

Who is this Jesus?

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[0 : 00] There are two scripture readings this morning are from the Gospels, and we read first of all from Luke's Gospel chapter 5. Luke's Gospel chapter 5, and we read together verses 1 to 11.

Jesus is ministering in different places. He's wandering about. He has already done a lot of teaching and performed some miracles.

So Luke chapter 5, verses 1 to 11. On one occasion, while the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, he was standing by the lake of Gennesaret, and he saw two boats by the lake, but the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets.

Getting into one of the boats, which was Simon's, he asked them to put out a little from the land, and he sat down and taught the people from the boat. And when he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch.

And Simon answered, Master, we toiled all night and took nothing, but at your word I will let down the nets.

[1 : 29] And when they had done this, they enclosed a large number of fish, and their nets were breaking. They signaled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them, and they came and filled both the boats so that they began to sink.

But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees saying, Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord. For he and all who were with him were astonished at the catch of fish that they had taken.

And so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. And Jesus said to Simon, Do not be afraid. From now on you will be catching men.

And when they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed him. And our second reading is from the Gospel according to Mark, chapter 8.

And we read from the verse Mark 27. Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Cederæ of Philippi.

[2 : 44] And on the way he asked his disciples, Who do people say that I am? And they told him, John the Baptist. And others say, Elijah.

And others, one of the prophets. And they asked him, But who do you say that I am? Peter answered him, You are the Christ.

And he strictly charged them to tell no one about him. Amen. This is the word of God.

In an address in 1963, the then President of the United States, Richard Nixon, said, that the greatest event in human history happened when man walked upon the moon.

The astronaut, Hale Irwin, chose to disagree. And he said, the greatest event in human history happened when God in Christ walked on the earth.

[3 : 50] And we're here this morning because we agree with Hale Irwin. And in recent weeks with Christians here in Edinburgh and across the globe, we've been celebrating the birth of the baby in the manger.

And with so many different Christians, our minister has constantly been reminding us that the birth of the baby in the manger was neither the beginning nor the end of God's loving purposes for us.

C.H. Spurgeon, the great Baptist preacher, said on one occasion, Jesus Christ is the arm and substance of the gospel. He is in himself all theology.

He is the foundation of every precious truth. Christy Annette, it's about various other things as well, but essentially it is about Jesus.

It's about Jesus. But who is he? He himself asked that question of the disciples when they were in Caesarea Philippi.

[5 : 11] Very important question because the scholars all tell us that once there was a confession, once Peter and the disciples recognized that he was the Messiah, the promised deliverer, the saviour, Jesus made his way down from the very north of Galilee down through Samaria, Judea, to Jerusalem and to the cross.

He knew that he would leave witnesses there. But who was he? C.S. Lewis, the famous Christian apologist and Ulsterman once asked the question, what are we to make of Jesus?

And he goes on to say, look, if Jesus of Nazareth, a historical figure, it's not just Christians who believe that this man Jesus was real. And both Jewish and Roman historians acknowledge there was such a man.

They don't believe he was the son of God. But Lewis says, look, if he is who he says he was, the son of God, you know, he's able to forgive our sins.

He's able to heal the sick. He's able to take us to heaven when our bodies die. Then we should bow before him.

[6 : 34] But if he's not, if he's a megalomaniac, you know, who lives in a fantasy world and he's on an ego trip, then we can just forget all about him.

Now, fortunately, there are four biographies written of Jesus from the time in which he lived and walked on earth.

Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. And between them, they answer for us the three big questions we all need to ask about Jesus.

first of all, what was his life like? We know there was such a man, but what was his life like? Then, secondly, what was his life for?

And finally, what has his life meant? What was his life like? Well, it was unique. It was difficult. It was demanding. It was incredibly full.

[7 : 35] I mean, the number of things that the gospel writers say he did and the words that he spoke, but John, at the end of his gospel, he said, look, there are many other things that Jesus did, the which, if they should all be written down, he said, I suppose all the books in the world couldn't contain what is written.

And interestingly, after the stories of his birth, Jesus is only mentioned twice before he's an adult man in his thirties.

Once, when he's forty days old, he's brought to the temple in Jerusalem, according to the Jewish traditions, and then when he was about twelve, he came up with his parents to Jerusalem to celebrate the feast of the Passover.

But when he was about thirty, he began a roving, itinerant, preaching, teaching, healing, ministry, where he does miracles and he speaks, you know, constantly to the people.

And then, as now, the judgments about him varied. You know, there was a judgment really of class.

[8 : 59] The people who lived in his village and lived round about, knew his background, the family he came from. When he went to the synagogue and opened the scriptures and began to expound them, they said, but isn't this the carpenter's son?

You know, as if a man who worked with his hands couldn't know about God. And then there was the judgment of contempt. The religious leaders, the scribes, the Pharisees, you know, oh, look at him, he's a friend of publicans and sinners.

You know, again, because he mixed with what we would call ordinary people, well, they weren't having any of that. But of course, there was a judgment of conviction.

There were people who believed. We read how Peter said, you are the Christ, you're the Messiah.

And at the cross, the Roman centurion said, truly, this man was the Son of God.

But in all that he did, look, he was misunderstood even by his own family. He was deserted by his disciples.

[10 : 12] He was denied by his friends. He knew temptations almost beyond measure. You know, he knew hours of loneliness and what it felt like to be rejected.

And yet, yet all through that, his sole concern was for the souls of men and women.

He sought to warn about and expose those evil things that damage and destroy and mar our natures.

believers. He sought to expose, he was courageous in doing it, religious sham and hypocrisy, the false religion that only leads people to destruction.

He was always teaching that to be right with God, you had to live in the way God taught and God sought, to live righteously, to live morally.

[11 : 22] And right was always going to be right, even if nobody did it. And wrong was always going to be wrong, even if everybody did it. You know, there was a moral dimension to life that God had set in place.

And of course, he constantly battled against Satan in all his guises. But what was perhaps most impressive about this man's life was the manner in which he conducted himself.

How he responded to the abuse and the lies that were told about him. You know, when he was introduced and maligned and lied about, you know, even at the end of his life, when, you know, false charges were brought against him.

There was that terrible, you know, that terrible miscarriage of justice when he was a victim of lies. And then he was, you know, he was demeaned and he was beaten and he was crucified.

There was absolutely no self pity. There was no self defense. There was no pride. There was no arrogance.

[12 : 43] there just weren't any selfish desires in his life. No selfish ambition or improper desires. And we look in vain for a stain on his character.

You know, he didn't injure anyone. He didn't take advantage of anyone. He didn't lie about people. He didn't mistreat people.

He didn't commit a wrong action. In a way, it's all summed up in Mark's Gospel chapter 7 where one of the folk testifies and says, you know, truly, this man, he has done all things well.

what a testimony that was. So, that's what his life was like. But what was his life for? Well, two main things, really.

He came, first of all, to show people what God was like. And secondly, to save people from the consequences of their sin.

[14 : 01] He came, first of all, to show people what God is like. You know, philosophers with their inquiring intellects, and little children with their innocent questions ask, what is God like?

We all want to know what is God like. And Jesus gives a very simple answer. He says, whoever has seen me has seen the Father.

That's what God is like. God is like Jesus. See, before his coming, people knew, those who believed, that God was the creator of the heavens and the earth.

He was almighty. He was all-powerful. He was holy. You know, he was wise. He was merciful. But when Jesus came, they saw him bringing little children to sit around him. You know, they saw him mixing with people nobody else would mix with.

[15 : 09] Lepers, beggars, outcasts. They saw him, they saw him, you know, healing the sick, lifting up the sad, spending time with the fallen, the outcasts of society.

Jesus, when he came, showed that God is loving and compassionate and personal.

There's an old hymn written by a 19th century English clergyman, F.W. Faber, where he says, you know, there's a wideness in God's mercy, like the wideness of the sea.

And he goes on to talk in the hymn, there is no place where earth's sorrows are more felt than up in heaven. There is no place where earth's feelings have such kindly judgment given.

heaven. Jesus came to show us what God is like and that's what he's like. And he came to save people from the consequences of their sin.

[16 : 24] On the cross, Jesus said, Father, I have finished the work you gave me to do. And that work was a rescue work.

Christianity is a rescue religion. You know, there's a great barrier between us and God that needs to be broken. There's a great gulf.

There's a bridge that needs to be built to take us back to God. And Jesus came to do that. The Apostle Paul had that testimony, didn't he?

He says, there's one mediator, one maker of peace between God and man, the man Christ Jesus. Peter, in his first letter, he says pretty much the same thing.

He says, he died the just for the unjust that he might bring us to God. And then going to the cross and bearing our sins, Jesus broke that great barrier between God and people.

[17 : 29] He built a bridge that people could get back to God. And down through the centuries, this wonderful message has resonated in the Christian church.

And as one hymn writer puts it, there was no other good enough to pay the price of sin. He only could unlock the gates of heaven and let us sin.

So that's what his life was like. And that's what his life was for. But what has his life meant? Well, what does the coming of this unique man who was also God mean?

Who lived this extraordinarily gracious and selfless life? Who claimed that he did this to show us God and to save us from the consequences of our sin?

Well, really, it does many things, but two things primarily. Firstly, it transforms our human nature.

[18 : 40] That's what his life has done, if we will allow it. And secondly, it assures us of the future. First of all, it transforms our human nature.

Apparently, 90% of Britain, 90% of people, I beg your pardon, in Britain, in the UK, are unhappy with their appearance.

They would like to change. You know, so anti-wrinkle cream doesn't work, by the way, let me tell you, and plastic surgery, all of that, you know, to change their appearance.

45 million people in Britain this weekend have bought lottery tickets in the hope of winning millions of pounds, things, because that will change their lives, they reckon.

No. We don't need our appearance, well, okay, some of us need our appearances to change, but most of you folk don't. we don't need our appearances to change.

[19 : 47] You know, we don't need more stuff that money will buy. We need our hearts to change, and that's what Jesus Christ has done.

Human nature, our natures, are not in themselves good. We are utterly, utterly selfish. selfish. We just are, you know, and our nature has been warped and wasted by sin, stained and solid by wrongdoing against God, and it needs to be remade.

And Jesus comes and does that. He says to the religious leader, Nicodemus, Nicodemus, look, you need to be born again.

You need to be born from above. And that has become, well, it's misused a lot nowadays, isn't it? But actually, because it's the word of God, and Jesus said it, it's true.

And if I could, if you'll excuse a personal reminiscence, when I was a teenager growing up on Northern Ireland, I wasn't a Christian.

[21 : 03] I went to church on Sunday morning. It was part of the social round. It's what you did. But three of my grandparents died within about 18 months of each other.

And three different ministers conducted their funerals. I remember virtually nothing about them. Except, when we were in the cemeteries, and the coffins were being put into the ground, each of the ministers quoted, what I now know are words of Jesus.

Jesus said, I am the resurrection and the life. Whosoever believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live. And whosoever lives and believes in me will never die. Now, if I thought about it at 12, I thought that was just mumbo jumbo.

How can you be dead, but yet live, and yet live and never die? And there they are, putting my grandparents' coffin in the ground. But of course, what Jesus was talking about was spiritual life and death.

All of us have a physical life. You know, we were all born and came into the world and grown up. But there's also a spiritual life, the life of the soul.

[22 : 23] And by nature, we are spiritually dead. You know, we're cut off from God. And when we come in faith and repentance to Jesus Christ, to the cross, and accept that he took the punishment that we deserve, and when we put our trust in him and accept his forgiveness, we're given a new heart, a new life.

it was promised. Even in the Old Testament, it was promised by God that that would happen. And of course, it transforms people's lives.

And that is what it means. It means the life of Jesus means transformation for those who will trust in him.

And of course, he comes to reshape our future. Because, you know, we need guidance. We need leading in life. You know, and it's not just young people.

We think young people, oh, they need career guidance, and they need this, and they need that. All of us need it. Older folk as well. You know, there's this assumption sometimes that old people are wise.

[23 : 38] Not a bit of it. You know, the Bible talks about an old and foolish king. And so many stories, particularly in the Old Testament, are of people who really lost things as they got older.

So, we need God to redirect our paths, to give us destiny as the children of God. Because without that, what is life really?

William Shakespeare has a great quote in Macbeth. He says, life is a tale told by an idiot full of sound and fury, signifying nothing.

Carl Jung, one of the great psychoanalysts of the 20th century, he wrote that really the central neuroses of our time is emptiness.

You know, what's life all about? What's life for? They say. And of course, the Rolling Stones, with their most famous song of all, you know, can't get no satisfaction for getting the bad grammar we know what they meant.

[24 : 45] If you're ever in the north of Scotland, up in the Highlands, and going into Inverness, if you're going in on the road from Nairn into Inverness City, there's this huge billboard, big sign, massive letters, and it says, no, your car shouldn't be making that noise.

and it gives the address of a garage down below where you could go and spend money and get your car fixed. How many of us have been in that position?

You know there's something wrong. Yeah, your car shouldn't really be making that noise. You know something's wrong. You're not quite sure because you're not a mechanic. You don't know what it is, but you know something's not right.

Life's like that. Life's like that. We know, without God and without Jesus, we know that something is not right.

And we need Jesus to transform our life and help move the center of gravity from self to Jesus so that we serve him.

[25 : 53] We serve other people. We work for the extension of his kingdom. And of course, we have hope. Don't we? We have hope of eternal life with Jesus in heaven.

And the other thing, on a practical level, you know, it's so difficult to explain to people sometimes, but Jesus takes us to where the good things are.

You know that story we read from Luke where Jesus goes to Peter and they've been fishing all day and they haven't caught anything and here comes this carpenter and tells them to put out into the deep, you know, but they go and do it and what do they discover?

That he has taken them to where the good things are. And he does that again and again. I bet, no, I don't bet, I'm not a betting man, but I guarantee if I asked the Christians who, people here this morning, who've been Christians for maybe 15 or 20 years, to tell you a story when Jesus in their lives led them through a situation and they couldn't understand, why am I going through this? Why is God allowing this to happen? But he brought them to where the good things are. I could guarantee almost everyone would be able to do that.

[27 : 21] See this pulpit? It's a replica, exact replica, of the pulpit in Milan Cathedral. And if you were to go to Milan Cathedral today and approaching that huge, huge, apparently it's one of the greatest cathedrals in Europe, there's three great doors and there are arches over each door with carvings on them.

And over the door on the left, it says, all that pleases is but for a moment. And over the door on the right, it says, all that troubles is but for a moment.

But over the big central arch, it said, that only is important, which is eternal. Can I ask this morning, are you thinking about eternal things?

do you think much about the living God who made you? What are you making of Jesus to use C.S. Lewis' question? But of course, really, the only question that really, truly matters is the one that Jesus asked Peter and he asks each of us, who do you say that I am?

[28 : 57] Let's pray. Our loving Heavenly Father, we thank you that your great plan of salvation was to bring Jesus as a baby in a manger to live and grow and then die on a cross and be resurrected that we sinful sons of men might know new life, know eternal life in our souls.

And so we thank you again for Jesus, the wonderful example he showed us in his life of how to live. And in his death, he was a sacrifice for our sins.

in his resurrection, a conqueror, in his ascension, a king, and in his intercession for us day by day, a great high priest. Lord, we thank you for him and we pray that you would give us each one the grace this morning to answer that Jesus is not just a saviour, but he is my saviour.

In his name we pray this. Amen.