

Christianity Explored

Jesus—Who Was He?

Selected Texts

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Jesus—Who Was He?¹

Scripture

Last week I began a ten-week series of messages. It is based on a series that is titled *Christianity Explored* by Rico Tice and Barry Cooper, out of England.

Last week I introduced you to *Christianity Explored*, and I said that Christianity is not about beautiful buildings or boring services. Nor is it about throwing your brain out the window. No. Christianity is all about Jesus Christ. That is why we began last week by reading Mark 1:1.

And, that is the same Scripture I would like to direct your attention to this morning because today's message is titled, "Jesus—Who Was He?" I want to examine what Mark teaches us about the identity of Jesus Christ.

So, with that in mind, let us read Mark 1:1:

¹The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. (Mark 1:1)

Introduction

There's a great scene in the movie *Notting Hill* in which the character Bernie meets Anna Scott (played by Julia Roberts) for the first time. The movie is a romantic comedy about an ordinary man named William Thacker who falls in love with the most famous actress in the world. But William's friend Bernie doesn't know that when he first meets Anna. Here is what happens:

Bernie: So tell me, Anna, what do you do?

Anna: I'm an actress. What do you do?

¹ The material for this message is from *Christianity Explored* by Rico Tice and Barry Cooper (New Malden, Surrey: The Good Book Company, 2002), 7-17.

Bernie: I'm actually in the stock market myself, so not really in similar fields, though I have done the odd bit of amateur stuff—P. G. Woodhouse farce, all that. . . . I've always imagined that's a pretty tough job though, acting. I mean, the wages are a scandal, aren't they?

Anna: They can be.

Bernie: I see friends from university. They've been in the business longer than you. They're scraping by on \$7-8,000 a year. It's no life. What sort of acting do you do?

Anna: Films mainly.

Bernie: Oh, splendid! Oh, well done. How's the pay in the movies? I mean, the last film you did, what did you get paid?

Anna: Fifteen million dollars.

Bernie: Right. . . so that's fairly good.²

Bernie doesn't relate to Anna properly. Why not? Because he doesn't know who she is.

Many people don't relate to Jesus properly because they don't know who he is.

If we are going to relate properly to Jesus we have to get his identity right.

The actor Noel Coward was once asked, "What do you think about God?" to which he replied, "We've never been properly introduced."³

We saw last week that, according to the Bible, God has introduced himself to us through Jesus.

So, who was Jesus? Was he a great moral teacher? A Galilean carpenter? A compassionate miracle-worker? A misunderstood revolutionary? A great historical figure?

Mark's assessment goes far beyond any of these views. He states very boldly, right in the very first sentence of his book that Jesus is "**the Son of God**" (Mark 1:1). Or, to put it another way, Jesus is God in human form.

Now, to say such a thing seems outrageous to many modern

² Rico Tice and Barry Cooper, *Christianity Explored* (New Malden, Surrey: The Good Book Company, 2002), 7.

³ *Ibid.*, 8.

ears, but it was no small matter to the people of Mark's day either. In fact, a claim to be God in human form got you thrown to the lions, because the only person you were supposed to acknowledge as God in human form was the Roman Emperor. Virgil, the Roman poet, described emperors as "a new breed of Man, come down from Heaven."⁴

But here, right at the start of his book, Mark boldly asserts that there *is* a higher authority than the Emperor, and he is Jesus.

Lesson

Mark gives five evidences that Jesus is the Son of God, that Jesus is God in human form.

I. Jesus Has Power and Authority to Teach

First, Jesus has power and authority to teach.

Mark says in Mark 1:21-22, "And they [i.e. Simon, Andrew, James, and John; cf. 1:16-20] went into Capernaum, and immediately on the Sabbath he entered the synagogue and was teaching. And they were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority, and not as the scribes."

What set Jesus apart from the other teachers of the law was the way he taught. The teachers of the law did not come up with their own material. There was nothing original in their teaching. They never taught without quoting other sources. They hid behind the great rabbis of the past and claimed no authority of their own.

But Jesus did not teach like that. He didn't hide behind anybody else's authority. He claimed authority of his own. He said, "I tell you on my authority. You can take it from me."

Jesus not only *claims* that his words have as much authority as God's words; when he speaks, it's as if somebody has suddenly switched on the lights in a dark room. What people heard from the

⁴ *Ibid.*, 8.

lips of Jesus explained their lives to them. So we see in verse 22 that the people were astonished at his teaching.

But then we have to ask: Was Jesus all talk? Did he actually live out what he taught? And the staggering answer is that he did.

What makes this so staggering is that I routinely find a contradiction between what I say and what I do. I say that I am going to be loving, or kind, or generous, or forgiving, or whatever. But, when the rubber meets the road, my actions often don't match my words. And I am willing to bet that you find the same struggle too.

But for Jesus there was never any contradiction between what he said and what he did. Jesus was no religious hypocrite. For example, he taught, "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (Matthew 5:44). Later, as he was being crucified on the cross, he prayed for his executioners, saying, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). Now, *that is practicing what you preach.*

So, Jesus has power and authority to teach.

II. Jesus Has Power and Authority over Sickness

Second, Jesus has power and authority over sickness.

One example of Jesus' power and authority over sickness is found in Mark 1:29-31, "And immediately he left the synagogue and entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. Now Simon's mother-in-law lay ill with a fever, and immediately they told him about her. And he came and took her by the hand and lifted her up, and the fever left her, and she began to serve them."

Here Jesus demonstrates absolute power and authority over sickness. Just a touch of his hand and the fever is cured.

And this is not an isolated incident. Just a few verses later, in Mark 1:34, we read that Jesus cured whole crowds of sick people.

A few days later his touch cured a man with leprosy, the ancient equivalent of AIDS in terms of its severity and the stigma attached to it (Mark 1:40-42).

Then, in Mark 2:1-12, his word healed a paralytic: bones,

muscles and tendons knitted together before people's eyes without a hint of surgery.

By Mark 2:12 the people were all amazed, saying, "We never saw anything like this!"

The sick are healed, the deaf hear, the blind see, and the lame walk. There are, in fact, thirty healings recorded in the Gospels, all showing us that Jesus has power and authority over sickness.

And you may be interested to know that non-Christian sources of the day also speak of Jesus' healings. Josephus, the Samaritan historian, said, "Now, there was about this time Jesus, a wise man, if it be lawful to call him a man, for he was *a doer of wonderful works*."⁵

Everybody was talking about Jesus' miraculous power—the only debate was where the power came from.

So Jesus has power and authority over sickness.

III. Jesus Has Power and Authority over Nature

Third, Jesus has power and authority over nature.

Mark tells us about Jesus and his disciples in Mark 4:35-41. When evening had come, Jesus said to them, "Let us go across to the other side."

And leaving the crowd, they took him with them in the boat, just as he was. And other boats were with him. And a great windstorm arose, and the waves were breaking into the boat, so that the boat was already filling. Apparently, storms arise quite suddenly on the Sea of Galilee, and this was a ferocious storm.

But Jesus was in the stern, asleep on the cushion. Jesus was clearly exhausted so that he was not even awakened by the storm.

But the disciples, some of whom were experienced sailors, woke him and said to him, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?"

One senses that they were terrified. And it is remarkable that

⁵ Flavius Josephus and William Whiston, *The Works of Josephus: Complete and Unabridged* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1996), n.p.

they wake Jesus who was not a sailor but a carpenter by trade.

So, what do you think Jesus did? Did he grab the helm and try to steer them all to safety? Or did he shout commands to the disciples about the best course of action in their present situation?

No. Jesus awoke and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, “Peace! Be still!”

And in an instant, with just three words, the wind ceased, and there was a great calm.

Is it any wonder that Mark notes that the disciples were filled with great fear and said to one another, “Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?”

Whatever conclusion they—and we—draw, one thing is clear: Jesus has power and authority over nature.

But the next thing Jesus demonstrates is even more amazing.

IV. Jesus Has Power and Authority over Death

Fourth, Jesus has power and authority over death.

Many people in our culture just block death out of their minds. They share Woody Allen’s sentiments on death when he said, “It’s not that I’m afraid to die. I just don’t want to be there when it happens.”⁶

You may have come across bereavement cards that say things like: “Those whom we have loved never really go away.” But that’s a lie. That’s the whole problem. The reason death is so fearful is because it has absolute power to separate us totally from those we love, often unexpectedly. And there’s no opportunity to tell them we love them one last time.

My mother died suddenly of a heart attack when she was forty-seven years old. I never had a chance to say good-bye.

But I don’t know if that is worse than those whose loved ones linger for weeks, or even months, in great pain and suffering.

In both cases, however, death separates us from our loved

⁶ Rico Tice and Barry Cooper, *Christianity Explored* (New Malden, Surrey: The Good Book Company, 2002), 12.

ones. And there is nothing we can do.

But, Jesus shows that he confronts death *as its master*, with total power and authority over death.

Mark records in Mark 5:21-43 the account of Jesus' encounter with a religious leader, a synagogue ruler, named Jairus. Jairus came to Jesus because his precious daughter was dying. He implored Jesus to help him do something to save his daughter from death.

Can you identify with this man? Imagine the desperation and powerlessness you would feel if you saw your own child dying. That is the emotional intensity of this passage.

Jesus agrees to go to Jairus' house. But while they were on their way to his house, there came from the ruler's house some who said, "Your daughter is dead. Why trouble the Teacher any further?"

You can't get more shocking than that. Jairus' little daughter is dying. He has found Jesus, and hope has risen. Maybe Jesus can heal his daughter. But, as they get to the house, he hears the terrible words in verse 35, "Your daughter is dead."

But overhearing what they said, Jesus said to the ruler of the synagogue, "Do not fear, only believe."

Now, who would say something like that to a distraught father? Frankly, either a fool or someone who is supremely confident of his own power would say something like that.

Let's see what happens next. Look at Mark 5:37-42:

³⁷ And he allowed no one to follow him except Peter and James and John the brother of James. ³⁸ They came to the house of the ruler of the synagogue, and Jesus saw a commotion, people weeping and wailing loudly. ³⁹ And when he had entered, he said to them, "Why are you making a commotion and weeping? The child is not dead but sleeping." ⁴⁰ And they laughed at him. But he put them all outside and took the child's father and mother and those who were with him and went in where the child was. ⁴¹ Taking her by the hand he said to her, "Talitha cumi," which means, "Little girl, I say to you, arise." ⁴² And immediately the girl got up

and began walking (for she was twelve years of age), and they were immediately overcome with amazement.

And Jairus is reunited with the daughter he thought he'd lost forever. The message is clear: it is as easy for Jesus to raise a person from the dead as it is for us to wake somebody from sleep.

Jesus has power and authority over death. And not just over the death of a little girl some two thousand years ago but also over our deaths and his own, as we'll see over the next few weeks.

And if he does indeed have power over death, then it is insanity to ignore him, to say, "I'm just not interested," or "This is boring," or "That's fine for you to believe." One day you and I are going to die. The question is: are you prepared to trust Jesus with your own death?

Believe it or not, "Peace! Be still!" and "Arise!" are not the most outrageous things Jesus says. For that we turn to the fifth evidence that Jesus is the Son of God.

V. Jesus Has Power and Authority to Forgive Sin

And fifth, Jesus has power and authority to forgive sin. Mark says in Mark 2:1-5:

¹ And when he returned to Capernaum after some days, it was reported that he was at home. ² And many were gathered together, so that there was no more room, not even at the door. And he was preaching the word to them. ³ And they came, bringing to him a paralytic carried by four men. ⁴ And when they could not get near him because of the crowd, they removed the roof above him, and when they had made an opening, they let down the bed on which the paralytic lay. ⁵ And when Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven."

I can't imagine what the owner of the house thought as his roof was ripped open. But what is extraordinary here are Jesus' words to the paralytic in verse 5: "Son, your sins are forgiven."

Why on earth does Jesus say that rather than immediately curing the man of his paralysis?

Well, we can only grasp this if we understand what the word “sin” means.

A few years ago, *The Independent* newspaper ran an article on the seven deadly sins. And the writer said: “In this day and age, sin has lost its sting. A bit of sinning is much more likely to be seen as a spot of grown-up naughtiness, the kind of thing that sends a delicious shock through the system.”

That’s what many people think of sin. It’s not very serious. It’s a bit of fun on the side. But rightly understood, in the way that the Bible describes sin, there is nothing nice about it. Jesus is saying that sin is humankind’s biggest problem. It’s not paralysis, or global warming, or terrorism, but sin.

Sin is not just doing naughty things. It is not just lust or laziness or whatever. No, according to the Bible, sin is ignoring God in the world he has made. It’s rebelling against him by living without reference to him.

We may not have committed adultery or murder, but we have all said, “I will decide exactly how I live my life.”

Now why is ignoring God so serious? It’s because if I insist on my independence in a world that God has made, then that has consequences. The Bible clearly links sin with death—and not just death here, but eternal death. That’s why sin matters. And we’ll be looking more at those consequences next week.

The staggering claim that Jesus makes in this passage is that he has power and authority to forgive sin.

The implications of this are not lost on the religious leaders. They don’t mind the paralytic being called a sinner; they know everyone’s a sinner. Their problem with Jesus is shown in verse 7: “Why does this man speak like that? He is blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?”

They are saying to Jesus, “Who do you think you are that you can forgive sin?” Sin offends God. So only God has the right to forgive it. The question is: does Jesus really have the authority to

forgive sin, or is he blaspheming, as the religious leaders claim?

To answer that question, Jesus does something amazing. Let's read Mark 2:8-12:

⁸ And immediately Jesus, perceiving in his spirit that they thus questioned within themselves, said to them, "Why do you question these things in your hearts?" ⁹ Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Rise, take up your bed and walk'? ¹⁰ But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins"—he said to the paralytic— ¹¹ "I say to you, rise, pick up your bed, and go home." ¹² And he rose and immediately picked up his bed and went out before them all, so that they were all amazed and glorified God, saying, "We never saw anything like this!"

As if to substantiate his claim to have God's power and authority, Jesus immediately cures the man's paralysis with a few words. The crowd that has crammed into this house to see Jesus is totally amazed.

But the healing is not an end in itself. Jesus doesn't do it with a flourish as if performing magic tricks at a circus. No, he cures this man—and countless others—in order to reveal his true identity. He is quite obviously acting with God's authority and God's power. And he expects us to draw the obvious conclusion.

Conclusion

As Jesus teaches, calms the storm, raises the dead, heals the sick and forgives sins he acts in God's world with God's authority.

Of course, if this is true, then it's not just an abstract idea. It gets very personal. Do I recognize who he is? Will I recognize that he is my teacher, whether I like it or not? Do I recognize that he has authority over my death, whether I like it or not? Do I see that he has the authority to forgive my sin or leave it unforgiven? These are good questions to ask—because if Jesus is who he claims to be, then it is a scandal that we haven't lived under his authority.

Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and **membership** in his church family,
develop them to Christlike **maturity**,
equip them for their **ministry** in the church
and life **mission** in the world,
in order to **magnify** God's name.*

Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

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PRAYER:

O God, Mark said that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. He is not merely a great moral teacher, a Galilean carpenter, a compassionate miracle-worker, a misunderstood revolutionary, or a great historical figure. He is indeed the Son of God.

And he has demonstrated to us that he is the Son of God by showing that he has power and authority to teach, over sickness, over nature, over death, and to forgive sin.

Help each one here today to believe that.

And all of this I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

CHARGE:

As you leave here today, may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and always. Amen.