to the living God.

[8 : 14] And so when Jesus says, render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's, he is making a radical statement. He's asking people to consider the deep loyalties of their hearts.

He's asking people to give God that loyalty that God ultimately and rightfully deserves. Complete loyalty. So the question is, my friends, where are your priorities tonight?

We walk in with misplaced priorities. We walk in with divided loyalties. We walk in knowing that God does not have our full devotion.

And Jesus here is offering us an opportunity to say, yes, Lord. I'm all yours once again. Amen. So we discover at the end of this section that Jesus is neither a political revolutionary nor a religious compromiser.

And the crowds marvel at his answer, but Jesus is by no means left on the hook. He's got many more people coming. Yet another brigade comes his way, and this time it's the Sadducees.

[9 : 31] And they want to make him look like a fool. Now you need to know that the Sadducees made up a portion of what was called the Sanhedrin. And the Sanhedrin was the council of those religious leaders who controlled the temple.

So the Sadducees are really important, influential, aristocratic people. And they come with a very specific agenda. They ask Jesus a question about marriage in the resurrection.

And they tell a story of a woman who had a string of seven husbands. And then they say, in the resurrection, whose wife will she be when all seven husbands are alive at the same time? Now I know some of you women out there are probably thinking, seven husbands at once? Yes, that cannot be heaven. But that's a different issue altogether. But Mark is very clear in the way that he narrates the story.

In verse 18, he tells us that the Sadducees actually believe there's no such thing as a resurrection. So when they ask this question, they don't actually care about what life is going to be like in the resurrection or the marriage thing.

[10:45] Their concern is far different. They want to prove that Jesus is a foolish teacher and a delusionary prophet. Who is this Jesus?

Isn't he really just a foolish teacher talking about all this resurrection stuff? Isn't he really just a delusionary prophet telling people about false hopes? Let's make a public spectacle of him and show everybody just how foolish Jesus is.

But Jesus replies astounding. He replies to their question with another question. Look at verse 24. Is this not the reason you are wrong? Because you neither know the scriptures nor the power of God.

And then Jesus points them to the scriptures that they claim to know so well. Verse 26. As for the dead being raised, have you not read in the book of Moses in the passage about the burning bush how God spoke to him saying, I am the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob?

He's not God of the dead but of the living. You are quite wrong. And it's beautiful because at this moment, Jesus brings us to this place in the beginning chapters of Exodus where God appears to Moses in a burning bush and speaks to Moses and says, Moses, I have heard the cries of my people in Egypt.

[12:15] I have seen their affliction in slavery for 400 years. I know their pain. And Moses, I'm here to do something about it. And I'm going to do something about it because I'm the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob.

I'm the covenant God who promised hundreds of years ago that I would deliver my people and bring them into a promised land. So Moses, here I am.

I'm here to be true to my promises and to bring freedom out of bondage and life out of death. And that's why Jesus points us to this verse because that's what resurrection is ultimately about. Resurrection is rooted in who God is as the one who promises to deliver his people from bondage and decay and death and sin.

And so Jesus points us to the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob. It is this God and the power of this God that guarantees resurrection will take place.

[13:22] I have no doubt that some of you came in here tonight and that's what you need to hear. You need to hear that resurrection really is possible.

That God really does love to bring life out of death and righteousness out of sin and wholeness out of brokenness.

And you need to know that resurrection is not founded upon your circumstances. Resurrection is not founded upon how good you are and resurrection is not founded upon your own strength. Resurrection is founded upon God. So we discover at the end of this passage that Jesus is not a foolish teacher.

He's not a delusionary prophet. He knows his God and he knows that resurrection hangs on the very character of God. But once again Jesus is not given much time to catch his breath is he?

[14:27] Yet another questioner comes his way and this time it's a questioner that's a lot more friendly. He's well intentioned. It's a scribe who wants to know is Jesus a faithful Bible teacher?

And so he asks which commandment is the most important of all? And Jesus answers in a very peculiar way as he often does by giving two commandments instead of one.

And he says love God love people. Profoundly simple. Love God and love people. And the scribe affirms Jesus' answer.

He says yes teacher you're correct. Now can you imagine affirming Jesus' answer? It's a bit like telling J.I. Packer he's good at theology.

I mean it's just kind of it's kind of silly. But he's doing better than everybody else. I mean think about it. Everybody else is telling Jesus he's wrong. So I think he's doing well. But then Jesus affirms his

answer and you're like yes sir you're right I was right.

[15:31] And then and then he goes on and he says you're so right you're not far from the kingdom of God. But even though Jesus affirms him this answer still shows that something is missing.

Jesus does not say yes you've entered the kingdom of God or the kingdom of God has drawn near to you or you've been born from above but he says the kingdom of God is not or you are not far from the kingdom of God.

I mean the scribe's gotten it right hasn't he? The Lord himself affirmed that to love the Lord your God with all your heart soul mind and strength and to love your neighbor as yourself is what the whole Old Testament is about.

The scribe has spoken truth hasn't he? Yet we're still left with the sense that something is missing. We're left with the question who is this Lord?

The scribe gets it right he's to love the Lord his God with all of his heart with all his soul and with all his mind and his strength but what he misses is that his Lord stands right in front of him.

[16:43] What he misses is that the kingdom of God heaven breaking into earth stands right in front of him and he doesn't fall down and worship and he doesn't take up his cross and follow and that's why Jesus decides that it's finally time that he be the one to ask everybody a question.

Look at verse 35. He says, how can the scribes say that the Christ is the son of David? David himself and the Holy Spirit declared the Lord said to my Lord sit at my right hand until I put your enemies under your feet and David himself calls him Lord.

So how is he his son? And Jesus gets straight to the heart of the issue. Who is he as the Christ? Who is he as the Messiah and as the Savior of Israel?

And Mark has already painted plenty of pictures for us of who this Jesus is. Jesus is the one sent by God to save Israel. Jesus is the one sent by God to conquer sin and death.

And Jesus is the one sent by God to be the son of David who would reign on the throne of David for all of eternity. But Jesus wants to take us further and he wants to take us even deeper.

[18:10] David himself calls him Lord. So how is he his son? In this question Jesus invites us to recognize that he is not only David's son.

That he is not only a human Messiah and Savior. But he somehow is the mysterious presence of the living God in human flesh.

Jesus Christ is the Lord. He is the Lord who was at the beginning with God when God spoke all things into being.

He is the Lord who was promised in Genesis when Adam and Eve disobeyed the Lord that would crush the head of the serpent. He is the Lord that was with Israel in bondage and delivered them out of bondage.

And he is the Lord that was promised to David that he would sit on his throne forever and ever. And he is the Lord that the prophets longed to see. And he is the Lord that now is standing right in front of the scribes and the Pharisees and the Herodians and the Sadducees and the crowds proclaiming that he is the presence of the living God in human flesh.

[19:25] So the question is brothers and sisters for the scribes as it is for us will you recognize in the face of Jesus Christ the face of the living God?

Will you proclaim that Jesus is the Lord? And will you love this Lord with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength?

Will you believe that Jesus of Nazareth is the mysterious presence of the living God? That's the question that Mark wants to leave us with this evening.

Who is Jesus? And Mark wants there to be no doubt about it that this Jesus this humble man from Nazareth is the Lord.

That's good news. Thanks be to God. Amen.