

THE REAL JESUS
A Series on the Book of Mark
“The Real Jesus”
Mark 14:53-65, 15:1-20
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New City Church of LA
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I. Introduction

Welcome to New City!

We are in the middle of a series called THE REAL JESUS. We are looking at the Book of Mark and seeing what Jesus was really like. The Book of Mark is an account of Jesus written by a guy named Mark. It was written most likely within 20 years of Jesus based on eye witness accounts. There are a lot of versions of what people say Jesus is like. Dan Brown in his novel Da Vinci Code claims that Jesus was just a man who married and had kids, and grandkids, and claims that Jesus family line still continues today. A lot of people want to construct their own Jesus.

In fact, there was an association of secular biblical scholars called Jesus Seminar in the 1980's who made some splash in the news by claiming that Jesus was just a sage who thought that the Kingdom of God is within us. They rejected all of the claims that he did any miracles. What they did was to take every passage in the New Testament and vote on whether they thought it was true or not. By doing this, they rejected about 75% of the gospels. I am not sure if this process reveals the real Jesus or the Jesus Seminar's preconceived notions about Jesus.

But a Jesus you create in your mind is not real. It's not based on evidence.

A lot of us view Jesus as some sort of Genie, or supernatural vending machine, or a healing machine.

I am not sure if we are creating a Jesus that we really want in our hearts, or the coming face to face with the real Jesus.

The only way to know the real Jesus is to read and study the eyewitness accounts of Jesus written around the time of Jesus.

Now, some of you are thinking: so what? What does the life of Jesus 2,000 years ago have to do with my life today? How does he help me through my difficulties?

Well, today's passage tells us how the real Jesus changes everything about the way we approach our hardships.

Are you going through a job loss?

Are you going through a difficult time in your life?

Let's see how knowing the real Jesus changes the way you approach your most difficult times.

Read Mark 14:53-65, 15:1-20 (the second book of the NT)

More than anything else, the passage regarding the trials of Jesus tell us about the real Jesus: (1) how strong and huge he is; (2) how weak and small he became; and (3) what the implications are.

II. First, how STRONG and HUGE he is.

When the chief priest bluntly asked him whether he is the Messiah, the Son of God, Jesus bluntly answered: I am. "And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven." He is saying that I am not only the Messiah, Son of God, but I am the Son of Man prophesized about in the Book of Daniel. And in Daniel, this Son of Man is God incarnate, the ultimate judge. I am the anointed one to come. I am divine. I am the ultimate judge. That's some claim.

The real Jesus didn't claim to be a great teaching point to a great way to live for God. He claimed to be God.

He didn't claim to be a prophet who is speaking for God, he claimed to be God.

He didn't come to give us advice or command from God. He came to show us who God is, what God is like.

It's like Shakespeare writing himself into his story. He is the God, the author of the Scripture, come to life. God has become flesh.

When he said this, there was such a violent reaction. The chief priest tore his cloth in absolute disgust. Blasphemy, he said. He is claiming to God! We don't need any more witnesses! They wanted to kill him right there. They stopped the trial and started to spit on him, they blindfolded him, punched him, and basically gang beat him. It was a pretty extreme reaction.

You see, when you come face to face with the real Jesus, I think we can't help but to react in an extreme way. It's hard to be religious or even nice. You either have to submit to Him as God, the ultimate judge, the creator of the universe and bow down and worship him and give your life to him completely, or you hate him or think that he is crazy. There is no mid way with Jesus.

You see, Jesus only gave us three options about what to think of him: If what he claimed about himself is not true, he is either a liar and fraud or crazy. And if his claims are true, then he is God. He is a liar, a lunatic, or God. There is no other logical choice about Jesus.

C.S. Lewis said:

“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 else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make a choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God; or else a madman or something worse . . . but let us not come up with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.”

Who is Jesus to you? I know some of you are still struggling with that question. Some of you have told me that you believe in God, but you have a hard time believing in Jesus as God. You've heard the debate about the historic Jesus. You heard people claiming that Jesus was just a rabbi, a good teacher, who went on to get married and have kids, and the church a few hundreds years later, when Christians came into power, claimed that Jesus is God buttress their position. There are so many people whose buying into this Da Vinci Code version of the real Jesus. The problem with these arguments is that they are basing it on stuff written 150-300 years after Jesus. It's like me writing about George Washington and scholars 1800 years later finding what I wrote about George Washington, and arguing that George Washington was really a dude who didn't like British food because Kevin Haah said so. How does that have any evidentiary authority? You've got to look at stuff that was written contemporaneously or soon after Jesus. If you want to look at who the real Jesus is, you have to look at writers who wrote their stuff based on eyewitness accounts. Mark was written within about 20 years of

Jesus, and based on the eye-witness accounts. If you look at the evidence, you will see that the real Jesus claimed to be God.

I know you have doubts. You heard something in your college class or saw something on the discovery channel and you have all these questions. But, a lot of you are like me. When I was in college, I took this class called European Intellectual History, and I started to question the real Jesus. I felt like an intellectual. But, I was too lazy to really dig in and do the research. There are many people who take the time to examine the evidence and come face to face with the real Jesus.

Josh McDowell, who wrote a series of books called Evidence that Demand a Verdict, started to research Jesus in order to write a book that exposed the fraud of Jesus. But, he ended up becoming a Christian instead. The stuff that he wrote actually ended up helping me a great deal.

More recently, Anne Rice, a literary giant, who wrote a book called Interview with the Vampire (it was turned into a movie starring Tom Cruise) decided to write a book on the life of Jesus. So, like many good writers, she did extensive research on Jesus, the whole debate about the historic Jesus and stuff. She wasn't a Christian. What she found stunned her. She ended up becoming a Christian. This is what she wrote in the afterword of the book that she wrote about Jesus called Out of Egypt:

“Skeptical arguments that insisted that the gospels were suspect, or written too late to eyewitnesses—all those arguments lack coherence and full of conjuncture. Some of the books I read were no more than assumptions piled on assumptions. Absurd conclusions were reached on basis of little or no data at all. The whole case for a non-divine Jesus who stumbled into Jerusalem and somehow got crucified and had nothing to do with Christianity's founding which came later—that whole picture which floated in liberal circles I had frequented for 30 years—that case was never made.”

Now, some of you believe that Jesus is who he said he is intellectually, but your perception is so entangled with the religious culture that you don't really even see the offensiveness or the magnitude of his claims.

You believe in Jesus, but he is mostly soft spoken teacher of good way to live. He is nothing but a good moral teacher in your practice. You pick and chose what you want to accept. You believe in being a nice person, a good person. You believe that if you are good, you will be blessed by God. If you are not good if you don't do nice things, you will not be blessed by God. You believe you are basically good although you struggle a little from time to time. When things go wrong, you question God, because you believe that you basically deserve good things from God. If there are stuff in the Bible that you don't agree with, you pretty much ignore it. You don't want to deal with the contradictions or be offended by God.

This is shallow Christianity! You have effectively reduced Jesus to a nice, non-offensive guy who taught us how to live a righteous life. But, the real Jesus is not like that. He is God. He is the judge. He is Holy. The only proper response to the real Jesus is to fall down and worship him, and submit your life to him completely. You lose your life. You no longer can continue to live as you live.

If you come face to face with God, you can't just walk away and not change you. He has to claim your loyalty or hate. If Jesus is not changing you, challenging you, you might not be facing the real Jesus. You might be constructing a Jesus in you mind not through the testimonies of the eyewitnesses but through the cultural lenses and personal preferences.

Confront the real Jesus!

Yet, this real Jesus is not just this huge God, but God who became weak.

III. Let's go to the second point: how weak and small he became.

The Sanhedrin did not have the authority to carry out executions. Remember, Judea was occupied by Romans. It was under the Roman Empire. So, in this situation, only the Roman had authority to carry out execution. That's why the Sanhedrin took the case to Pontius Pilot, who was the governor of Judea at the time.

The representatives of the Sanhedrin are the accusers. They can't have him executed by blasphemy. So, they argue that Jesus claimed to be King, so that he will be guilty of treason against Rome. Jesus is accused, and if I was him or his defense lawyer,

I would have a lot of great arguments. But, Jesus is silent. The Bible says that Pilot was amazed. Why didn't Jesus defend himself? Why was Jesus silent?

I love great trial movies. It looks like they are going to lose. A star witness that the lawyer is relying on falls through. It looks like he has no way to win. Then, something comes through. New evidence comes to light. Was something going to come through?

No. This God, the creator of the universe, decided to not defend himself. He fulfilled the prophesy about the Messiah being a suffering servant in Isaiah 53:7-8:

⁷ He was oppressed and afflicted,
yet he did not open his mouth;
he was led like a lamb to the slaughter,
and as a sheep before her shearers is silent,
so he did not open his mouth.

⁸ By oppression and judgment he was taken away.

Jesus was not only silent, but also mocked and shamed. They put on purple robe, placed a crown of thorns and they mocked him by calling him a King of the Jews. They struck him on the head with their staff, they spit on him. Then, ultimately, they crucified him.

Can you imagine a more powerless person than Jesus? Can you imagine a person who has become weaker than Jesus? Can you imagine a more shamed person than Jesus? The world is mocking him. It is not just the Sanhedrin that is condemning and mocking him. It is not just Pilot who is condemning him and mocking him. It is not just the crowd that is condemning and mocking him. It is not just the soldiers who are mocking him. It is you and I who are condemning him. It is you and I who are accusing him. It is you and I who are spiting on him. It is you and I who are gang beating him.

We are saying: show your strength. If you are the King, if you are the Son of God, show us your power! The world speaks in the language of the power over people. The power of coercion and violence. But, here is Jesus in weakness.

Philippians 2:6-8 put it like this:

⁶ [Jesus], being in very nature God,
did not consider equality with God something to be grasped,
⁷ but made himself nothing,
taking the very nature of a servant,
being made in human likeness.

⁸ And being found in appearance as a man,
he humbled himself
and became obedient to death—
even death on a cross!

Jesus intentionally humbled himself to the cross and die for our sins. He saw that Jesus knew that was the purpose of his coming. He confirmed that decision in the Garden of Gethsemane. He was determined to let it happen. You see, it was not just the sin of Sanhedrin, Pilot, the crowd, or the soldiers that crucified him. It was our sins. Isaiah 53:4-6 prophesized:

⁴ Surely he took up our infirmities
and carried our sorrows,
yet we considered him stricken by God,
smitten by him, and afflicted.
⁵ But he was pierced for our transgressions,
he was crushed for our iniquities;
the punishment that brought us peace was upon him,
and by his wounds we are healed.
⁶ We all, like sheep, have gone astray,
each of us has turned to his own way;
and the LORD has laid on him
the iniquity of us all.

You see, it is through humility, through weakness, God has decided to reconcile us to a relationship with him. Jesus kept silent because he saw you and me reconciled to a relationship with him.

You would think that the way he was going to reconcile us is to come in power over things. Destroy the bad guys and expose the corruption. Protest against Sanhedrin and the Romans. But, no, the way Jesus approached was to come in through the power of the power-under. The power of weakness. The power of self-sacrificial love. The power of a suffering servant.

The way of Jesus is so counter-intuitive. It is so different than the way we think things should be done. Our instinct is to fight for our rights! Our instinct is an eye for an eye.

When we have a choice to have power or weakness, all of us will choose power. When Jesus was arrested, Matthew records that Jesus said that he could call a legion of

angels to rescue him if he wanted to. But, he decided not to. Because God has chosen to work through weakness. The greatest demonstration of God's love came through the cross.

Do you see the irony?

How huge he is.

How weak he became to demonstrate his love.

IV. Third, what are the implications?

One, there is an amazing insight here for how the Kingdom of God works. Kingdom of God is not about the power of power-over and ruling over things. The Kingdom of God is about how the power of power-under, the power of self-sacrificial love, the power of servanthood, the power of weakness.

As Alastair shared, there is an amazing power in weakness.

In 2 Corinthians 12:7, Paul talks about a thorn in his flesh. We don't know what it is. Maybe it was some sort of illness. It was something that caused him to be weak. He prayed to God for healing. He said, he asked three times. But, Jesus responded with these words: "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Then Paul says: "Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. 10 That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong."

If God demonstrated His greatest work through weakness, suffering, being shamed, mocked, spat upon, flogged, beat-up. Do you see how that changes how we approach our own weaknesses?

Do you see how we should handle insults, hardships, persecutions, and difficulties?

Do you see why Jesus taught "Blessed are the poor in spirit?"

Do you see why Jesus taught "Blessed are the persecuted?"

Do you see why Jesus taught "If you want to be great in the Kingdom, you must be a servant?"

Do you see why Jesus taught "the first will be last and the last will be first?"

Do you see why you should completely change your attitude towards suffering?
We don't approach difficult situations in our lives by blaming God or mocking God or condemning God. How could you do this?

In our weakness, we open our hearts to God's power. It is when we are absolutely broken that the power of God begins to manifest in our lives.

Two, Pilot decided to put Jesus up for another trial in front of the crowd. He offered them Barabbas, a violent insurrectionist who committed murder, and Jesus. The crowd chose Barabbas. The world chooses those who seek change by the power of the sword, the power of coercion and the power-over things. They rejected Jesus, who walked the path of weakness in order to save us, in order to rescue us.

The crowd chanted, crucify him. Maybe they were a part of his gang to start with. Maybe they were influenced by the leaders. Barabbas was liberated and Jesus was crucified. I am Barabbas. You are Barabbas. It was me or Jesus. It was you or Jesus. I was the one who sought power by the standards of this world. I was the one who mocked God. I was the one who condemned Jesus through my sins. I was the one who crucified Jesus with my sins. I was the one. But, because he took my place, I was liberated.