A First Look At Jesus

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[0:00] Well, good morning. It is good to see you. It is great to gather this morning as we begin our two services. It may feel a little thin to some of you compared to what it was last week, but know that we hope and anticipate that having this room will mean that more people may be able to come and join us later this fall.

I want to send a special welcome to those of you who are moving here to be a part of the university life, whether you're a student or a grad student or postdoc, whatever it is.
I did want to mention two weeks from now we'll be having a college, we call it college lunch, but it's really for anyone involved in the university world. So more details to come, but two weeks after the second service, so it will be 1230, we are going to be doing that.
Before my mother passed away, when I would go visit her, one of her favorite shows was the Antique Roadshow.
Now about 10 of you have seen this, and another 10 of you have seen it but won't admit it, and the rest of you may have never seen it. But the Antique Roadshow is this show where people bring their stuff that they have that they think might be valuable to see if it might be valuable.
[1:20] They bring it to appraisers and the whole show is about these conversations. Because these people come in and they don't know. They don't know whether this little green vase is a $5 Martha Stewart from the 1980s line vase from Target, or whether it's actually a Ming Dynasty vase worth thousands and thousands of dollars.

I looked it up. The greatest find ever was a watch that a guy bought for $345, and it was appraised at over a million dollars. It was a unique one-of-a-kind pocket watch that he had.
So, you know, and there are all sorts of things. Paintings, vases, Navajo blankets, wooden boxes, furniture. And, you know, these people bring in, and they're either family heirlooms, and people are like, yeah, I got this.
My great-great-grandfather had it in their house, and I don't know if it's worth anything or not. What do you think? And sometimes the people are like, nah, not really. And sometimes they're like, wow, you've got something special here.
Or sometimes it's people that, things that people picked up along the way. Hey, I got this at a garage sale, and I looked closer, and I thought, I wonder if this is more valuable than the five bucks I paid it for.
[2:32] So they have no sense of its worth, and they look at it, and they just think, well, you know. It's easy sometimes for us to miss something of value that's right before our eyes.

Whether it's by ignorance or whether it's by overly being familiar with these things, we don't think about some of these things as being super valuable. And I wonder if in our culture today, we do the same thing with Jesus.
I wonder if for some of us, Jesus is like that grandma's chair in the corner. It's always been there, not really thought about it. You're familiar with Jesus.
It's a common thing. It's no longer special. You've grown up with Jesus. You can sing the Sunday school songs. But he's become so familiar, he's not particularly precious.
And you've lost sight of whether he's valuable or not in your life. For some of us here this morning, Jesus may be something unknown.
[3:37] And the little that we know of him, we may not be interested. We may think Jesus is a part of a political party. Or we may think he's a cultural figure. We may think that he's a nice idea or a great teacher.

But we don't really know much about him. We've never really investigated. And we're not sure whether he's worth the attention. Although hopefully, if you're here this morning, you actually think

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it's worth coming here to this gathering.
Coming to church to find out a little bit. My hope is that you're here this morning because you're open to seeing Jesus more clearly. And this is why we're teaching this fall through the beginning of the book of Mark.
If you want to turn there, it's page 785 in your pew Bibles. If you brought your own pew or you can just listen along, we will read it together in a minute. But we're looking at this book of Mark, this account of Jesus.
Because what Mark is trying to answer is the very question, who is this Jesus? Is he really valuable? Is he really worth our attention, our time, our worship?
[4:51] So this is what we're going to look at this morning for a little bit as we dive in. And so, the gospel according to Mark, we're going to start in chapter 1, verse 1.

And we'll read through verse 13. So, let's read God's word together. The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.
As it is written in Isaiah, the prophet, John appeared, baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.
And all the country of Judea and all Jerusalem were going out to him and were being baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. Now, John was clothed with camel's hair and wore a leather belt around his waist and ate locusts and wild honey.
And he preached, saying, In those days, Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan.
[6:21] And when he came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens opening and the Spirit descending upon him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven, You are my beloved Son.

With you I am well pleased. And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. And he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan.
And he was with the wild animals. And the angels were ministering to him. This is God's Word. Let's pray together. God, as we look at this passage this morning, we ask for your help.
For, Lord, we know that it is you who opens our hearts and our minds to understand your Word. It is by your Spirit, Lord, that we are able to know you through your Word.
And I pray for your help this morning. I pray, Lord, that I might speak clearly the words you would have me speak. And I pray that, Lord, we together would sit under your Word and receive it as your words to us.
[7:27] Lord, that you might change our hearts and our minds and our wills because of who we understand you to be this morning. We pray this in Jesus' name.

Amen. Amen. Amen. So, as we look at this section, we're going to walk through it. As we do here at Trinity, we're going to look at verse 1, which is an introductory statement, kind of a title for the book. And then we're going to look at verses 2 through 13. And we're going to see two things about Jesus that Mark wants us to know right up from the start as we're… as he launches into this account of Jesus' ministry in life.
So, that's what we're going to do. If you're writing your outline, those are your three points. The intro and then two things about Jesus. The intro sentence packs a lot. And Mark is saying to us, this is what this book is about.
And he says a lot in a few things. He starts with, in the beginning. Or the beginning of the gospel. And… But that beginning has these resonances for anyone who's a Jewish reader because it's a translation of the word that begins the book of Genesis.
[8:32] The very start. The very commencing of God's work in the world that has this echoes in Genesis of his creating the world.

Mark is saying, we're going to talk about God's creative work in the world in a special way. And this is a… this is going to be about a gospel. And the word gospel means good news.
Right? It is a good word. And it is… it was often used in the first century in a number of different contexts. It was used, for instance, for the birth of a new child who would become the emperor. Or the declaration of military victory. And so, this is… these were the good newses that were proclaimed in the Roman Empire in the context in which Mark is writing.
And Mark is saying to them, you've heard many accounts of good news about the Roman Empire and about the Roman Emperor. But I want to tell you that there is one really good news.

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[9:33] It is not just some good news. It is the good news. And it's greater than all those other things. And that good news, as Mark goes on, is about a person.

The good news is about Jesus Christ. And Jesus has names, and these names are pregnant with meaning. Jesus is a translation of Joshua in the Old Testament.
And it's… and it means God is salvation. Right? And so, Jesus comes with this word right from the start. He is coming with a purpose. He's coming to bring something to us.
And then the second word, Christ. And these are so familiar words that, again, like the vase in our grandma's house, we want to look at it carefully again. Jesus Christ. Christ means anointed.
It is the Greek translation of the Hebrew word, Messiah. And this is a pregnant term. Because Mark is writing in the first century when the Jewish people had been waiting for years.
[10:37] In fact, decades. In fact, centuries. Waiting for this one that the Old Testament foretold. A Messiah. Someone who God would send to bring peace.

To overthrow their enemies and establish a kingdom that would last forever. This was the hope of a messianic kingdom. And Mark is saying, this Jesus is the Messiah.
He is the Christ. The anointed one of God who's come to do all of these things. But Mark is not done. Because the last thing he says in verse 1, he says, this beginning of God's new creative work.
The good news is focused on this person who is the promised one. He is the Son of God. And if you want to read, if you want to read through the whole book of Mark this week, you will see something. This term is used three times for Jesus in this whole book. It's right here at the very beginning. And we'll see in this passage a little bit further on. It's used in the middle of the book at the transfiguration where God again affirms to his disciples, this is my Son with whom I am well pleased.
[11:53] Listen to him. And then it's used at the very end of the book. In the mouth, not of his disciples, but in the mouth of a Roman centurion who watches him die and says, surely this was the Son of God.

How can that claim be? Well, that would be a great sermon, right? But that's not what we're going to talk about today. So what I want to say is hang in there and wait and see. Because Mark is going to unfold what that means.
Why does he say that? And how does that play itself out in the life and the account of Jesus that we see? So that's what we're going to do as we… So that's Mark's title in his introduction, right?
And what Mark is going to do is give us not a description. It's not a formal biography in some senses. But it is true account of who Jesus was put together like a portrait.
Some of the other gospel accounts, Matthew, Luke, have a lot more teaching, a lot more instruction. They include Jesus' teaching. They have more commentary. Mark writes in this staccato narrative.
[13:02] And it's like he's a painter painting a portrait. And each account is a little brush stroke. And when you see it all together, he's going to teach us all sorts of theology. But not by being explicit with it, by being implicit.

As he says, this is what this guy does. This is who he is. This is how he interacts with the world. And as we look at this portrait together, as we invite you to go on with us on this journey to explore who is this Jesus again, my hope is that you will see these great things.
You know, as this last year, I actually decided to read the biography of Alexander Hamilton by Ron Chernow. And yes, it's because the musical.
And yes, the musical is great apart from its… Well, we really enjoy the PG version that you can download. You can buy a PG version of it, which is lovely. You can't get the video of that.
So, but the musical is pretty magical. But as the biography unfolded, it gave all these pictures of here's who he was. In the Caribbean, here's how he was when he first arrived in New York.
[14:12] And here's what he did. And here's how he moved through his life in different relationships and different things. And this is what Mark is going to give us, is a picture like that, an account of who Jesus is.

So, let's go on this journey together. And we're going to start this morning because we're going to look at verses 2 through 13 and see what Mark launches us with. And we're going to see two things about Jesus this morning.
This is hopefully very memorable. Jesus is a man with a history and he's a man with a family. What does that mean? Hang on. We'll fill those things out and let you know. So, verses 2 through 8 is

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Jesus is a man with a history.
As Mark transitions from his title, he begins with, as it is written in Isaiah the prophet, and he quotes the Old Testament about someone who is coming to prepare the way for the Lord.
Okay? Now, some of you are Bible scholars and you'll start looking for these words in verse 2 somewhere in Isaiah. And you'll find out, yeah, it's not really there. Because in fact, Mark has conflated some Old Testament passages.
[15:19] Verse 2 is actually probably a quote from Malachi chapter 3 verse 1. It has some similarities with parts of Isaiah, but it seems like for Mark, it's the quote in verse 3, which is from Isaiah chapter 40, which was read by George earlier in the service.

This promise of comfort and the coming of God to bring comfort to his people and someone coming to prepare the way for God to do this work in the world.
And as you go through that quote then, verse 4, who is going to be this one who's going to prepare the way? Well, verse 4 says it's John. Who the heck is John? Mark doesn't tell us.
He just shows up. Again, this is the way Mark tells stories. John shows up. And John shows up and he's doing this ministry. He's in the wilderness. He's baptizing. He's proclaiming a message of repentance from sin and of forgiveness for sin.
And he's kind of a weird dude. He's wearing animal clothes. He's eating locusts and wild honeys. Eating locusts might not be as weird to us, to them as it might have been to us.
[16:33] But it was still pretty weird. Unless you were an Old Testament student and you knew that in fact in 2 Kings verse 1 chapter 8, the prophet Elijah wore the same thing.

Elijah, who was the one who came and proclaimed God's work in the middle of a dark time in his people, Elijah who confronted leaders who didn't accept God's work and trust in God's salvation, Elijah who was translated up into heaven and did not die.
And so the Jewish people thought he was going to come again before the Messiah and prepare the way for the Messiah. And all of these threads of expectation are drawn together by Mark in this really short narrative to say, John the Baptist is like the Elijah coming now to proclaim the good news of something that's coming.
Because when you look at verses 7 and 8, what did he preach? He didn't preach about himself. He didn't even preach about the kingdom of God. He preached about one who is coming after him. One who is great with power. And one who, when he arrives, John the Baptist would say, I'm not worthy to even untie his sandals.
[17:56] That's how much greater he is than I am. And look, again, Mark doesn't make a big deal about this, but John the Baptist is the last and greatest Old Testament prophet. He had a great successful ministry.

God was doing good things. People from all over were coming out to him. And yet John says, none of this is important except to prepare the way for the one who's coming after me.
So this is what Mark is telling us, that John the Baptist is coming to prepare the way for this one to come. Right?
Right? Why does Mark tell us to do this? Golly, where am I in my notes? Okay, here we go. Why does Mark tell us this?
Well, for two things. One, because as we look at John the Baptist, there's a paradigm there for us as human beings to have. Because in our human hearts, we so often make ourselves the center of the story.
[18:59] We think that the story of our lives and the story of everything else around us is really happening because we are in the middle of it. And John the Baptist says, I have this great ministry and this great thing, but it's not about me.

And we're supposed to look at John the Baptist and learn something. Because when Jesus arrives, Jesus claims the center place. The center place in our lives, the center place in our world, the center place in human history, the center place in the work of God in the world.
Jesus takes a place. He alone is worthy of taking that. But the good news is that that reorientation that John the Baptist models for us is really, really good news for us.
Because this Jesus who has come, He is the one that our hearts long for. People went to John the Baptist because they knew that they needed something from God.
They needed reconciliation. They needed forgiveness of sins. They needed somehow to return to God. And John the Baptist said, I can do a little bit, but the one who's coming after me, He's the one

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that you need to look to.
[20:16] He's the one who's going to come. And this one isn't just, He didn't just show up as the next in the line of God sort of throwing spaghetti at the wall and hoping something's going to stick in terms of actually establishing His kingdom.

Right? Part of what we're seeing here is that Jesus is rooted in history, in the history of God's work in the world, preparing the world for Jesus to come.
And so when we look at Jesus, again, just like we look at a vase and we think, well, maybe it's a 1980s Martha Stewart vase, and we know, no, it's a 16th century vase from China that has immense value.
Let's see how rooted Jesus is so that we understand how valuable He is. So Jesus is a man with a history.
A history that's all been leading to this moment, the arrival of Jesus in the world. But He's also a man with a family. And verses 9 through 13, we learn a lot in this story about Jesus' two great identities.
[21:25] Right? And the literary link, this is when Jesus shows up for the first time. Right? We saw the title in verse 1. Then verses 2 through 8 were all about this John the Baptist and what was going on there.

And then finally in verse 9, Jesus shows up. Right? In those days, Jesus came. And Jesus was a real person from a real place. He was from Nazareth of Galilee, and He showed up at the Jordan River.
In case you wonder whether this is just mythology, it's not. Mark is saying this was a real person in real time, doing real things. Jesus shows up.
And the narrative is really evocative for a careful reader. Jesus comes to John, and He is baptized. And when He is baptized, a few remarkable things happen.
First, it says, the heavens were torn open. And second, the Spirit of God descended down into this one who had just been baptized.
[22:27] baptized. This is an incredible story that these things would happen. This had never happened with anyone else who got baptized by John, is Mark's implication.

This was a unique event. Right? And then, after these sort of surprising things, then, the Spirit that just descended upon this man, seemingly giving the affirmation as the words of God say, this is my son in whom I am well pleased, God seems to be saying, this one is special, and then He's driven out.
Right? He's not celebrated. He's not, you know, there's no great parade. There's no great promotion. He gets sent out alone into the desert, into the wilderness, and faces trial and opposition.
In fact, it says the wild animals were with Him. A lot of commentators think that the wild animals were, was a common term in the first century used as the Christians talked about the persecution they faced.
And part of it was because at times in the Roman Coliseum during times of persecution, there was literally wild animals that were unleashed onto Christians as sport. And they were killed by it.
[23:45] And so, there might have been a sense in which Mark is bringing that evocative imagery into, into place. But as Mark tells this narrative, right, it's what, five verses?

Four, I can't count. Four verses? What does he say? He says two things about Jesus' family and identity that are remarkable. First, he says, Jesus came to identify with humanity.
Right? What we know from the rest of Scripture, Mark doesn't make it clear here, but from the rest of Scripture, we know Jesus was without sin. Jesus didn't need to wash.
Jesus didn't need to repent of sin because there was no sin in him to repent of. He did not come to this baptism because he, like the rest of us, needed all this.
He came uniquely as the one person in history who never needed it. And yet, he submitted himself to this to say, I am identifying with you.
[24:46] I am one with you. And this identification with humanity goes further because what we see in verses 12 and 13 is he's driven out into the desert, into the wilderness.

Again, if you go back and you read the Old Testament, the desert is always a place of hardship and of trial. It is a place where human beings feel their neediness. We need food.

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We need water. We need shelter. And we don't get it. Right? And anyone who knows the history of the Jewish people knows that they wandered in the wilderness for 40 years.
But part of the thing that happens also in the wilderness is God provides. Even as he tests, he also provides. And Mark doesn't tell us what happens like Matthew and Luke tell us about the temptation and how Satan came and the particular ways in which he was tempted and the particular ways in which Jesus responded.
He doesn't get into any of those details because his point is simply to say, you're identifying with me. This is what Jesus is doing.
[25:55] He's identifying with us. And for those of you who've been here this summer as we preach through the book of Isaiah, we know that he submitted to this part of being a suffering servant, identifying with fallen humanity because he has a trajectory in his life of being the suffering servant who in the end would go to the cross to die for us.

The suffering servant who Isaiah told us in chapter 53 was pierced for our transgressions, was crushed for our iniquities. Upon him was a chastisement that brought us peace.
And with his wounds we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray and we have turned everyone to his own way. But the Lord has laid on him, the suffering servant, the iniquity of us all.
And so this Jesus came to identify with fallen humanity so that he could be a substitute for us and achieve our salvation. One commentator said this about Jesus, he will don the servant's trowel rather than the warrior's sword.
He will practice sacrifice above vengeance. He will not inflict suffering but suffer himself as a ransom for many. But this story also tells us that Jesus is not just another human but he is also uniquely and specially the Son of God.
[27:27] As Jesus comes out of the water, the heavens open up, they're rent. And there's this imagery reminding us of what happens at the end of Jesus' life when he dies on the cross.

The curtain in the veil of the temple that kept the people from the glory of God because it would break out and destroy us in our imperfection was rent in the same word, the same Greek word, was rent from top to bottom.
As the sky is broken in this way, right, the spirit comes down and this voice comes, this is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.
Just as Jesus came and said by his identification with humanity, I'm a part of you, God now comes and says, I am making, I am letting you know that he is a part of me.
We together are a part of a family, a divine family of God, of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We in our Trinity family are sending this one into the world for his purposes so that he might come and be the bridge, to be the one who could rebuild a bridge between that the chasm of sin had created between humanity and God.
[28:54] This is what God has come to do. And so Mark, in this incredibly understated narrative way, is teaching us about the incarnation, about the doctrine of the Trinity, about the purposes of God and salvation, about the fulfillment of his promises and his faithfulness.

This is the Jesus that Mark is holding out for us. Jesus. My family and I have been watching the Miss Marvel series on Marvel.
She's a new superhero and this last episode that we watched last night, one of her best friends found out that she was actually a superhero, that she had superpowers.
And she realized she didn't know her friend as well as she thought. In fact, she wondered, do I know anything about you at all because I don't know that you're a superhero? She's actually kind of hurt, right?
It's kind of like Ned in Spider-Man. He like drops the Death Star Lego, which is really sad, by the way. But when Ned finds out that Peter Parker is actually Superman, this always happens with superheroes.
[30:05] There's some disclosure where people are like, oh my gosh, I thought I knew you and I don't know anything about you at all. And friends, in Mark's beginning of this gospel, this is what he's saying to us.

You think you know Jesus, but you may not know Him at all. There is so much for you to see here. We're doing this series so that we can deepen and refine our understanding of who Jesus is.
To see Him and all His complexity and all His compelling nature and all His beautiful actions and His heart for the world. And my prayer is that as we see Him, that we will be surprised.

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That some of our comfortable presuppositions will be shaken up. That some of the ways in which we proudly dismiss or resist Him will be challenged. And where we have fuzzy understanding of who He is, that we will gain great and brilliant clarity.
that we will see the beauty and the majesty and the wonder and the awe of who Jesus is as He's come to earth. So I invite you, come on this journey with us.
[31:26] One little thing I'll just say, if you want to come on this journey in a special way, in the back, there are Scripture journals. It's the text of the Gospel of Mark with lots of room to take notes.

So if you want to, pick those up for $3. and if you can't afford $3, just let us know and take it anyway. But if you want to pick those up to help you study along with us with the Gospel Mark this fall, we'd love for you to do that.
With that, let me pray. Lord Jesus, we come to You this morning. We confess. Lord, we confess our need, our need to know You more.
Lord, for the amazing thing about You is that we could study You for a lifetime. We could study Your Word and the account of who You are and what You have done. And Lord, yet continue to grow deeper and with greater clarity seeing who You are.
Lord, we thank You for what we have seen this morning. And we pray that we might be encouraged, Lord, to long for and to pursue knowing You more this fall. we pray these things in Jesus' name.
[32:39] Amen.

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