

THE REAL JESUS
A Series on the Book of Mark
“The Love of God”
Luke
New City Church of LA
December 21, 2008
Speaker: Kevin Haah

I. Vision of New City

Merry Christmas! Welcome to New City. We’re a multi-ethnic, multi-socioeconomic come-as-you-are church in downtown LA. We’re a church where everyone is welcomed.

II. Introduction

How many of you have seen a movie called Talladega Nights? It’s about a racecar driver named Ricky Bobby. Ricky Bobby is not exactly the brightest guy. At one point in the movie, he prays. He prayed to “little baby Jesus.” It was a kind of a goofy prayer:

Dear tiny Baby Jesus in Your tiny baby crib, with Your tiny little hands and feet, watching Your tiny little Einstein Baby Development videos, use Your tiny little superpowers to keep me winning on the racetrack. Amen.

His wife, who was just a little sharper than Ricky Bobby said to him:

You know, I don’t think you are supposed to pray to the little “baby” Jesus, because He grew up and became a man, and I think you’re supposed to pray to “Grownup” Jesus.

Ricky Bobby says:

I don’t want to pray to that Jesus. I like praying to the little “Baby” Jesus, because it makes me feel good just to think about Him being a little, tiny infant. So when you’re praying, you can pray to the “Grownup” Jesus, or the “Teenage” Jesus, or the “Bearded” Jesus, or whomever you want to, but I like “Christmas” Jesus. I like a cuddly little baby Jesus. I’m going to pray to Him.

What struck me as I was watching this movie is that, ironically enough, one of the great barriers we face when it comes to entering into the reality of God is that we all tend to replace the REAL Jesus with whatever Jesus we want Him to be. We might want to replace Him with the little baby Jesus, because it makes us feel good at Christmas time just thinking about a little infant in a manger. Nice, cozy, warm. He's just, soft, kind of sweet just lying there. But, is that the REAL Jesus? In fact, is that the REAL Christmas story?

That's why we have been in a series we call the REAL Jesus, and we've been looking at the book of Mark for the real Jesus, instead of the Jesus we create with our own desires.

But, since today is Christmas Sunday and Mark doesn't have the birth story of Jesus, we are not going to look at Mark. We're going to look at Luke.

III. Scripture Reading

Let's go to Luke 2:8-20.

This passage and Christmas story tell us (1) where Jesus came to, and (2) why Jesus came the way he came.

IV. So, first, where he came.

The angel said to the shepherds, "Don't be afraid. I bring you good news, of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior is born to you; and he is Christ."

And then the angel says this intriguing thing, "Here's the sign, here's the tip-off, here's the dead giveaway that will enable you to recognize the real Messiah, the real Savior when you see him."

And if you're a shepherd, you would expect this sign to be pretty impressive. If this is a royal child you're expecting the angel to say you'll recognize the baby because you'll find him wrapped in silk and lying in a golden crib and living in a spectacular palace because that's how kings do it in this world.

But the angel doesn't say anything like that. The angel says, "You'll find this baby born in a barn, wrapped in rags, laid in a feed trough."

It's a very ironic thing because in our day whenever you see a nativity scene in somebody's home or in a shopping center, it always looks so neat. But in the actual barn where Jesus was born, it wasn't that way. Because a barn's a messy place. I'll guarantee you when Mary found out that's where she was going to give birth to her baby, she didn't say to Joseph, "Hey, how sweet, how quaint!" Nobody went through the barn and cleaned it up with Clorox ahead of time. It looked and smelled the way barns always look and smell. It was not a pitiful place to have a child. And when the shepherds showed up in the barn, they didn't make it any better either. They're not known for hygiene. The baby's in a manger and a manger is not a high-end product in the crib line? A manger is a feed trough.

The angels say the fact that Jesus ended up here is not an accident. It's not arbitrary the fact they would find Jesus in this condition. This is a sign: a tip-off, this is a dead giveaway that this Jesus is no ordinary king.

Here's the clue: you can recognize him because he will show up in the messiest place you can imagine.

No power.

No money.

No newspapers.

No headlines.

Born in a barn, wrapped up in rags, surrounded by animals, entrusted to this poverty-stricken young couple.

Think about the situation that this creator of the world came into:

Think about the violence. How King Herod tried to kill the baby. And how they had to run away and live in exile in Egypt.

Think about the scandal in Nazareth when a young teenage girl got pregnant out of wedlock. We're talking about a society where they righteous people stoned such girls.

Think about the forced journey to Bethlehem, 160 miles away, during Mary's pregnancy. What kind of law is that? There is no mention of a donkey in the Bible.

The king of the universe, the alpha and the omega, creator of the universe, enters into human history in a little bundle, wrapped in obscurity and poverty and humility.

Philippians 2 put it this way:

Jesus Christ, ⁶Who, being in very nature^[a] God,
did not consider equality with God something to be grasped,
⁷but made himself nothing,
taking the very nature^[b] of a servant,
being made in human likeness.
⁸And being found in appearance as a man,
he humbled himself
and became obedient to death—
even death on a cross!

V. Why? Why couldn't he make things a little easier, safer, cleaner, richer, more powerful? Why come in weakness instead of strength and power? Let's go to the second point. Why Jesus came the way he came.

The angels announced that the purpose of the coming of Jesus is to save us. If his purpose is to save us, the fact that he came into a messy place, in weakness, instead of strength must tell us something about what we are saved from.

You might be thinking: if he came to save us, why did he come in weakness? If God really is out to save me, he should have come in power, in riches, not weakness, and blow away my enemies and my problems. We need a Messiah to come in power to destroy evil doers. What we're saying is: The reason we have so many problems is because OF THEM. Most everyone says, the problem is THEM. So, we need someone to knock them down. It's the lawless, the criminal; or, it's the privileged ones exploiting people and not sharing. The problem is THEM. The problem is my parents, the problem is that I don't know the right people; the problem is that I don't have the money; the problem is that guy who victimized me. We need a Messiah to get rid of those out there. If the real problem is THEM, then, I think you might be right that he had to come in power in order to save us.

But, Jesus came in weakness because the problem is IN HERE. IN OUR HEARTS. We are a sinner. We are self-centered. We don't need a Messiah to destroy all evil doers. That would destroy us. We need someone to work in us. Change us. Come in us.

You see, the real problem is NOT out there. The real problem is not that I am a sufferer who needs a sugar daddy, a Genie; I know we think that; but the real problem is that I am a sinner and I need a savior. I need my sins dealt with. I need to deal with the fact that I am cutoff from God, alienated from God. Outside of God, there is only meaninglessness and ultimately destruction. I need to deal with the mess inside my heart: I need to deal with my self-centeredness, my anger, my selfish ambition, my emptiness, my loneliness, my pain. The vicious cycles of sin. These are the things that are destroying everything. It's destroying our relationships. It's destroying our lives with addictive behaviors. It's destroying our world. It's the cause of all evil in the world.

We are messy and messed-up and we can't fix it. We can't fix it.

So the angel says, "Here's the good news. Here's the good news of Christmas. Our God's not afraid of a mess. The God who was born in a stable and laid in a manger will come right in the middle of our lives no matter how messed up it is if we just ask him."

Sometime, people say, "I've got to get my life cleaned up first. I've got a mess of a life and I have to fix myself up first. Then I can come to God." But God says no, it's not that way at all.

I am here to save you because you can't save yourself. I love you, and I want to save you. I want to touch you. You don't have to put yourself together and come to me. You are not saved by works; you are saved by me and it's a gift to you. It's by grace.

Here is the good news about Jesus: your messiness doesn't keep him away. It brought him to all the way from heaven to earth. He started his life in a mess, dressed in rags, laid in a manger and he ended his life in a mess wrapped in rags and hung on a cross.

And in between the first day and the last day, he mostly just hung out with some pretty messed up people. He kept loving them, and embracing them and teaching them about God's love.

When he went to the cross, the reason he went to the cross was that he was taking on the whole mess of this world, the mess that you and I can never straighten out - my sin, my junk and yours. That's what he was taking on himself. Mess doesn't scare him at all. It's why he came the way he came.

Romans 5 says: God demonstrated his own love for us in this: that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. While we were sinners, Christ came. While we were messed up, Christ came; he came into that messiness.

When God comes and touches our lives, it changes everything! When the Spirit of God enters our lives, it changes everything. When the love of God touches our messiness, it changes everything.

Listen to this simple poem:

Twas battered and scarred, and the auctioneer
thought it scarcely worth his while
To waste much time on the old violin,
But held it up with a smile.

"What am I bidden, good folks," he cried,

"Who'll start the bidding for me?

A dollar, a dollar, then, two! Only two?

Two dollars, and who'll make it three?

Three dollars, once; three dollars, twice;

Going for three . . ."

But no,

From the room, far back, a grey-haired man

Came forward and picked up the bow;

Then, wiping the dust from the old violin,

And tightening the loose strings,

He played a melody pure and sweet

As a caroling angel sings.

The music ceased, and the auctioneer,

With a voice that was quiet and low, said:

"What am I bid for the old violin?"

And he held it up with the bow.

"A thousand dollars, and who'll make it two?"

"Two thousand! And who'll make it three?
"Three thousand, once; three thousand, twice;
And going and gone."said he.

The people cheered, but some of them cried,
"We do not quite understand, what changed its worth?"
Swift came the reply:
"The Touch Of The Master's Hand."

And many a man with life out of tune,
And battered and scarred with sin,
Is auctioned cheap to the thoughtless crowd,
Much like the old violin.
A 'mess of potage,' a glass of wine;
A game - and he travels on.
He is 'going' once, and 'going' twice,
He's 'going' and almost 'gone'.
But the Master comes and the foolish crowd
Never can quite understand
The worth of a soul and the change that's wrought
By the touch of the Master's Hand.