

I'd like to begin, by offering a special welcome to our preschool parents and other guests this morning. As you may know each week during preschool chapel we've been going through this Storybook Bible and learning all the important stories in the Bible.

We started with the story of God creating the world, and continued through the Old Testaments stories, from Noah, to Moses, to King David, and then the prophets, and now we are turning to the stories of Jesus.

And today as you saw on the video we are looking at the question "Who is Jesus?" Of course there are many view points out there. One view point that we've talked about this year is called, the Upper Story. That's the story of this world from God's perspective. The Lower Story is the world from a human perspective.

And if there was ever a Sunday when the contrast between the Upper Story and the Lower Story becomes clear, this is it.

That's what we just witnessed on the video.¹ Some people see Jesus clearly as the Son of God and some people see Jesus through the various lenses of this world.

This morning, we can't help but watch a video like that and start thinking, how we might answer that question. "What does Jesus mean to me? Who is he in my life?"

Let me show you another video clip.² It's the testimony of Bono from U2.

I share that video with you to illustrate the difference between a biography and a testimony. Each of the Gospels give us a biography of Jesus, sharing things he did and said. However the central point of each gospel is not simply to convey information about Jesus. The point is not to record a history for future historians to debate. The point of each gospel is to give testimony to Jesus and to bring the reader to a point of decision. Based on this evidence, "Who is Jesus?"

The Gospels, especially the first three, take time to drop hints along the way. Each is written to force the reader to scratch his or her head and wonder, "Who is this man?"

They do this by allowing us to see Jesus from several perspectives. Sometimes we meet a person who is seeking out Jesus in a time of need.

Some are curious like Zacchaeus who climbs a tree to see Jesus.
 Others like Nicodemus come to Jesus with questions.
 Others like the Samaritan woman at the well, aren't even looking for Jesus.
 But he goes to where they are and finds them.

As Jesus moves closer to the cross, the question of his identity takes on a greater urgency.
 The disciples are beginning to make statements about him.
 The crowds are wondering.
 The religious leaders are furious that Jesus himself is making statements, such as: "Before Abraham was born, I am!"

For them that sounded suspiciously like Jesus calling himself the "I AM" who spoke from the burning bush to Moses.
 Could he be claiming to be not just a rabbi or teacher, but God himself?

In Matthew chapter 16,
 Peter's confession, "You are the Messiah," represents the first time that someone had connected Jesus with the hope of Israel.

For the first time in human history,
 someone had caught a glimpse of what the prophets had been foretelling.
 And yet Matthew shows in just a few verses after this,
 that Peter's understanding was still not complete.
 Peter did not grasp the full magnitude of his confession.
 Although Peter rightly identified Jesus as the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies,
 another question remained.

The Old Testament prophecies contained two strains of teaching about the Messiah.
 One thread emphasized the Messiah's triumphant rule, ushering in a new Israel.
 The other spoke of his suffering and death.

When Peter embraced the first thread, the idea that the Messiah had come to overthrow the Romans, but then he rejected the idea of a Messiah who suffers.

He took Jesus aside and rebuked him. But Jesus countered by rebuking Peter's misunderstanding, because the cross was coming soon.

Earlier in the Gospels, when Jesus would perform a healing
 or his disciples caught a glimpse of his identity as the Son of God sometimes he would instruct them not to tell anyone. And he would say to them, "my time has not yet come."
 But now his time was drawing near.

The religious leaders of his day were clearly threatened.
 The crowds were following Jesus and they would not stand for it.

What would become of their privileged positions and wealth?
 What would happen if there was an uprising and the Romans stamped it out?
 And so they met secretly and plotted to arrest Jesus and have him silenced.

While this was happening the crowds began to buzz with their own questions.
 And the issues boiled down to his identity.
 "Who is this man?" they asked.

Until, something they could not explain away, happened.
 Standing before the tomb of Lazarus, Jesus called out a man who had been dead for three days -
 and to everyone's amazement, Lazarus had been raised from the dead.

While some may have claimed that the little girl he raised from
 the dead was "just sleeping" no one doubted that Lazarus had truly been dead.
 The smell of death was unmistakable.
 Jesus demonstrated to all - that he had power and authority over everything in this world.
 Even death could not stop him.

So the question we are all faced with, is whether or not to believe this testimony.
 Is Jesus who he says he is?
 Is he the Son of God?

Because if he is, that changes everything,
 It changes what we live for.
 It changes what we look toward for meaning in our lives.
 It changes how we make decisions, how we deal with the bad things that happen to us...
 where we look for hope, where we look for peace.

Do we believe that Jesus is the Light of this world?
 If so, he is a light that no darkness can overcome.

There is a story about a naval ship that just returned from a tour overseas.
 And on that ship there was a young ensign who had shown himself to be responsible and
 efficient while they were out on tour, and because of that he was given the opportunity to take
 command of the ship as it made its way out to sea again.

And as the ship was preparing to pull away from the dock, the ensign gives a series of crisp
 commands and before long he had the decks buzzing with men and the ship left port and began
 steaming out of the channel.
 Everyone involved could testify that the ensign's efficiency had been remarkable
 in fact he had set a record for getting the destroyer out of port.

The ensign glowed with pride and was not at all surprised when another seaman approached
 him with a message from the captain.

The captain's message read:

"My personal congratulations upon completing this exercise."

And you can just imagine the ensign grinning from ear to ear.

But the message continued,

"In your haste however, you overlooked one of the unwritten rules of seafaring.
Make sure your captain is on board before leaving the dock."

I'm pretty sure the ensign didn't intend to leave the captain at the dock.

But he had been so preoccupied with his own agenda, with everything he felt had to be done, that he just didn't give the captain a second thought.

Is life like that for us?

Do we get so busy sometimes, and so preoccupied with our own agendas, that we leave our captain, Jesus, at the dock?

In the Gospels, the outsiders often knew who Jesus was.

The demons all knew Jesus and feared him.

Some of the outsiders, like the Samaritan woman at the well, came to know who Jesus was and when she realized he was the Messiah, she dropped her jaw in amazement and awe. She knew that Jesus was the captain, and there was no way that she was going to pull out of port without Jesus on board.

My prayer for each you,
is that in the busyness of your lives with all the distractions
and all the things pulling you in different directions,

that you pause long enough to hear Jesus calling to you,
that you open your eyes wide enough to see Jesus clearly

and when you hear him, and see him
that you will make him the Lord and captain of your life. Amen.

¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E7H67BoHDdo>

² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kOQCIGNRoPc>