

Josh Short

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Preacher: Sam Low

[0 : 00] Hey everyone, good to see you all here. Good evening, I should say, actually. I'm super excited to be here today. Yes, because it is my now second sermon, because of this morning.

But more because I get to talk to you about God's word, from God's word. And that's a very exciting thing. So Sam gave me this passage a few weeks ago. And it's a great passage.

And so I prepared eagerly. So let's pray before we get into it, shall we? So, Heavenly Father, we thank you for the great things that you've given us, including your son, Jesus, Lord.

I ask that tonight you would open our ears so that we can hear your message, Lord, and give us hearts that are willing to change for you. Amen. Amen. I'm not sure if you've ever had that moment of clarity in your life, where you realize that after this point in time or in this situation, things have to change.

They can't be the same anymore. There are some pretty famous examples of this, such as getting married or having children. But I haven't experienced either of those yet.

[1 : 08] So I'll give you one that I do remember and that I have experienced. I can tell you without any shame that I was an adorable child. It's a fact. And at year four, they presented us with an option of joining the music program at my school, Trafalgar Elementary, or if you're in the French immersion class, Trafalgar Elementary.

And I desperately wanted to be a part of the music program. I wasn't great at any or many courses at school. And music just seemed like so much fun. You could make noise.

It was joyous. And so I wanted to be a part of it so bad. And so I applied. I auditioned, rather, and successfully became a part of the music program at my school. And I was over the moon about it.

I was the only trombone player in the whole school. How much fun is that? But all my joy came to a sudden halt one day. Let me set the scene for you. We're in the gym.

You know, kind of the same wood paneling, actually, as we have in the church. About 50 kids, all tiny, lots of dark-haired clarinet and flute players, and one small blonde kid with freckles in the back of the room, making a sound like a baby elephant being strangled to death, just loud as anything.

[2 : 22] And I had no idea what I was doing was incorrect in any way. I was happy to make noise. But after class, my teacher came to me and said, if I could play specific notes for her.

I had no idea that there were such things as notes, or any idea how to play them. I knew I either had to learn how to play notes, as she said, or stop playing altogether.

Fortunately enough, I learned my instrument just well enough to leave it behind when I came here. But the reason for that story is that in the passage today, we have the biggest kind of moment of clarity in all of history on display to us.

The greatest truth being revealed of all time. And we need to get to the heart of that, because it has an infinite amount of implications for us as followers of Jesus. Now, like always, there are three questions that I have in my head when I read the book of Mark, which I inherited from my older brother, because he's very wise.

Again, who is Jesus? What has he done? And what does that mean for us?

[3 : 34] So first, who is Jesus? Again, the importance of this question cannot be stated enough. It is central to the gospel of Mark. It's so important that Jesus asks it himself, unprompted, in the passage today, which is such a rare occurrence for Jesus to do.

And I think a little context would help us understand more. Does anyone other than Tashi know the first sentence of the book of Mark? Or Liz? Anyone else? It says, The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

The first sentence in the book identifies Jesus as the Christ, the Messiah. Lays it out plain. But there isn't a clear occasion of anyone identifying him as that until this point in the book.

It's a mystery. So for a while now, Jesus and his disciples have been traveling around the area of ancient Palestine, teaching, preaching, healing, exercising, and possibly exercising.

But this whole time, Jesus has been doing miraculous things, with our expectation being that people would see him for who he really is. But it hasn't happened.

[4 : 50] People don't see it. Earlier in this chapter, the disciples are worried about their lack of food, specifically bread, immediately after Jesus has just finished feeding a humongous group of people for the second time in front of them.

And you can see by his reaction in verse 21 of chapter 8 that he expects them to see what's really going on, and he's frustrated that they aren't. So we come back to the question asked by Jesus himself in the chapter.

Who do people say that I am? Meaning, what have the people put together after seeing my miracles, or hearing my teaching, or even just hearing about me?

What have they put together? What is the fruit of my labors, Jesus is wondering? And the answers the disciples give him, that the people are saying, aren't bad answers.

They're in an appropriate direction. But they're still wrong. We have John the Baptist, who died a few months ago before this story. We have Elijah, who died a few hundred years ago before this story.

[5 : 58] And we have generally the great prophets, who are in the back half of the Old Testament, none of whom have appeared to Israel for also another 800 years. But these are all people that are great.

The heroes of Israel, the paragons of the nation, the people who they think, he must be great, he must be like one of these men. The best they can think of.

But like I said, these answers are incorrect. Jesus asks the question again, but to his disciples this time, specifically to them, the people who he's taught the most. He's handpicked them to follow him.

They have seen more and done more than we could ever imagine from the Bible that we have. So they must have the right answer. Yeah? Well, thankfully, Peter, who's known for putting his foot in his mouth at every opportunity, actually gets it right in verse 29.

It's an amazing moment. It's as simple as an answer can be to that question while also being as truthful as any possible response that could be given.

[7 : 08] You are the Christ, he says. And there we have it. That moment of clarity, that thing that changes everything. It changes everything. Jesus isn't like John the Baptist or Elijah or the prophets.

He's on an entirely different playing field. He is astronomically more powerful and important than any of those men are. They aren't good enough to be like him.

They aren't anywhere near who Jesus is. Jesus is the Christ. It's not just another title of his. It has weight. It has meaning. And it shouldn't be a mystery to us how important this title is.

It conveys the entirety of God's plan throughout time and history. You know, promises to Adam and Eve in Genesis chapter 3 or to Abraham in Genesis 12 or to Moses and the people of Israel in Exodus 19 or to David in 2 Samuel 7.

The list keeps on going. It goes on and on and on. And each one builds upon the idea of who this Christ is, how important he is, how powerful he is. They just add weight to the person of Jesus.

[8 : 19] When Peter says to him, you are the Christ, all the things go boom. This is who he is. It means all of these things. I love how amazing this part of Mark actually is.

Something I learned a while ago and was reminded in class this term is the structure of Mark chapter 8. Jesus has just finished healing a blind man of his physical blindness.

It's kind of a weird story. He spits in his face and the guy kind of sees trees and then sees people again. It's kind of strange. But then he moves down and he heals the disciples and us of our spiritual blindness.

The answers that the disciples give about the people when he asks them shows that they can't see who he really is. They haven't put it together. And it wouldn't be possible without his teaching and miracles and allowing us to see who he really is.

It's a miracle. Jesus' display of himself to us. And he's chosen this part in chapter 8 of the book of Mark to change that, to reveal it to us.

[9 : 31] And so who he is directly affects what he has come to do. in verse 31. That is what the Christ has come to do. Take a look at it. The all-powerful promised one of God who has come to save the world comes to do it through pain, through suffering, through rejection, and through death.

And I think this idea has lost a bit of its impact on us. We take the concept that Jesus can actually die on face value. But it's a miracle.

It's a miracle of God. It's a tragic one. It's a sad one. But it is, nonetheless, miraculous. Mark has just spent the first half of the gospel showing how powerful Jesus actually is.

If you read chapter 5, you see that Jesus has the power to exercise demons, to heal the sick in masses, and to raise a little girl back from the dead. So how can a man who has the power over death actually die?

It doesn't make sense. It just doesn't. And that's what Peter is thinking. Jesus talks about himself dying, and Peter says, that's not how the plan works.

[10 : 48] The Savior is not supposed to die. He sees it as like a misfortune or tragedy that needs to be avoided. He's saying, you're talking smack, Jesus.

That's not how it works. The idea that Christ has to die is so contrary to the human way of thinking. You can see it in our culture all over the place, you know, in our movies, in our books, our TV.

Our heroes are, you know, majestic and strong people. They succeed in their acts of heroism by not needing to die because dying equals failure. Right? As a teenager, I was a massive fan of comic books.

I still kind of am, only I don't have the money to spend them anymore. But in particular, I love the stories that were engaging. You have a hero who has a struggle he has to overcome.

And he has to use his powers at his disposal or his tools or whatever. And he overcomes them. But there was an interesting phenomenon in the comic book world that I eventually got kind of jaded with, which is the idea that comic book heroes never really die.

[11 : 56] It's a thing called retconning, which means retroactive continuity, where they come back to life in various ways. But I think it's because that human idea of he can't be a hero if he ever dies.

That negates all the work that they have done because it's a failure as a character of theirs. It's that human idea that death is just a defeat of heroism.

Thankfully, God doesn't think the same way we do. Very thankfully. The work that Jesus has to do is perfectly in line with God's way of thinking because it's God's plan.

And it's so different from how we would ever even imagine being saved by somebody. Which is also why the completion of his work is still utterly bewildering to us.

Not only does the guy who has control over death have to die, he also comes back to life. It's even more impossible than the guy who has control over death dying in the first place.

[12 : 59] It's amazing. So who Jesus is as the Christ affects what he has to do and will do. And both of these bear tremendous importance for us.

Which brings us to the last section of the passage, verses 34 to chapter 9, verse 1. It's also worth noticing that these words are not spoken to his 12 disciples anymore, but to the gathering of people who are following him.

And so they also apply to us if we seek to follow him. We have the third subtle miracle of this passage. In that we can actually be saved.

There is hope for us. It's a miracle. What Jesus' death and resurrection mean for us is our salvation. And with that, the expectation that we follow him as the Lord who has saved us.

They go hand in hand together. The invitation for salvation for us isn't just a simple contract to sign, though. There is fine print, only that it's not fine, but bold, double underlined, highlighted, and in a gigantic font.

[14 : 08] It's big. It's there. What is expected of us as followers is an enormous amount, and Jesus holds no punches back. Take another look at those verses. There are about three things that are expected of us as followers that are all equally as daunting to attempt.

Let's see. There is deny yourself, take up your cross and follow him, and lose your life for the sake of Jesus and the gospel. All of these are, again, reversals, contrary to how we humans think our lives should be.

It's just a flipped up world. It's not the way we think like. It's just the same as before. Our way of thinking isn't the same as God's way of thinking or the way God plans things, but it's only through God's plan and God's way of thinking that we can actually be saved.

So if we're going to do this, what is expected of us? Because the examples given by Jesus are kind of puzzling, but they're not very clear exactly. So first, the idea of denying yourself, taking up your cross and following him, it's not talking about living a life of austerity, of being poor, that whole Buddhist notion of self-denial, so the material items in your life don't bring you happiness so you have to deny them and reject them.

It's not talking about that. What it is talking about is a life of humble submission, a life example off of what Jesus himself has done. There is no greater denial of self in the history of time than the creator and owner of the universe coming down and being born as a human, living a life of suffering, and then dying for us.

[16 : 00] There's no greater example of it. And that is the image that we are to follow in our taking up our cross and following him in our life. We are to put down those things that reach up and towards us from following Jesus and doing it them instead.

It's a path of rejection of the world and the people and this is why Jesus brings up the idea of being ashamed of him. It's such a temptation, isn't it?

When you're at work and you just want to get things done and somebody comes and asks you what you did with your Sunday. or when you're at uni and there's that kind of air of mutual views and sharing them and everyone kind of appreciates each other until the topic goes to something like gay marriage, even regular marriage nowadays, and you realize that their views don't really extend to you.

They don't really accept you as being valid anymore. or you're in school and your friends ask you why you haven't partied with them on the weekend, why you're not getting drunk with them.

And these questions come up and you just kind of shrink inside. You don't want to talk about them, you just want to kind of shrink away and avoid the question.

[17 : 23] That human reaction, that natural reaction that we have, I am a massive culprit of those many points of my life. But the point of this passage isn't to despair, but to have hope in who Jesus is instead.

Because who Jesus is and what he has done for us is more than enough for us to endure a temporary amount of discomfort. It even says in John chapter 15 that if the world hates us, it's because it hated him first.

And the moment of clarity I deal of talking about is here, it's right here in this passage. It's the truth that is ultimately more valuable than anything Uriah could ever be worth. As it says in verse 37, what can we offer in exchange for our soul?

What are our lives worth? You could have everything in the entire earth and your life would be nothing compared to the work of Jesus and his life and a life following him. This passage in Mark is so humongous.

It just changes everything. It's like that street outside from which we can reach every corner of Sydney. We can go north, south, east, and west.

[18 : 38] This passage kind of spreads over every corner of our lives and affects every area. It reaches those places and demands that we follow him.

you see the truth of Jesus on display as him being the Christ and it demands that you be changed for him. It demands that we live a life of humble submission like he did in order to be saved.

and it gets rid of those dark corners of our mind that kind of distract us in those situations and helps us to keep walking on that path Jesus has already trodden out for us.

And so the truth of Jesus being the Christ here in Mark chapter 8 and the work he has done of coming, suffering, and dying for us means an infinite amount to us and it is awesome enough for us to follow him in every area of our lives and change for him and suffer for him so that we can be saved by him.

Amen.