

074: Who Is Jesus?

Andrew Kneeland, February 14, 2021

*Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*

Who is Jesus?

Most of us, I think, have read a fair bit of the Bible throughout our life, so we probably have a pretty good idea of who Jesus is and what Jesus did. You've all heard many times that Jesus lived a perfect life, and died on a cross for your sins, and raised from the dead on the third day. Have you heard that before? I know you have.

But the disciples hadn't. They followed Jesus and watched Him perform miracles but they didn't know what Jesus was about to do. They called him teacher, and they called him "Lord." But for most of Jesus' life, they didn't really have a real good answer to the question: "Who is Jesus?"

But they were about to get one. Our sermon text today is called the Transfiguration, and it's where Jesus gave three of disciples a little clearer glimpse of who he really was.

*Let's pray before we dive into this story together: Father God, thank you for your Word. Your Word is Truth. Guide my words this morning, help me preach only your truth and your message. May you alone be praised, amen.*

Jesus and his disciples were traveling through Judea, healing the sick, feeding the multitudes, and teaching everyone who would listen about the coming of the Kingdom of God. But even after months and years with this traveling rabbi, the disciples still didn't really *know* who Jesus was. Or what He was going to do.

Things got a little clearer for Peter, James, and John in Mark chapter 9. They went up a mountain with Jesus and immediately were filled with shock, awe, and fear. This humble carpenter was more than a simple teacher. Jesus was *transfigured* before their very eyes: his clothes became as white as lightning and his face shone like the sun.

This was Jesus, the Son of God. The second member of the Trinity who was all-powerful, all-knowing, all-present... the powerful and eternal God who created the world and held all things together through the strength of His might. That's this guy; that's Who Jesus Is.

Those verses we read last week from Isaiah: the One who holds all the oceans in His hands,

who named and knows every one of the 300 sextillion stars. That's Jesus. And to Peter, James, and John, it was the guy standing in front of them. Their hiking buddy and travel companion and miracle-working friend was also the fully divine Son of God.

Young and brash Peter, always the first to speak and the last to think, sees this amazing sight and mumbles out a response. You can almost hear the shock and confusion in his voice: "It's wonderful for us to be here! Let's make three shelters as memorials."

But Jesus didn't transfigure Himself in order to go camping with his three clueless friends. He transfigured himself to show His three clueless friends who He really was. To show that even though He was fully and completely a human being, just like them, He was also fully and completely divine.

Why did they need to know that? Why do WE need to know that Jesus was more than just another guy? Because if "just another guy" died on a cross we would still be hopelessly lost in our sins. If "just another guy" had claimed to take all of the punishment for all of the sins of all the people in all of the world, he would be lying. If followers of "just another guy" claimed that their leader had raised from the dead, they would be wrong and their false religion would be worthless.

But Jesus is not "just another guy." He was and is and will forever be the eternal Son of God and Son of Man. Only a man could suffer and be killed as a sacrifice in place of another. And only God could provide a sacrifice *valuable* enough to cover the sins of the entire world. Jesus is perfectly and completely both God and man, because He needed to be.

But the star-struck disciples learned more about Who Jesus Is that day on the Mount of Transfiguration. They learned from Moses and Elijah. These two people were not randomly summoned from the Pearly Gates. It wasn't like jury duty. Moses and Elijah were chosen on purpose, to teach us something very important. Moses represents the Law, and Elijah represents the Prophets.

Together they represent the entire Old Testament, and really the entirety of history leading up to that moment on the mountain. Moses and Elijah were there to teach the disciples and us that Jesus is the central figure in history. All history led up to Jesus, and all history since has pointed

back to Jesus. Jesus, this Transfigured Lord of Lords, is the lynchpin of everything.

The Law -- which Moses wrote -- was written to show sinful people how they could be in presence of a sinless and holy God. All those rules and regulations and standards and restrictions were put in place not to punish the Israelites, but to show them what it would take for them to again be considered friends of God.

Kevin DeYoung writes that the Law taught the Israelites to have holy people (called priests) wear holy clothes and use holy tools and holy objects to celebrate holy days in order that they might become a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. Holiness is what God is, and holiness is what God requires. Perfect holiness.

But they couldn't do it. They couldn't follow these rules, nobody could. Nobody CAN. Did God have Moses write them down, then, in order to mock them? In order to humiliate them and permanently lock them out of heaven? No. Moses wrote down the Law in order to show that it would take perfect holiness to make things right again... and so that Elijah and the prophets could speak about Someone who COULD keep these rules, this Law. Someone who COULD be perfectly holy.

The Law says that we need Someone like Jesus... the Prophets say that Someone named Jesus is coming. Our need, and our solution. And all three were together on the Mount of Transfiguration here in Mark 9... with Peter, James, and John watching with slack jaws and bated breath. Perfect holiness on display, for all to see.

Don't you wish -- maybe I'm the only one -- but don't you wish sometimes that you could just SEE Jesus? That He would just physically appear again for a little bit to reassure us, or to comfort us, or to guide us, or show us what to do? It's so easy to doubt... if we could just SEE God, like the disciples did, it would be a WHOLE lot easier to believe, right?

The disciples got to actually SEE Jesus. They talked with him, ate with him, hugged and kissed him!

A few years after this Transfiguration -- a few years after Jesus had died and rose again and ascended back into heaven -- Peter was a pastor. He was a young pastor and he was dealing

with some people who were asking this same question: I didn't get to SEE Jesus, how can I be sure He's really God? Why can't He *transfigure* Himself to me?

Peter said this, in his second letter: "When Jesus received honor and glory from God the Father, and the voice was borne to Him by the Majestic Glory, "This is my beloved Son," we ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain."

But then listen to what Peter says next: "And we have something more sure, the prophetic word."

What's MORE SURE than actually seeing Jesus transfigured before your very eyes? This Word. The Word of God that we get to hold in our hands, THIS is what Peter says is MORE SURE, MORE RELIABLE, MORE COMFORTING than actually seeing Jesus. Isn't that amazing? Peter experienced an amazing thing on the Mount of Transfiguration, there's no doubt about it. But that experience was just for a moment... he would rather have the forever-lasting and forever-enduring Word of God.

But what do you think Jesus, Moses, and Elijah were talking about? These two very important Old Testament heroes of the faith who had been waiting in heaven for over a thousand years, got the chance to talk with Jesus face-to-face, here on earth. What questions do you think they would have had for Jesus? What do you think they were talking about?

Well, we don't have to guess! This same story is repeated in three of the Gospels and Luke gives us the answer! Luke 9:31 says they were "speaking about his departure, which he was about to bring to fulfillment at Jerusalem."

The word for departure is the same word the Jews used for "Exodus." Moses led God's people through the Red Sea in the first great Exodus... and now Jesus was about to lead His people through another, greater, Exodus. An Exodus not from slavery in Egypt to the land of Palestine, but a spiritual exodus from slavery to sin to freedom in Christ.

Through his upcoming death and miraculous resurrection, Jesus was going to undo each and every effect of sin. He would change the status of each and every one of His precious children. A transformation from slaves to sin, held in bondage in the evil grasp of the devil... to liberated

and free heirs of God's promises. From the bottom of a bottomless pit... to the seat of honor at the heavenly banquet table.

Have you ever heard the story of Louis Delcourt? He was a young French soldier during World War I. He was given a "leave pass" for a weekend while he was on active duty, but he didn't return on time. He was afraid of being arrested or punished so he didn't go back, he chose to run away.

He went back home to his mother and convinced her to hide him in the attic so nobody could find him. She would sneak him food and other necessities and kept him alive, and very well hidden. For 21 years Louis Delcourt hid in his mother's attic, afraid of being found but even more afraid of being arrested for desertion.

But then, in 1937, his mother died and Louis had no choice but to leave his hidden sanctuary. He was pale and sickly as he took himself to the nearest police station to turn himself in. He confessed his crime to the officer and prepared for the worst. But the police officer looked at Louis in disbelief and said: "Haven't you heard? The war's been over for 19 years! And the government passed an amnesty law for deserters years ago!"

Louis Delcourt had been rescued, but it took him years to know it. He was instantly transformed from a prisoner in his mother's attic to a completely-legal citizen of the nation of France, with all rights and responsibilities.

Jesus offers a similar -- but greater -- transformation. His victory on the cross ended the war with sin and made it possible for sinful people to again be in the presence of a sinless and holy God.

Forgiveness and salvation have been won for you. The work has been done and accomplished by the holy Son of God who revealed His majesty and divinity on the Mount of Transfiguration. Don't waste your life in the attic like Louis Delcourt, afraid of the consequences and punishment you deserve. Freedom has been won for you. Freedom from fear, freedom from hiding, freedom from punishment.

Who is Jesus? The divine Son of God, who won that freedom for YOU. Amen.