

A Medium Jesus

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Date: 10 April 2022

Preacher: Thomas Davis

[0 : 00] Well, as I said, I want us to turn back to this chapter together tonight. We're going to be looking at passage towards the end from verse 12 to verse 17, and our title is A Medium Jesus.

I want to start by thinking about some of the biggest moments in history, those pivotal occasions when something absolutely massive happened. The things that you learn about in school, the things that appear in quizzes, often these can be very high profile.

So you've got things like the first landing on the moon, the first person to climb Everest, the coronation of a king or queen or a big election or something like that.

Often the big moments in history are very high profile, but at the same time, many of these big moments in history have happened in obscurity, and a seemingly insignificant event can actually change the world.

Let me give you some examples. 25 years ago, two students in America called Larry and Sergai invented a computer program called Backrub, and it used internet links to determine what the most important websites were so that when you search for something, the most important sites would come up.

[1 : 19] They later changed the name from Backrub to Google, which I'm very relieved about because if I say I'm going to Google Derek Lamont, that sounds fine. If I say I'm going to Backrub Derek Lamont, no, no, no, no, that's not good.

So, 250 years ago, a chap called Edward Jenner grabbed a boy. I don't know if he made a cut in the boy's arm or if he found a cut in the boy's arm, but anyway, grabbed a boy who had a cut in his arm, and he put some pus into that cut.

That pus had come from a cow that was infected with cowpox, and as a result, the little boy who was just grabbed by Edward Jenner became immune to smallpox, and the first vaccine was invented, and it's called a vaccine because vacca is the Latin word for cow.

I wouldn't probably pass health and safety tests today. Not many people probably knew what he was doing, but that was a turning point in history. And 500 years ago, a monk in Germany called Martin Luther hammered 95 discussion points onto a door of a church which were questioning some of the practices in the Roman Catholic Church at the time.

That, of course, sparked the Reformation. When all those events happened, they would have seemed so insignificant at the time, but all of them changed history forever.

[2 : 41] 2,000 years ago, a carpenter walked out into the wilderness of Judea to the Jordan River to be baptized by a preacher who was known as John the Baptist.

At that moment, history changed forever, and that's what I want us to think about tonight. You see, in verse 13, Matthew records, Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John to be baptized by him. And this is a pivotal moment in history, but it's also a moment that's very easy to misunderstand, or it's one that we sometimes find ourselves thinking, well, I don't really know what's going on here. And I want us just to expand on that a wee bit tonight under two headings, which look at ways in which we could potentially misunderstand what's going on here.

And our two headings are to say that it's very easy for our, that our view of Jesus isn't high enough, or that our view of Jesus isn't low enough.

[3 : 45] And in looking at both of these, what I hope we'll see is that all too often, our view of Jesus is far too medium.

So first of all, our view of Jesus isn't high enough. So imagine you were back in the crowd at the Jordan River watching Jesus and John speaking from a distance.

You would not have noticed anything significant about it. Jesus would not have looked any different to anybody else. That's confirmed if you look in John's Gospel, because in John's Gospel it tells us

that when John the Baptist saw him, he had to point Jesus out to his disciples to say, oh, look, that's him, because on his own, he didn't stand out.

So he wasn't glowing or shining, or he wasn't a foot taller than everybody else, or anything like that. He had to just blend it in. Most people would not have realized that something historic was about to take place, but John the Baptist knew that something special, that there was something special about Jesus, he knew that his role was to prepare the way for him, that one was coming.

We read about that in verse 11 when it spoke about John saying, he who's coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals are not worthy to carry you. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.

[5 : 02] But of everyone standing at the Jordan that day, John is the only one who is anywhere close to realizing just who Jesus is.

Now, I don't think that there would have been many in the crowd who would have been opposing Jesus. That didn't really happen until later in his ministry.

Right now, Jesus just looks like a faithful Jew who's heard about John the Baptist and who wants to come and be baptized by the man who's telling everyone about the importance of repentance and forgiveness.

In other words, I think at the moment, everybody's view of Jesus would have been pretty medium. The same thing has been repeated throughout history. Yes, Jesus has had some fierce opponents across the centuries, but for so many people, their view of Jesus isn't particularly negative.

It's just pretty medium. Over the years, Jesus has been admired as a good teacher. He's been appreciated for his acts of kindness.

[6 : 06] He's been highlighted as a noble example. And I'm pretty sure that that is still the majority view in many places today. I think I'm fairly confident that that's still the majority view in Scotland today as well.

So yes, in some parts of the world, the gospel faces huge opposition. But I don't know many people who think that Jesus is awful. There are some, there are few, but not many.

So some people might deny that he worked miracles. They might be skeptical of how accurate the gospels are. They probably don't believe that the resurrection actually happened, but they still think that Jesus is okay.

And as Corey was saying this morning, even Islam would revere Jesus as a prophet. And I'm fairly confident that in Scotland, in Edinburgh, that's the majority of majority position.

I don't know many Jesus haters. There aren't many Friedrich Nietzsche's today. I'm sure there's some people that don't think about him very much.

[7 : 04] There's some people who are quite respectful. There's some people who might even admire him. And this week with Easter coming up, that's probably even more prominent people will think more. People might be like, oh, well, this is the one Sunday next week that I should go to church.

Some people might think a little bit more about Jesus over the next seven days. But the key point is that it's all far too medium.

And the ironic thing is that medium is the one option that in reality you just don't have with Jesus.

Rabbi Duncan was a free church minister 170 years ago.

He was a missionary and a professor, and he puts it wonderfully. He says, Christ either deceived mankind by conscious fraud, or was himself deluded and self-deceived, or he was divine.

There's no getting out of this trilema. This is a kind of riddle, if you like. Not really a riddle, but like a dilemma, a trilema that's been used by many theologians since either Jesus deceived people, or he was deluded himself, or he is the divine Son of God that he claimed to be.

[8 : 16] That's highlighting that a medium view of Jesus makes no sense at all, and yet even for us as Christians, all too often we can have a view of Jesus that's too medium.

So on a Sunday, we might come here and acknowledge that Jesus is our Savior, but then we go into the busyness of Monday and the rest of the week, and we just don't think about Him too much, and it doesn't affect our lives.

We might come here in body to worship Him, our minds might be all over the place. We might pray to Him, and yet all too often we're niggled by the thought, will this make any difference?

And for anyone who's maybe not yet a Christian or not sure where you stand, maybe you hope that one day you will become a Christian, maybe you think, yeah, that is what I want in my life, but not

right now.

All of these thoughts are far too medium, and they're all examples of when our view of Jesus is not high enough.

[9 : 21] So what should our view of Jesus be? Well, this is where verses 16 and 17 are really helpful. These verses are crucial for showing us who Jesus really is, and that's because they're making a huge statement about His identity.

Verse 16 tells us that the heavens were opened, and that immediately is showing us that this is a pivotal moment in history. And we have to stop and pause there because one of the challenges that we will often face is that because the world is so beautifully balanced, because it's sustained so wonderfully by God's providence, we can easily forget that it's all part of something bigger.

It's maybe a wee bit like being at the theater where you can look at the stage and you're so captivated by what's been performed there. Everything that's going on is just grabbing your attention and you're totally focused on what's going on.

You can so quickly forget that behind the curtain, there's a writer and a director and a whole crew of people on whom the whole thing depends for its existence, and it's exactly the same with the universe.

It's all so orderly and impressive and beautiful. It's so easy to forget that behind the curtain, there's a writer and a director on whom the whole thing depends.

[10 : 50] But every so often, God opens the curtains for a brief moment. And this is one of those moments in Matthew 3, heaven and earth, time and eternity, God and humanity all meet with the curtain opened.

And it's reminding us that the whole universe is in the hands of God, our Creator, all of time is just a moment in eternity, all of humanity is under the watching eye of God. So as Jesus comes up from the baptism, the heavens open and two massive things happen.

First of all, the Holy Spirit descends on Jesus as a dove. The Holy Spirit comes to rest upon him.

And in that moment, we're seeing Jesus being identified as God's chosen servant.

And through the indwelling Spirit, Jesus is being empowered to accomplish the work that God needs him to do. And that's why from this point on, Jesus is able to go and perform mighty miracles and cast out demons in the power of the Holy Spirit.

This is a huge turning point. From this moment on, Jesus is about to become the most influential figure in all of history. And the fact that it's a massive moment is confirmed by the fact that the Spirit descends like a dove.

[12 : 12] The dove is pointing us backwards. Corey mentioned that in the morning, that so often in Matthew, we are being pointed backwards to the Old Testament. This is a brilliant example of that.

The dove definitely points us back as far as Noah. At the end of the flood, Noah sent forth a dove to see if the waters had subsided from the face of the ground. And then we can go back even further, right to the very beginning of the Bible, when in the creation account, we're told that the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.

The key point that this shows to us is that both of these that you've got there are turning points in history. So is this in Matthew 3.

Jesus is about to begin his ministry. But as he does so, God pulls back the curtains, he opens the heavens and God, the Holy Spirit Himself, comes to rest on Jesus and a mighty work begins.

That's the first thing that happens. The second thing that happens is that God speaks. When God opens the curtain, he speaks.

[13 : 22] Now we need to recognize what's happening here. This is a pivotal turning point in history. Heaven and Earth, time and eternity are all colliding. This is the point when Jesus' ministry is beginning.

This is when the battle really starts. The waiting is over. The moment has come. John is no longer saying, he's coming, he's coming, he's saying, he is here. This is where it all kicks off.

This is what everyone has been waiting for. And at this moment, what does God the Father want you to know?

Does He want you to know that the battle has begun? Does He want you to know that victory is certain, that the devil is doomed, that God is almighty? All of that's true, but that's not what God wants to tell us.

At this pivotal moment in history, God wants us to know that he loves his Son and he is so delighted with Him.

[14 : 25] And that tells us that our view of Jesus has got to be at the highest level. He's not some good teacher.

He's not some impressive leader. He's not a noble example. He's the treasured, beautiful, beloved Son of God. In other words, to God the Father, He is utterly and indescribably precious.

And that means that if you can pull back the curtain of heaven, if you can pull back the curtain of heaven, if you can look behind the scenes, if you can dig as far into God as you can, what are you going to find?

You're going to find that at the very foundation of all reality, at the core of the being of God himself, at the very heart of the whole of Christian theology is a Father who utterly loves His Son.

That love is carried by the Holy Spirit. It's a beautiful, loving relationship of Father, Son, Holy Spirit. And if that's true, then a medium view of Jesus is blasphemy.

[15 : 44] It's utterly unthinkable. And for all of us, far too often, our view of Jesus is nowhere near high enough.

From this moment on, we are starting to see who Jesus really is. But at the same time, we're also being shown what Jesus has come to do.

And that brings us to our second point, that all too often, our view of Jesus isn't low enough. Now, that might sound like a bit of a weird thing to say, especially after everything that I've just told you. But I hope that you will understand what I mean.

And I hope that you're also going to see that this is a very easy and dangerous mistake for us all to make. In fact, it's a mistake that John the Baptist made. In verse 14, you can see that when Jesus comes to be baptized by John, John's first response is to say, no way.

I can't baptize you. You should be baptizing me. John knew that he wasn't worthy even to carry Jesus' sandals. So in his mind, he's like, well, there's no way it's appropriate for me to baptize Jesus.

[17 : 01] Now, just to note that this is one of several occasions where God's plan involves someone saying, I'm not worthy of doing this. And God's response is, I know you're still doing it.

And that's a pattern that God has used throughout the whole history of his church. The key point, though, is that this is an example of somebody whose view of Jesus wasn't low enough.

Now, when I say that, I don't mean that we should be looking down on Jesus in criticism. What I mean is that it's incredibly easy to think that there is no way that Jesus would stoop down to our level.

And so many people fall into this misunderstanding. We recognize that Jesus is special. We see that he's remarkable. And then we're immediately confronted by the fact that we do not match up. So if Jesus is here, we are down there, nowhere close. And because of that, we can so easily think that, well, if we're going to meet Jesus, we need to kind of get a little bit further up.

[18 : 07] We need to sort ourselves out, get a little bit closer to him so that at least we can tie and reach his standards, or at least get a little bit closer. And that can manifest itself in so many ways in the lives of Christians and in the lives of those who are not Christians.

We can think that our prayers are rubbish. So God's not going to bother listening. It's like other people's prayers are much better. Mine, there are no use. God's not going to listen.

We can think that other people are far more worthy than us, that they're going to be far more effective serving Jesus. And you think, well, you know, God is going to be much more happy with them than he is with me.

We can think that on the whole, Jesus is disappointed with us. That we maybe started off good, but that we've messed up more times than we've succeeded, and Jesus is generally going to be disappointed with us.

We can even think that Jesus has given up on us. We can think that our chance has gone.

[19 : 12] We can think that we're just too far gone for Jesus to reach us. So easy to think that Jesus has only come for the good ones, or, well, at the very least, the medium ones, for the people who aren't as bad as me.

But I'm just not at that level. And if you think like that, then this is where it's absolutely crucial that we understand why Jesus came to be baptized by John.

John preached a baptism of repentance and forgiveness of sins. So repentance is when you turn around. So the idea in the Bible of repentance is when you stop walking away from God, you stop rebelling against God, you turn around, and you start following God.

You change. You change the way you behave and return to God. Forgiveness, you all know what that means. It's just the fact that we're guilty, and God forgives us for that.

John preached a baptism of repentance and forgiveness of sins. Jesus needed neither. He had no sin to repent of.

[20 : 21] He had no sin for which he needed to be forgiven. So why did he come to be baptized? The reason was that he came to identify himself with the people that he's come to save.

And this is a crucial aspect of how God's whole plan of salvation works. Jesus has not come to be above us. He's not even come to be near us.

He's not even come to be right alongside us. He has come to take our place. And there's a word that we use to describe that. We say that Jesus' work of salvation is vicarious.

V-I-C-A-R-I-O-U-S. Vicarious means in the place of another. Jesus' work of salvation is in the place of another. It's vicarious.

Here Jesus comes to receive a baptism of repentance and forgiveness, and in doing so, he's making it clear that he has come to turn us back to God, and he has come to secure the forgiveness that we all desperately need.

[21 : 28] He's come alongside us. He's come to represent us. And in that vicarious work of salvation, he's going to go all the way to the cross, where he's going to die as our substitute and save us from our sins.

That work of salvation is going to fulfill all righteousness, as Jesus himself describes here. The public stage of that journey starts here at his baptism. And this is incredible, because all of it means that no matter how low you are, Jesus will meet you there.

And this is why so often our view of Jesus is not low enough. We think that we need to improve in order for us to meet with him.

We think that he's only looking for the best out of all of us. We think it's only when we succeed in life that Jesus is going to have any interest towards us, or we can think that we're just never going to be good enough for him.

If you think like that, then your view of Jesus is nowhere near low enough. Because Jesus is not some medium religious snob who likes the religious middle classes.

[22 : 43] Jesus is the vicarious Savior who will meet you at your lowest point. The people who were going out to John for baptism were realizing that they were broken, that they needed forgiveness.

Jesus joins them in baptism, because these are exactly the kind of people that he came to save. And it's crucial that we think about this, because these two misunderstandings are so easy to fall into.

All too often our view of Jesus is not high enough. All too often our view of Jesus is not low enough. All too often our view of Jesus is far too medium.

And it's crucial that you recognize and understand this, because if your view of Jesus isn't high enough, then you will end up thinking that you don't need to bother with him.

And isn't that true of so many people? They've got a medium view of Jesus. They're going to go to church next Sunday, because it's Easter Sunday, and then they're going to spend the rest of the year not bothering with him, because their view of Jesus is not high enough.

[23 : 51] If your view of Jesus isn't high enough, you'll end up thinking that you don't need to bother with him. But if your view of Jesus isn't low enough, then you're going to end up thinking that he won't ever bother with you.

That he's got better people to love and care for. Both of these conclusions are totally wrong, and both of them will lead you to hell.

And it's telling us all that our view of Jesus must never, ever be medium. We need to understand more of how high he is, and we need to understand more of how low he is, because this is what makes Jesus so amazing.

Because if you look up to the heights of theological truth, what do you see? You see the beloved Son of God in whom the Father is well pleased, who's so beautiful and glorious and majestic and wonderful.

If you look up to the very heights of theology, that is what you're going to see. And if you look down into the very depths of all your failures and mistakes and sorrows and scars, what are you going to see?

[25 : 03] You're going to see his arms open and ready to catch you, ready to bring you home again.

Jesus is high enough to utterly captivate us. Jesus is low enough to always catch us.

And at this moment, we've got a turning point in history, after this baptism, Jesus' ministry began, the world was never the same again.

And all of it means that tonight can be a turning point in your history as well. And if you're not yet a Christian, if you're thinking about things, do you look at your life and think to yourself, ah, I'm so glad I've not become a Christian.

Do you really think that? And if your answer to that question is no, then make tonight the turning point in your life.

[26 : 07] Make tonight the night that you follow Jesus. And to do that, you've got to ask yourself, what's the next step? What's the next step that you need to take? Is it to pray for the first time?

Is that the next step that you need to take? I've got no idea if there's people here who've never prayed before, but if you've never prayed before or if you haven't prayed in years, maybe that's the next step you need to take, to pray.

And praying is so easy, because all you've got to do is just talk to God. That's all it involves. You can talk to Him. You don't need to use fancy language or anything like that. If that's your next step, take it.

Maybe you are praying, maybe you are thinking about things, but no one else knows. So maybe the next step for you is to tell somebody to speak to Derek or Corey or to any of the Christians here and to say, I really want to become a Christian.

I want to follow Jesus. I've got questions. I'm not sure. If that's where you are, if you need to talk to someone, do it. Take that step. Talk to somebody.

[27 : 10] Maybe you're further on than that, but maybe you haven't quite taken the step of professing faith and saying, yes, I'm a Christian. Maybe inside you know that you are, maybe inside you're bursting.

Take the next step and profess faith. Or maybe it's to take the next step in terms of serving Him. Some of you guys are nearly finished, uni.

The next chapter in your life is maybe something you're not sure of. What does God have for you? Maybe He's got an amazing door for you to serve Him. Maybe you're a bit afraid.

Maybe you can hear God's voice pointing in a direction that you feel a bit scared of. Go for it. Take that next step. Don't be afraid. Make tonight a turning point.

And if when I say that, you're like, well, I don't know. I don't know. If you're reluctant, is it because your view of Jesus isn't high enough?

[28 : 12] Is it because your view of Jesus isn't low enough? Make no mistake, Jesus is high enough to make Him worthy of giving every day of the rest of your life to Him.

And Jesus is low enough to look after you every step of the way. Amen. Let's pray.

Lord Jesus, we worship You, our God, the one who's higher, higher than our minds can take in.

We praise and thank You as the one who's low enough to reach us at our very depths, that no matter how low we go, underneath are Your everlasting arms.

We praise You, Lord Jesus, because You're so high. We praise You because You've come so low. Blessed be Your name.

[29 : 24] Amen.