

Who is Jesus?

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[0 : 0 0] So, page three of the little booklet, that's where we're going to be this morning, Luke 22 and 23. And I'd like to begin with a question for you all.

Who do you think Jesus is? Who is Jesus? That's the main question that I'd like us to answer this morning.

And it's an important question. Recently, as a church, we've been walking through, we've been exploring what it means to walk the road of the cross and the resurrection with Jesus.

So, we've been exploring what it means to live trusting and honoring Jesus through the ups and downs of day-to-day life, through the sufferings and the hopes and the joys of life.

So, knowing exactly who Jesus is, is important. Because if we're going to trust him with our lives, if we're going to follow him, if we're going to suffer for him, then we better know who he is.

[1 : 1 0] We better be sure that he's a trustworthy guy. Now, there are lots of potential answers to the question, who is Jesus?

To some, Jesus was a wise teacher. So, a Gandhi or a Dumbledore type of guy. A man who had great insight into life.

To others, Jesus was more than that. He was some kind of political revolutionary, kind of like an early Che Guevara, out to throw the political and religious regime of his day.

But to others, Jesus was much more than that. They would disagree that he was just a teacher or a political activist.

Other people would say, well, he is, he was, and he still is the one true living God. The God who came to defeat evil, to forgive sin, to restore the world to the peace and harmony that it was supposed to have.

[2 : 1 8] And there's lots of other opinions, too. The world is awash with answers to the question of who is Jesus. So, which is it?

Who is Jesus? And are the great claims of this man to be trusted? You might know the story of the Wizard of Oz. It kind of illustrates what we're going to talk about this morning.

Dorothy, the main character, gets carried far away from Kansas by a tornado. And ends up in the mythical land of Oz. And Oz is a dangerous place.

And there are these evil witches that are out to get her. And the story goes that Dorothy, she makes some friends. And her and her friends hear about a mighty wizard.

The mighty, powerful Wizard of Oz. Who can save them and return her home. So, off they go to see the wizard. The wonderful Wizard of Oz.

[3 : 1 7] Oz. And when they get there, the wizard puts on this great display of grandeur and terror to demonstrate his mighty power. But in a turn of events, he's revealed to be an imposter.

This mighty and powerful Oz. The promised king. The promised king. The promised deliverer. Turns out to be just a simple man from the circus. A man who has no real power to help.

And I wonder, are you tempted to think of Jesus a little bit like that? As someone who is promised to have all of the answers. As someone who claims he can help.

But in reality, we consider him someone who either won't help. Or maybe he can't help. Either he's a God who has no interest in our boring little lives.

Or maybe he's just a man from the circus. Someone who is no different from the rest of us. Well, this morning, I'd like to try and shed some light on that.

[4 : 22] And I'd like to answer this question, who is Jesus? By simply walking through this passage. And in the next 15 minutes, I'd like to skim quickly through these three encounters that Jesus has with the Jewish leadership.

With Pontius Pilate. And with Herod. And I'd like to take some time to see who Jesus says he is. And then who he shows himself to be.

So page three. Page three. Here we go. Verse 66. So our passage begins at daybreak. Jesus is hauled into the courtroom to meet the judgment of the Jewish authorities.

The Jews finally have their man. And they've been planning to kill Jesus for months. Now is their chance. But the problem is, they still haven't found Jesus guilty of anything that they can kill him for.

So in verse 67, they make a last ditch attempt here. And ask him a question that sums up this whole phony trial. They ask, if you are the Messiah, then tell us.

[5 : 29] So the Messiah was God's promised, God's chosen and promised king. The one who would come to free God's people from their enemies and establish a new kingdom on earth.

And they ask this question to try and catch Jesus out. They're not interested in whether or not this might be true. They're hoping that Jesus will incriminate himself here.

Because if Jesus says, yes, I am the Messiah, then the deeply religious Jews will consider this to be the crime of blasphemy, comparing oneself to God.

But more than that, because if Jesus says, yes, I'm the Messiah, the promised king, then the Jews would bring Jesus before the Roman court.

He would be a dangerous revolutionary, a rival king, someone who was out to overthrow the Roman Empire. And this would be a crime worthy of death.

[6 : 31] So how does Jesus answer this leading question then? Well, in verse 67, he says, If I tell you, you will not believe me. And if I ask you, you would not answer.

So Jesus refuses to answer this question. He knows it's not genuine. He's been over this with them before. If you look back in Luke at chapter 11, Jesus has had this conversation already.

And they didn't believe him then. And they're not going to believe him now. So effectively, Jesus says, look, you've already made up your mind. We're not going to talk about this.

And then he drops a bombshell because he goes on in verse 69. And he says, but from now on, the son of man will be seated at the right hand of the mighty God.

So Jesus quotes words from an Old Testament prophecy here, which promised a divine king. Someone who would eternally rule over his enemies.

[7 : 34] And he applies these words to himself. And so basically, Jesus says, We're not going to talk about whether or not I'm the Messiah. But know this.

You can judge me and you can kill me. But from now on, I'll be seated at the right hand of the Father. I'll be in that position of power and honour.

And I will be the one that judges and rules over you. And the council, they get what he's saying. So they ask him, are you then the son of God?

And Jesus replies, you say that I am. You've said it. And from that moment on, the Jews had what they needed. Not only had he blasphemed by claiming to be the Messiah, but according to the Jewish authorities, he had claimed to be God's promised king.

He had claimed that he was going to overthrow the Roman Empire. And this is a crime that the Romans would punish by death. Why do we need any more testimony, they say?

[8 : 46] We've heard it from his own lips. What is it that you hear from Jesus' lips? The ramblings of a madman who claims to be God?

Or the words of the divine man who, being God, came to save you from your sin and set you free? You know, it's funny.

The Jews longed for God's promised Messiah. They were desperate for God to set them free from their oppression and to establish his kingdom on earth.

The thing is, when Jesus finally arrives and presents himself as the very thing that they had been longing for, they reject him.

They take one look at Jesus and say, well, he can't possibly be the answer to their problems. He looked nothing like what they expected.

[9 : 50] And like the Jews, there are many things that we long for in life. We long for freedom. The freedom to pursue the things that will make us happy. So whatever that is to you, maybe it's the perfect job or the ideal husband or wife, or maybe it's the new iPhone.

Many of us long to know who we are and how we fit into this life, our identity. And many of us long for hope. Maybe it's simply the hope of something better than we have now.

Well, Jesus came to offer us all of these things, to set us free so we can pursue joy that will last. He came so that we could find our identity in him and so that we could have hope in this life and in the next.

The problem is, like the Jews, so many of us have made the decision that Jesus cannot possibly be the answer to the things that we desire.

No, it must be somewhere else. It must be someone else. Maybe it's something else. So consciously or subconsciously, we write him off.

[11 : 08] Write him off as a madman or maybe as just a man. Someone who's just unable to help me. If that's you, if you're inclined to think that way, then take another look.

Whether you've been a Christian for many, many years or whether you're not a Christian, know that Jesus loves you. He's for you. He's on your side.

He wants to help you. And if you take time to get to know him, perhaps you'll see that there's so much more than you first thought.

But let's keep going. Because the Jews have what they need now. They have what they need to seek the death penalty. And so they haul Jesus up before the Roman ruler Pontius Pilate and they present their case.

Now, psychological research would have us believe that about 60% of us lie at least once every 10 minutes of conversation. Well, that's nothing compared to what the Jews bring before Pilate.

[12 : 17] Because in verse 2 of chapter 23, they say, we have found this man subverting our nation. He opposes payment of taxes to Caesar and claims to be Messiah, a king.

So they accuse him of being a dangerous public nuisance, which is blatantly false. They accuse him of tax evasion, which earlier in Luke, Jesus explicitly proves to be false.

And then lastly, they accuse him of being Messiah, a king. Which, ironically, is true. He is the Messiah. He is the king above all kings.

But to Pilate's ears, this isn't an accusation of divine sovereignty. This is an accusation of political revolt. This is the accusation of a challenging king.

And this is what Pilate picks up on. So in verse 3, he asks him, are you the king of the Jews? To which Jesus' reply is suitably vague. You have said so.

[13 : 16] Because, well, he is the king. He is the king overall, but he's not out to overthrow Rome. And there's a very interesting discussion that takes place between Jesus and Pilate, and it's recorded in the book of John in chapter 18.

Now, we haven't got time to go into this, but the outcome of this discussion is what Pilate declares in verse 4. I find no basis for a charge against this man.

Jesus is innocent. And the Jewish authorities, they hear this, and they are furious. And they try to convince Pilate that actually, this man is trouble, and he needs to be stopped.

He needs to be killed. So Pilate is left with a decision here. What do I do with this Jesus? He's not a dangerous political revolutionary.

At worst, in Pilate's opinion, he's a harmless religious fanatic. So what does Pilate do when faced with this difficult question of who is Jesus? Well, he does what so many of us love to do in difficult situations.

[14 : 26] He passes the problem to someone else. He refuses to think about it. However, like all good problems in life, it won't just go away if we ignore it.

And the question of who Jesus is is a question that each one of us has to answer. Now, caveat, there might be times in our life where we're just not sure of the answer.

And that's okay. It's okay to be uncertain sometimes. And we're going to get into that in just a second. What I'm talking about here is perhaps those of us who just want to remain neutral.

Those of us who just want to remain indifferent to the question of Jesus. Those of us who just say, whatever. I don't care. Because that's something that we can't really do.

Jesus, he claims to be king over all. And he invites each and every one of us to have a place in his kingdom. Our response is either to say, accept that and say, yes, thank you very much.

[15 : 33] Or to say, no. There's not really anything in between. So we can't ignore the question, who is Jesus? Which brings us to our last guest judge and very close to the final verdict.

Herod. Now, Herod has a curiosity about this man. He wants to see him and he'd like to see some sort of sign. Now, some have suggested that Herod has heard of Jesus.

He's heard of this one who can forgive sin, who can take away guilt and who can offer eternal life and hope. And the suggestion is that Herod wants to believe.

He wants to have this for himself. But he needs a sign. He needs something to confirm that Jesus is real and that he's true. And others have suggested that Herod simply wants to be entertained.

Entertained by this man who some say can do miracles. And we can't really tell what Herod is thinking here. But what is clear is that Herod wants to prove, or Herod wants Jesus to prove his worth.

[16 : 45] He wants him to prove his worth with some signs, some miracles, some performance. And so in verse 9, he plies him with many questions. But Jesus refuses to perform.

And when he doesn't entertain Herod, well, Herod has no use for him anymore. So without these signs, Jesus isn't worth his time. So they mock him, they dress him up in royal robes and mockery of his claims to be a king, and they ship him back to Pilate.

Many people like Herod say that without a sign, without some sort of evidence, that they just can't believe the radical claims of Jesus. I mean, if Jesus just claimed to be some sort of religion teacher, or some sort of political leader, then we wouldn't really care much for proof.

But Jesus claims to be God. And he claims to be the one who offers us eternal life if we believe in him. That's a big claim.

And thankfully, God hasn't left us with our evidence to back that claim up. I mean, for starters, the evidence is sitting all around you in this room, in the hearts and the minds and the lives of those of us who have accepted Jesus as king and who have been transformed by God's love.

[18 : 13] But perhaps most clearly, the evidence is right here in the Bible, in God's word. Because Jesus shows himself to be real, not only in what he says, but in what he does.

Let's read the finale to this story. Verses 22 to 25. And that's on page 5 of your booklet. For the third time, he, that's Pilate, spoke to them, that's the Jewish authorities in the crowd, and he says, Why?

What crime has this man committed? I have found him in no grounds for the death penalty. Therefore, I will have him punished and then release him. But with loud shouts, they insistently demanded that he be crucified and their shouts prevail.

So Pilate decided to grant their demands. He released the man who had been thrown into prison for insurrection and murder, the one they asked for, and surrendered Jesus to their will.

So three times in the final verdict, Pilate declares Jesus innocent. That he finds no basis for the charges brought against him.

[19 : 30] Neither has Herod. But the Jewish authorities and the people, they don't care. And each time they respond, crucify him.

Crucify him. Crucify him. And Pilate grants their demand. Jesus, the divine king, will go to the cross to die.

But yet, that was God's plan all along. Because Jesus didn't come to this earth to be worshipped as a king.

He didn't come to this earth and demand to be honoured. No, Jesus came as the suffering servant to accept the penalty of death for all of the wrongs in the world so that we don't have to.

The very evidence that Jesus is who he says he is, is seen in his life, in his death, and then in his resurrection. And while I'm sure there have been many good and loving teachers and activists throughout the millennia, how many of them have loved you enough to die for you?

[20 : 47] And how many of them have risen from the dead? As we live the Christian life, as we walk the road of the cross with Jesus, as we live trusting him through the ups and downs of day-to-day life, remember that we don't trust in a dead person.

We trust in the one true living God, the God who was not only crucified for our sin, but who rose again, destroying, defeating the power of evil and death, and who will one day return again to this earth to destroy evil once and for all and to judge and renew the world.

Remember that we don't trust in the empty promises of wise teachers or politicians or in some far-off distant God. We trust in Jesus, the God who having lived on this very earth and having experienced all that we experience, so the rejection, the betrayal, the disappointment, the despair, the torture, the bereavement, the death, he's able to understand us and he's able to comfort us in our suffering.

In just a minute, we're going to celebrate communion, whereby eating the bread and drinking the wine, we remember the sacrifice that Jesus made for us.

And by doing this, by participating in communion, we're saying, yeah, Jesus, you are the king, you are the Messiah. we're acknowledging that in the middle of our challenges and our sufferings and our joys in life, that we have an everlasting hope, that we have an indestructible joy and that we have an indescribable peace, knowing that for those of us who trust in Jesus, that we've been forgiven of our sin, not because of our goodness, but because of what Jesus did for us.

[23 : 03] Do you know that? Can you say that? As you sit there today, are you sitting there safe in the knowledge that you have been forgiven of your guilt and saved from eternal death by the love of God?

At the very end of this trial, there's a great allusion, a great picture of the gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ, that as the innocent Jesus accepts the penalty of death and is handed over to die, the guilty Barabbas is set free.

The innocent Jesus died so that you and so that I, the guilty, could be set free from our sin and set free to the fullness of life. If we choose to trust and believe in him.

The question is, however, who do you think he is? I want to finish with a quote, a quote from C.S. Lewis and that's the guy that wrote the Narnia books.

He says this, a man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg or he would be the devil of hell.

[24 : 30] You must make your choice. Either this man was and is the son of God or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you that you are the one true and living God. We thank you that you're a good God, a God who loves us so much that you gave your son Jesus to die for us, to give us the gift of salvation, forgiveness and hope.

Lord, we ask that you would reveal yourself more and more to each of us and that the Spirit would impress the truth upon our hearts and our minds, encouraging us and empowering us to go and share the good news of Jesus Christ, the gospel of who he is and what he has done for us.

Amen. Amen. Amen.