

Week 2: Jesus – Who is He?

Well good evening - I hope you're sufficiently fed and watered.

Can I just say, that if you have any questions as you listen to the talk, then please do jot them down.

And then raise them at the end in your groups.

So are you sitting comfortably?

Then I'll begin!

Let me begin by reminding you of what we said last week.

It was very simple, yet incredibly important.

Christianity is not about religion and going to church;
it's not about religious people dressed in funny clothes;

It's not about beautiful buildings and boring services.

Christianity isn't about rules and living in a certain way.

And it's definitely not about leaving your brains outside the door.

Christianity is actually all about "*knowing Jesus Christ*".

It's about having a relationship with Him.

Because, as we said last week,
God has revealed himself to us in the person of Jesus.

This relationship is **utterly central** to the Christian faith.

I want to stress this:

Christianity is **not about** religion - it's **about** knowing Jesus.

Encountering Jesus Christ himself - having a one-to-one with him.

That is right at the centre of the Bible and this course.

And without that relationship there can be
a terrible emptiness in our lives.

One person who felt the awful emptiness in his life without God was
Tolstoy, the great Russian writer of the nineteenth century.

He entitled his autobiography "*A Confession*" and
he admits in it that the whole of his life was a "*search for meaning*".

He writes that as a young man he decided there
was meaning in pleasure.

As a young soldier he revelled in wine, women and song.

But like I did, Tolstoy discovered the paradox of pleasure:
the more you have, the less it satisfies.

Tolstoy became one of the wealthiest men in Russia.

He could do anything with his money and he found he could do great good.

But **still** there was something missing.

He decided there was meaning in having a family.

In 1862 he married and had 13 children.

"This for a period," he writes, "put me off finding the meaning of life."

But as he watched his children play, he lamented,

"What meaning has my life that the inevitability of death does not destroy?"

The fact that one day his children would be dust,

caused him to anguish as he grappled with the question,

"What is the point of it all?"

And Tolstoy was disgusted with his contemporaries when he saw them avoiding the big questions:

Where did I come from?

Who am I?

Where am I going?

What should I do with my life?

Eventually, towards the end of his autobiography, Tolstoy documents how he found real meaning and real fulfilment - the "*something missing*".

He encountered rest for his soul at last in a one-to-one with Jesus.

At the end of his book, he delights in Jesus' promise recorded in Matthew (11:28) which says: "*Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.*"

What was true for Tolstoy then, can be true for each and everyone of us now.

It doesn't have to come after a lifetime of searching, becoming famous or having 13 children before we get there.

Our aim tonight and for the next few weeks is to show you Jesus Christ.

And our hope is that you will take the opportunity to build a relationship with him.

But to get to know anybody, we first have to get their identity right.

If you've seen the film Notting Hill, you may remember the scene where William takes Anna Scott to his sister's birthday dinner.

And his friend Bernie meets Anna but does not realise that she is someone famous.

The scene goes like this:

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

Anna: I'm an actress.

Bernie: I'm actually in the stock market myself,
so not really 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. How's the pay in movies?
I mean the last film you did, what did you get paid?

Anna: 15 million dollars.

Bernie: Right, so that's fairly good.

Bernie didn't relate to Anna properly because he didn't know that she was a famous actress.

And it's the same with Jesus.

In order to relate to Jesus properly we have to get his identity right.

So tonight we'll be answering the question upon which the Christian faith stands or falls:

[OHP 1]

Who is Jesus?

Is he a good moral teacher?
a compassionate miracle worker?
a great figure of history?
or ... what?

Mark's verdict goes way beyond that.

Please turn to page 1002 and look at Mark chapter 1, verse 1.

Mark chapter 1, verse 1:

"The beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God."

[BLANK OHP]

Mark is determined that we should see Jesus as a figure with divine authority: the Son of God.

And the word "*Christ*" isn't his surname; he would not come under "C" in the phone book.

The word "*Christ*" simply means God's anointed king.

Now if this is true, if Jesus **really** is God's King, then life can never be the same again - because we will either be his subjects or his enemies.

And what Mark does over the first few chapters of his Gospel is stack up layer after layer after layer of evidence to justify his claim that Jesus is the Son of God.

As we go through some of this evidence I would like you to consider:

Does Jesus reveal here the power and authority to substantiate the claim that he is God's king in God's world?

So let's take a look at, "*Who is Jesus?*"

So first of all:

Jesus has the power and authority to teach.

Would you please find Mark chapter 1, verses 21-22 on the bottom of page 1002:

"They went to Capernaum, and when the Sabbath came, Jesus went into the synagogue and began to teach. The people were amazed at his teaching, because he taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law."

What set Jesus apart from the other teachers of the law was the way he taught.

The other teachers did not come up with their own material.

Just like my talks, it was all borrowed from other people!

There was nothing original in their teaching; they were merely interpreters of the law.

And they never taught without quoting their own authorities.

They hid behind the great teachers of the past and claimed no authority of their own.

But Jesus did not teach like that.

[BLANK OHP]

If you read through any of the Gospels,

you'll see that he didn't hide behind anybody else's authority;
he claimed authority of his own.

He didn't speak about great heroes of the past.
He talked about himself.

And what people heard from the lips of Jesus helped them to
understand their lives.

Hearing him speak was like driving in the dark and
suddenly putting your headlights on full beam:
where you are going suddenly becomes very clear.

It was all his own material,
and the people were amazed at his teaching (*Mark 1:22*).

But we have to ask: Was it a case of do as I say **not** as I do?

Or did Jesus actually live what he taught?

And the staggering thing is that he did.

That is one of the things that makes Jesus so attractive.

Most of us are aware of our own selfishness and the tension that exists between what we say and do.

But Jesus was no religious hypocrite.

In the Sermon on the Mount, he taught:

"Love your enemies; pray for those who persecute you."

Later, as he is being crucified, he does exactly that.

He prays for his executioners,

"Father forgive them, they know not what they do."

There's an amazing correlation between life and lip that we can only dream of.

So Jesus has authority not just as a teacher,
but as the **greatest** teacher the world has ever seen.

A teacher who promised true freedom to those people
who held to his teaching.

Listening to him helps us to see that God's laws reflect his character.

So he says not to lie, because he is a God of truth;
not to commit adultery, because he is a faithful God;
not to steal, because he is a giving God.

These are not fences to restrict my freedom
but foundations,

which free me to live as I should,
as I was made to.

And if we want to follow Jesus we have to trust him to know what is best for us.

But Jesus wasn't merely a teacher.

[OHP 3]

Secondly:

Jesus has power and authority over sickness.

Jesus is not merely a teacher. He's also a healer.

Please take a look at chapter 1, verses 29-31 on page 1003:

*"As soon as they left the synagogue,
they went with James and John to the home of Simon and Andrew.
Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever,
and they told Jesus about her.
So he went to her, took her hand and helped her up.
The fever left her and she began to wait on them."*

Here Jesus has absolute authority over sickness.

Just a touch of his hand and the fever is cured.

There is no period of lying in bed recovering, no taking it easy - it's as if she had never had a fever.

And this is **not** an isolated incident.

Three verses later, in verse 34,
we read that Jesus cured **many** sick people.

A few days later his touch cured a man with leprosy (*Mark 1:40-45*).

Then, in chapter 2, his word heals a paralytic without a hint of surgery.

By verse 12 of chapter 2 everyone is amazed,
"We've never seen anything like this!" they exclaim.

The deaf hear, the blind see, and the lame walk.

[BLANK OHP]

There are in fact 30 healings in Mark's Gospel,
all showing us that Jesus has authority over sickness.

This is far greater authority than doctors have today.

Even with all the fantastic advances in medical technology
modern science is still not as effective as Jesus.

Jesus healed people so completely that it was as if they had
never been sick.

Everybody was talking about his miraculous power -
even his enemies acknowledged his amazing healing power.

So Jesus has power and authority over sickness.

[OHP 4]

Thirdly, we see that Jesus has power and authority over nature.

Please turn to Mark Chapter 4 verse 36 on page 1006.

Here we have Jesus and his disciples setting off across the big lake that is the sea of Galilee.

And in verse 37 Mark tells us,
"a furious squall came up, and the waves broke over the boat, so that it was nearly swamped."

This isn't a couple of irresponsible holiday-makers on the beach getting swept out to sea in their rubber dinghy.

These are hardened fishermen caught in a whirlwind.

This is when the delusion that we are in control gets totally destroyed.

And the hardened fishermen who have spent their lives on the sea of Galilee are **terrified**,
the boat is getting swamped, they're going to drown.

So what do they do?
They wake up Jesus who's asleep.

What does Jesus do?

Grab the helm and steer them out of the whirlwind? **No.**

He gets up and says 3 words, "*Quiet! Be still!*"

Then, in verse 39, the wind dies down and it is completely calm.

It normally takes waves a long time to calm down if the weather has been rough, but Jesus flattens them immediately.

[BLANK OHP]

Now how many of you,
if you've heard that story when you were a child,
have tried doing that?

When you whooshed up and down the bath,
did you try, "*Quiet! Be still!*"

It just didn't work did it?

Or am I the only one who tried?

But this is what the disciples saw Jesus doing.

No wonder the passage ends in verse 41:
*"They were terrified and asked each other, Who is this?
Even the wind and the waves obey him!"*

The disciples should have known from the Psalms (89) that only God himself controls the wind and can still the waves.

So the answer to their question, "Who is this?", seems obvious.

Furthermore, in the next chapter we see the disciples witnessing Jesus doing something even more astonishing.

For here we see Jesus has absolute power and authority over death.

[OHP 5]

My Grandmother was a fine old age when she died a couple of years ago and so it wasn't much of a shock when she died, but it still hurt, I still cried at her passing away.

Death is always hardest on those left behind.

Death is so painful, so wrenching.

Not least because it severs relationships with loved ones.

You may have come across bereavement cards which say, "*those whom we have loved never really go away*".

But that's a lie.

They do go away and we miss them so much, **that's** the problem.

It is the separation which is so hard to bear.

[BLANK OHP]

But Jesus makes it quite clear in chapter 5 that he has power and absolute authority over death.

In verses 21 to 43, on page 1007, we have a religious leader, a synagogue ruler named Jairus,

in agony because he is powerless to help his little daughter who is dying.

So please follow me as I read verses 21-43 on page 1007,
skipping verses 24 to 34.

*When Jesus had again crossed over by boat to the other side of the lake,
a large crowd gathered round him while he was by the lake.*

Then one of the synagogue rulers, named Jairus, came there.

*Seeing Jesus, he fell at his feet and pleaded earnestly with him,
“My little daughter is dying. Please come and put your hands on her so
that she will be healed and live.”*

And from verse 35.

*While Jesus was still speaking, some men came from the house of
Jairus, the synagogue ruler.*

*“Your daughter is dead,” they said.
“Why bother the teacher any more?”*

*Ignoring what they said, Jesus told the synagogue ruler,
“Don’t be afraid; just believe.”*

*He did not let anyone follow him except Peter,
James and John the brother of James.*

*When they came to the home of the synagogue ruler,
Jesus saw a commotion, with people crying and wailing loudly.*

*He went in and said to them,
“Why all this commotion and wailing?
The child is not dead but asleep.”*

But they laughed at him.

After he put them all out, he took the child's father and mother and the disciples who were with him, and went in where the child was.

*He took her by the hand and said to her, "Talitha koum!"
(which means, "Little girl, I say to you, get up!").*

Immediately the girl stood up and walked around (she was twelve years old). At this they were completely astonished.

*He gave strict orders not to let anyone know about this,
and told them to give her something to eat.*

Now you can't get more shocking than this.

His little daughter is dying and he hears the terrible words in verse 35,
"Your daughter is dead."

What does Jesus do?

Does he sympathise with the man and comfort him in his grief?

No!

He tells him not to be afraid; just believe.

I'd love to know what Jairus was thinking at that moment.

He knew Jesus could heal the sick,
and whilst his daughter was alive she had a chance -

if only he had got Jesus to his house sooner,
his daughter would be alive and well.

But now?

And all Jesus says is that he is not to worry.
Instead he should just believe in him and in his power over death.

And he takes the hand of the dead girl and says, "*Little girl, get up!*"

Again we see the complete and immediate healing - she stood up and walked around.

The message is clear:

It is as easy for Jesus to raise people from the dead
as it is for us to wake the sleeping.

Just as I can wake a sleeping person, so Jesus can raise a dead person.

And it wasn't just a one off either, 3 times he did it.

Jesus is showing that he can get us through death,
and we'll see in the weeks ahead that this is conclusively proved by his
own resurrection from the dead.

One day I know with absolute certainty that I am going to die.

And if Jesus does indeed have power over death,
then surely it is madness to ignore him?

Well, I wonder now if you can see why Peter followed Jesus; why he hung around him.

Jesus had come into his world and he had seen him say, "*Quiet, be still!*" to a raging sea, when such natural forces can sometimes be so terrifying.

And he had seen him say, "*Get up!*" to a dead girl.

But having control over nature and the power to raise the dead, are not the most amazing demonstrations of his power and authority as God's King.

Please turn back to chapter 2, verses 1-12 on page 1003.

For here we see Jesus giving the greatest demonstration of his power and authority - the power and authority to forgive sins.

[OHP 6]

Here Jesus is in someone's home and a paralysed man comes crashing through the roof.

I can't imagine what the owner thought as the roof was ripped open, but what is extraordinary here is Jesus' words to the paralytic.

In verse 5, "*Son, your sins are forgiven.*"

Now, I don't know about you.

But to my ears, Jesus demonstrates a staggering lack of priority.
What could be more politically incorrect?

Jesus is saying that sin is this man's biggest problem - not his disability.

How can Jesus say such a hurtful thing to a disabled person?
And why on earth does he mention sin?

Well, we can only grasp this if we understand what this word "*sin*" actually means.

[BLANK OHP]

Sometime ago The Independent newspaper had an article on the seven deadly sins.

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 these days.
It's not very serious. It's a bit of fun on the side.

Some people also believe that breaking the law,
or perhaps breaking the 10 commandments,
constitutes "sin".

Whilst these are indeed sinful,
sin itself is actually worse than just breaking the law,

It's even worse than destroying the World Trade Centre.

Sin is not **just** doing naughty things.

It is not **just** lust or laziness or whatever.

According to the Bible,
sin is simply ignoring God in the world he has made.

It's rebelling, either consciously or unconsciously,
against God by living life without reference to him.

So we suspend God's moral law and make up our own,
as and when it suits us.

We may not have committed adultery or murder,
but we have all said,
"I will be God and I will decide what is right and wrong."

And if we haven't actually said it, that is how we have behaved.

So sin is **our** biggest problem also.

We have **not** allowed God to be God in our lives.

Throughout the Bible rebellion against God, *sin*, is clearly linked with death, and not just death here, but eternal death, what we call Hell.

That's **why** sin matters.

And we'll be looking more at the consequences of our rebellion next week.

But this is serious and we have all done it.
Each one of us.

Even this paralytic.

And the staggering claim that Jesus makes is that he has authority to forgive our rebellion against God.

Jesus is saying that he has the power and authority to give us the relationship with God that we should have -

the relationship that we were created for!

And you can see the shock from the way the religious leaders react.

They don't mind the paralytic being called a sinner; they know everyone's a sinner.

Their problem with Jesus is in verse 7,
*"Why does this fellow talk like that? He's 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 is not treating God as God.

It's relational.

It's to use and ignore God in his world.

Sin is an offence against God.

And so **only God** can forgive sin.

So **who is** Jesus?

[OHP 7]

Mark's Gospel emphatically answers that he has the right and the authority of God.

For as Mark says in the opening verse of chapter 1 that he is,
"the Son of God".

Jesus is God's Lord and King.

And as he teaches,
calms the storm,
raises the dead,
heals the sick and
forgives sins -

he acts in God's world with God's authority.

He acts as if he is the ruler of God's world.

Of course he could be completely bonkers, or worse a liar.

Or it could actually be true.

Throughout this course we want you to put Mark Chapter 1 verse 1 to the test.

So does Jesus demonstrate that he is God and ruler of God's world?

Of course, if he is, then it's not just an abstract idea.
It gets very personal.

Because if Jesus is who he claims to be then it is a scandal
that we haven't lived under his authority.

If Jesus is the king of the world, then we are guilty of treason.

[BLANK OHP]

So the question we need to ask ourselves is,
if I believe this, will I submit to him?

It all, of course, comes down to his identity.

That is what the teachers of the law are wrestling with when they ask,
*"Why does this fellow talk like that? He's blaspheming!
Who can forgive sins but God alone?"*

So who is Jesus?

Thank you for listening.