

Meet Jesus: The Son of God

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Preacher: Alex Bedford

[0 : 0 0] Dear Heavenly Father, we give you thanks for this lovely time of year. We so enjoy the sunshine, the warmth, the longer days, the budding flowers and the leaves on the trees, and the feeling that the long winter is behind us.

So we thank you for this lovely time of year. Of course, Father, at Easter we want primarily to give you thanks, to give you thanks for sending your Son into this world, for his death that enables us to speak to you as Father, through the forgiveness of our sin.

And so we come to you with humble hearts and seek afresh that forgiveness that you offer to us through your Son. Father, our sin is ever before us.

Even today we've not lived as we ought to have, wrongful thoughts or actions or sins of omission.

And so therefore we ask that you would forgive us.

Forgive us our sin, we pray. We pray that you'd also help us to forgive those who sin against us. We pray that you not lead us into temptation.

[1 : 1 9] That you would structure our lives to avoid circumstances in which we're most susceptible to sin. Areas in which the evil one continually invites us.

Please protect us, Father, for we are weak, each one of us. Having sought forgiveness and repentance, we hear words of assurance from the Apostle Paul.

He says, For our sake, he made him to be sin, who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. We think now, Father, of those who we know who are struggling with one thing or another.

Those trying to resolve financial difficulties. Those who are unwell. Those undergoing treatment for cancer. Perhaps there's folk we know who have recently been knocked sideways by some trauma. And we lift them to you, Father. We pray that you'd wrap your arms around these folk and comfort them. That you would give skill to medics. That you would give a speedy recovery where this is your will.

[2 : 3 7] And in all things, Father, though a mystery to ourselves, we pray for your glorious ends. We thank you, Father, for the work of the well.

We thank you how this has developed over the last 16 years. We think of those who are just one full-time employee and one part-time and yet they minister to thousands and thousands of people each year.

We pray that you'd be with them and use them for your glory. We pray that one would plant, another would water and that you would bring the growth. And finally, Father, as we come to your word, we pray that you'd be with us now through your word and through your spirit and that you'd lift that same word from the pages of scripture, that you would embed it into our minds and our hearts and that you would be shaping us more like your son, Jesus Christ.

and we ask in his name. Amen. Amen. So you might like to turn up your passage in the order of service. We're looking at Mark chapter 15.

Mark chapter 15. And I'll read from verse 21. Mark 15 from verse 21.

[3 : 5 6] Mark 15 from verse 21. Mark 15 from verse 21.

Casting lots for them to decide what each would take. And it was the third hour when they crucified him. And the inscription of the charge against him read, The King of the Jews.

And with him was crucified two robbers, one on his right and one on his left. And those who passed by derided him, wagging their heads and saying, Ah, you who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save yourself and come down from the cross.

So also the chief priests with the scribes mocked him to one another saying, He saved others, he cannot save himself. Let the Christ, the King of Israel, come down from the cross that we may see

and believe.

Those who were crucified with him also reviled him. And when the sixth hour came, when the sixth hour had come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour.

[5 : 23] And at the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani, which means, My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? And some of the bystanders hearing it said, Behold, he's calling Elijah.

And someone ran, filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on a reed and gave it to him to drink, saying, Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to take him down. And Jesus uttered a loud cry and breathed his last.

And the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. And when the centurion who stood facing him saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, Truly, this man was the Son of God.

There were also women looking on from a distance, among whom were Mary Magdalene and Mary, the mother of James, the younger, and Joses, and Salome. When he was in Galilee, they followed him and ministered to him.

And there were also many other women who came up with him to Jerusalem. Just look with me, if you would, at verse 39 of that passage.

[6 : 32] You see the words from the lips of the centurion there. Can you see verse 39? And when the centurion who stood facing him saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, Truly, this man was the Son of God.

What does that title mean? The Son of God. What does it mean? You get a knock on your door, you open the door and it's a Jehovah's Witness. And if you invite them in, they'll soon be telling you that the Son of Man means that Jesus is less than God.

Are they right? In our first point, friends, we'll be thinking about that title, the Son of God. And from the passage later on, we'll be looking at reactions to Jesus, the Son of God.

But firstly, let's think about that title. We first hear it in chapter 1 and verse 1. Mark opens his account with an absolutely staggering sentence. He says, The beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

The word gospel means good news. And there's two titles there. Did you notice? Jesus the Christ, that is the promised one from the Old Testament part of the Bible. And then also, he's the Son of God.

[7 : 49] That's what Mark is saying in chapter 1 and verse 1. And that's the title, isn't it, that the centurion recognised. That's the one he noticed. The Son of God, he says, as he looks at Jesus on the cross.

But what does it mean? Well, this is a billing, says Mark, chapter 1, verse 1. God has broken into our world. The creative power, the intelligence that brought the whole of the cosmos into being has actually visited the planet.

It's absolutely massive, isn't it? Is it? Do you think so? It's like an extraterrestrial landing or something, isn't it? 2,000 years ago. It's incredible. You know, just think of all the major events that have taken place over the years in history.

some massive things have happened, haven't they? Well, they're not even in the same category as this, are they? You know, it doesn't get any bigger than God turning up on the planet, does it? And the centurion, he looks at Jesus and he's worked it out, hasn't he? You know, sometimes I think we've downgraded Christianity, domesticated it.

[9 : 03] Just picture the scene. This Roman centurion, he looks at a beaten and crucified man, doesn't he? And he says, that's God. You just don't expect it, do you?

It's just so shocking. It's not like any other religion we've heard, Mark. It's just not what we expected. But friends, if we were to just look at the Old Testament and open that up, we'd be expecting God to visit.

And in particular, we'd expect him to be visiting us in a specific way. Just listen to this. This is Isaiah. He says, Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son and call his name Emmanuel, which means what?

God with us. He's all in the pipeline, say the Old Testament prophets. He's on his way, the Messiah. God's on his way. And so there's this great expectation as we close the pages of the Old Testament.

And then suddenly in Luke's Gospel, in Luke's Gospel, the angel Gabriel comes and speaks to Mary. Yes, a seemingly insignificant wee lassie.

[10:17] The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore, the child to be born will be called holy. Listen, the Son of God.

And we come back to Mark's Gospel and remember, we're thinking about the title of the Son of God in our first point. And I'm going to whiz through Mark's Gospel now, just pick a few things out as we go through.

And we're thinking about the title, the Son of God. So Mark sort of lays his cards on the table, doesn't he? Chapter 1, verse 1, the Christ, the Son of God. And then what he's saying is saying, I'm going to be up front with you.

Here it is. He's the claim. I'm going to tell you straight away my verdict. And then what he's going to do is through the Gospel he's going to tell us why he's come to that verdict.

He's going to give us the evidence, show us the evidence. Mark's like a barrister in court and he wants to present the evidence to us.

[11:17] He wants his reader to get the right verdict. It's important, isn't it? He wants us to realise that Jesus is God. So he piles on the evidence as layer after layer after layer as we go through Mark's Gospel.

Chapter 11, chapter 1, verse 11, sorry, God the Father says to God the Son, this is my beloved Son.

And also in chapter 9, chapter 2, Jesus is forgiving sin, isn't he? And the scribes, they know it's a claim to deity. They say, who can forgive sin but God alone?

And so, we're just sort of two chapters in and already the evidence is piling up that God, in the flesh, is walking his planet.

Jesus calms a storm in chapter 4 and it's eerie. The disciples, they were terrified at the storm but now they're terrified. It's just a mill pond.

[12:22] There's no waves and it's making them afraid. They realise who is in the boat with them. Who is this, they say, even the wind and waves obey him.

It's a bit like Genesis chapters 1 and 2, isn't it? The Creator's speaking, words fall from his lips and the creation itself responds to his voice and the evidence is piling up.

Much like a lawyer, you know, you've seen him on television, don't you, bringing all the evidence to court on a trolley. It's all piled up and he's giving us the evidence here. Mark wants us to get the right verdict because Mark knows his readers have a problem.

We have a problem. Our problem is that Jesus just doesn't look like we'd expect God to look. Does he? Am I right?

He doesn't, does he? He had no form or majesty that we should look at him, said Isaiah. And the evidence just keeps on coming. Jesus feeds 5,000 people and it's like God feeding the people in the desert with manna.

[13:35] It's amazing the provision. He says to his disciples in chapter 8 verse 21, he says, do you still not understand? And Mark, he's got his readers in mind.

You know, we're also a bit slow on the uptake, aren't we? Me and you. That's why we sin, friends. We've not got God properly reigning, Jesus reigning in our life as God and King.

We've not got that sorted out. We downgrade him in our thinking. That's what's going on when we sin. So the blind see, the lame walk, sin is forgiven, the sick are healed, storms are calm, demons are cast out, the dead are raised and the question on everyone's lips is who is this?

Who is it? And the evidence is, friends, that Jesus is fully man and also fully God. He's not God the Father.

There's a distinction. Jesus is God the Son. And friends, we come now, finally, to chapter 15. We've thought about that title, the Son of God and now, through chapter 15, we'll be looking at some reactions to the Son of God in our second point.

[14:52] And it seems the whole world has accepted him. No. The whole world has rejected him. Hasn't it? The whole world has rejected him. Even his disciples have fled the scene.

They've hot-footed it out. And Jesus, think about this, he looks, doesn't he, he looks least like you'd expect the Son of God to look like.

Hands that flung stars into space to cruel nails surrendered. He's the author of life, says Peter in Acts chapter 3.

But those he created, they want him dead. And just before we get to the passage here, I'll read a couple of verses about Pilate.

Just see Pilate here. He's a politician. He's more interested in the opinion polls. Verse 14. And Pilate said to them, Why? What evil has he done?

[15 : 52] But they shouted all the more, Crucify him! So Pilate, listen to this, wishing to satisfy the crowd. He's just like a modern politician, isn't he? Released for them Barabbas.

And having scourged Jesus, he delivered him over to be crucified. A few weeks back, Terry McCutcheon and myself and Katie Pigott, we went down to England on a mission to a church down there.

And during the week, Terry and Katie got booked up to have a spray on suntan. Because there was a suntan studio next door to the church we were using.

Now can you imagine Terry with a suntan? Well I couldn't, and thankfully they backed out. But Katie didn't. Katie went, she wanted to get her nails done.

So she went to this beautician and she had her nails polished. And while she was getting her nails polished, she was telling the beautician the gospel, as Katie would. And the beautician, she seemed to understand it.

[16 : 56] So Katie asked her for a decision. She said, what are you going to do about this? And the beautician said to her, well, I can see it's true, but it's a problem I'm going to have if I go home and I'm a Christian.

It's a problem I'll have with my friends, my colleagues. It's just too awkward. And Pilate is more interested in people's opinions, isn't he?

Popularity is more important to him than the Son of God. And what about you, friend? You know, are you afraid of what people will think about you if you confess Jesus as your God?

And even as Christians, even as Christians we can be ashamed of Jesus, can't we? We can be afraid of speaking about him. Maybe someone you know doesn't know the Lord yet, and you just can't bring yourself to speak about Jesus.

Maybe that's something we can be praying about in our lives. we can all be embarrassed. John Stott says, Pilate made an ingenious attempt to avoid coming down clearly on one side or the other.

[18 : 08] And if you're not yet a Christian, if you've not yet made your mind up, why not come along to the Christianity Explored course and check it out? It's a lovely environment, it's going to run here, beneath here in the wind, from the 26th, Tuesday the 26th of April, from 7.30 to 9.

And you can come along, you can hear a wee talk about Jesus, you can interact, you can ask questions, you can just be quiet if you want, just listen and absorb the gospel. You're welcome to come along to that, the details are on the back of the service sheet there.

So we thought about Pilate, what about the soldiers? How did they react to the Son of God? Well, listen to this, this is from a thousand years previously.

I can count all my bones, they stare and gloat over me, they divide my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots, Psalm 22.

So that's a report from one thousand B.C. what does Mark say? Listen, look at verse 24, can you see verse 24 in the passage there? And they crucified him and divided his garments among them, casting lots for them to decide what each would take.

[19 : 25] For the soldiers, it's just another day at the office, isn't it? You know, they've gone through this process so many times before. It's not that they're sadistic or that they hate the condemned, they're just oblivious, aren't they, the soldiers, to what's actually happening right in front of them?

It's like they're on autopilot and we can have financial worries, can't we? Stress at work, all the problems of listening, living in 2011.

You know, we can miss out on the Son of God, even though for a time, like the soldiers, we were very close to him. The worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and their desires for other things, come in and choke the word, says Jesus.

Verses 29 and 30, the passers by, they mock him. Jesus, he looks helpless, doesn't he? So they just lay in and they're mocking him. And those who pass by, can you see verse 29, derided him, wagging their heads and saying, ah, you who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save yourself and come down from the cross.

And the Son of God doesn't waste his breath on those mocking him. And probably there's a lot of application here for the new atheists of our times.

[20 : 49] You know the people I have in mind who vehemently attack the Christian faith. And then verses 31 and 32, the religious people, they're supposed to be God's people, aren't they?

But they join in the fray. Their jobs are more important to them than the Son of God. Verse 31, so also the chief priests and the scribes mocked him to one another saying, he saved others, he cannot save himself.

Let the Christ, the King of Israel, come down from the cross that we may see and believe. And Jesus is impaled, isn't he, on the cross, deserted, beaten, mocked, hated.

Those who were crucified with him also reviled him. So here he is, Jesus. He'd made these people, he'd made them in his image, but they've marred him, haven't they?

And he's dying. And Mark is saying to us this afternoon, this is the Son of God. Just look at him. This is the Son of God before you.

[21 : 59] chapter 9, and his father had said, this is my beloved Son. But now the Father, he opens the floodgates of his wrath on his Son, and all else that went before is as nothing.

Like holding its breath, the Son withholds its light, as the Son of God becomes the object of his father's wrath. And Mark brings us the original language through the centuries.

It comes cascading into the room. Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani. And we think our sin is not very serious, don't we?

Anselm said long ago, and I don't understand Latin, but I'll read it anyway. Nondam considerasti quantum ponder, ponderis peccatum, which means the problem is that men simply don't grasp the gravity of sin.

It was my sin that held him there until it was accomplished. Jesus' heart stops. And we finish verse 39 with that centurion.

[23 : 24] Yes, amidst it all, Mark wants us to see this centurion. A Roman centurion. He's looking, isn't he, at Jesus, their eye to eye, face to face.

He's a Roman, not a Jew. He's the opposite, isn't he, of God's people in every respect. You can just imagine him there, can't you, in his gleaming armour, his tunic, his leather boots.

He controls a hundred soldiers. Humanly speaking, think about this, he's the boss of Golgotha, isn't he? And everyone knows it, or they think they do.

He brings a sense of order, doesn't he, to the awful proceedings of execution. Alexander McLaren says, the soldier who commanded the executioners had no prejudices or hatred to blind his eyes or ossify his hearts.

And he looks at Jesus, verse 39, eye to eye. And we ask, what does the centurion make of it all? What's he thinking? Verse 39, can you see?

[24 : 32] And when the centurion who stood facing him saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, truly, this man was the Son of God. And it's all focused in, hasn't it, for him.

He sees what he's looking at. No one else had got it in Mark's Gospel. No other human, anyway. Well, you wouldn't, would you?

He just didn't look like we'd expect. No, on the cross, Jesus, he looks the complete opposite of what you'd expect the Son of God to look like, despised and rejected by men.

It's all topsy-turvy. the centurion had thought that he was in control of Golgotha, but now he realises that it was the one crucified.

He was in control all along. Think about this, the penny drops, doesn't it, with a Roman centurion in charge of the execution.

[25 : 39] He's the last person you'd expect, isn't he, to believe. And you and I, friends, we're unlikely candidates as well, aren't we?

When we think of ourselves and of our sin. And can it be that I should gain an interest in the Saviour's blood?

And Mark is saying, just look at the centurion. It can be. It can be. Paul Barnett says this, just listen to this as we finish.

This represents the inconceivable reversal of values. This Gentile is the first man to see Jesus as God sees him, as the Son of God.

He sees what the disciples have not yet seen. This man is the forerunner of many Romans in inverted commas, who over the next centuries will declare the crucified one to be the Son of God.

[26 : 40] Indeed, historically speaking, this man is the first Christian confessor. So here he is, Jesus, the Son of God.

Friends, do you live like that's true? Shall we pray? dear Heavenly Father, we thank you so much for sending your Son into the world.

We thank you that upon the cross he took the sin of all those who have sought forgiveness in him. God. Amen. So we thank you, Father, for the salvation that we have in your Son. We thank you how this gives us a clean sheet, a fresh start, an eternity that unfolds before us.

And so, Father, we pray that we live the rest of our lives with Jesus Christ as King and Sovereign in our lives.

[27 : 47] and we lift this prayer to you in Christ's name. Amen.