

Sermon – “The Essential Jesus” Matthew 13:54-58; Matthew 16:13-28

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- (6) III – Have a look at these pictures of look-a-likes – can you tell the real celebrity? The real person?
- (5) Can you tell who Jesus really is? People have a whole lot of different ideas about who Jesus was and who he is today. Just look at the many images that people have drawn over time. Which ones did you grow up with??? But who is the REAL Jesus?

Jesus – the nobody

In our first reading, Jesus returns to his hometown where he grew up. His neighbours hear him teach incredible things in their synagogues and perform many miracles. Then they recognise him. It's little Jesus. The carpenter's son. Mary's little boy. The brother of James, Joseph, Simon and Judas. ... and they took offense at him. It's just little Jesus.

Jesus is a nobody in his home town. They recognise him, but he's so familiar to them, he's not important. He's nobody.

For many people today, Jesus is a nobody. Many people love the cute and familiar baby Jesus in the manger at Christmas, but don't know the grown up Jesus who died on the cross and rose again and is King. And others are so familiar with Jesus, he's just someone who's "there". A symbol or a character of history who really isn't important. A nobody. Sort of like an appendix.

- III – the appendix (picture)

Lots of people see the appendix as a useless organ in the human body. Most people in the medical field believe that the appendix appears to be useless. And if it hurts, you take it out.

For many people, Jesus is like an appendix. They can't see a real use for him. They're happy for him to be around, but if he gets annoying, or uncomfortable, he's out of our life. For many people, Jesus is a nobody, like an appendix.

Jesus – important but not essential

When we turn to our second reading, Matthew 16:13, Jesus asks his disciples – “Who do **people** say the son of man is?” And the answer from the disciples is that most people think he's somebody important. “Some say you're John the Baptist” John the Baptist had been beheaded by this stage and some thought Jesus was John come back to life.

Some say you're Elijah or Jeremiah or one of the prophets from the Old Testament come back to earth again. Most people thought Jesus was someone special. We see this response today as well. Jesus was an amazing man. An amazing teacher. A miracle worker. An historical figure. A prophet. An important person.

But perhaps he's a bit like one of our kidneys...

- III – Kidney (picture)

Most people are born with 2 kidneys. And kidneys are important – they remove waste from the blood, they balance our salts and acids and produce hormones. They're very important. We can't live without them. But we **can** get by with just one. For most of us, if we lose a kidney, we have a spare.

For many people, Jesus is like the spare kidney. He's important. Good for a backup, but he's like a spare tyre. The “just in case” Jesus. You hope you'll never need him, but he's there just in case.

Jesus – the essential

Finally, Jesus asks his disciples in 16:15 – “But what about you? Who do you say I am?”

Peter answers: “You are the Christ, the son of the living God.”

In other words, Jesus, you’re not just somebody important. You are THE important person we’ve all been waiting for! You’re THE Christ – which means “the anointed one”, the one sent by God. You are God’s son – in other words, God himself on earth. You are the saviour of the world. What Peter is saying to Jesus is “You are the heart!”

- III – the heart (picture)

You cannot survive without a heart. There’s only one and it’s essential for our survival. The heart is unique. The heart pumps blood to all parts of the body. You have about 5 litres of blood in your body and it all passes through the heart about every minute. Our heart is essential. Jesus is our heart. He’s not an appendix or a spare kidney. He the *essential* heart we need to have life.

And he’s not a Buddha or Mohammed or Krishna. He’s unique. He’s the only one, the only way, and the only God. He’s the essential Jesus.

The implications of the essential Jesus

So if the REAL Jesus is essential, what does that mean? Well, this passage gives us TWO implications:

- 1. Jesus must die and rise again

As the Christ, Jesus’ mission was to die on the cross to take the punishment for our sins, and to rise again to give us power over death.

When Peter hears this, he takes Jesus aside and rebukes him – “No! That’s never going to happen to you!” he says. And Jesus replies to Peter: “Get behind me Satan; you are a stumbling block to me; **you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men.**”

Peter is distracted by worldly thinking. He calls Jesus “the Christ”, but he has an image of Jesus as a *worldly* leader, a leader who would rescue them with worldly strength and power. Not a leader who would show his power by dying.

Perhaps we sometimes think about Jesus in a worldly way too. For example, when we want to share Jesus with other people, we might try to present to them a picture of Jesus that will be more acceptable. A picture of a Jesus who will make their life on earth better and easier. But we need to present the REAL Jesus.

The real Jesus is loving and caring. And he does make our life better, but not necessarily in a *worldly* way.

Jesus says some very difficult things about our worldly existence that people often don’t want to hear –

He says we’re all sinful and we all need to be rescued from sin.

He says he is the way, the truth, and the life and that NO-ONE goes to heaven except through him.

He says that we must love him more than anyone else – even our own family.

He says we must be prepared to leave EVERYTHING to follow him.

He says we will often face difficult times and persecution if we follow him.

This is the REAL Jesus. The essential Jesus. This is not an image of a Jesus who makes our earthly life easier. In fact, quite the opposite. Following THIS Jesus, the REAL Jesus, may often make our life more difficult on earth. It’s not always an EASY picture of Jesus to share, but it is the essential Jesus that people need to hear to be saved. We won’t see people saved by committing to a soft “acceptable” version of Jesus. They’ll be saved when they hear the truth about the REAL Jesus, and God opens their heart to accept him as Lord. Which brings us to the second implication:

- 2. We must die. 16:24 –

“Then Jesus said to his disciples: ‘If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. ²⁵For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it.”

If you follow Jesus, YOU must go to the cross. What does that mean? It means that Jesus doesn’t just want us to **live** for him. He wants us to **die** for him. The only way to save your life, is to lose it to Jesus.

Have you lost your life to Jesus?

- Verse 26: *“²⁶What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul?”*

What good is it if you have **great wealth** but forfeit your soul?

What good is it if you have **a brilliant career** but forfeit your soul?

What good is it if you **do great things in this world** but forfeit your soul?

What good is it if you **have a wonderful family** but forfeit your soul?

Verse 27: *“²⁷For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father’s glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what he has done.*

What have you done with Jesus’ words? What choice have you made? Have you decided to gain the world and forfeit your soul, or have you decided to lose your life to Jesus?

Jesus calls on us to have **God’s** goals for our life, rather than our **own** goals, even if it leads to death, which it does for many of Jesus’ followers. We’re called to trust **his** plans rather than our **own** plans. To keep focussed on **God’s** will rather than our **own** will.

I find that difficult. For me it’s a daily challenge to do two simple things:

The first challenge is to hand over all my plans, my worries, my whole day, to God in prayer.

The second challenge is to put **his** kingdom above my personal kingdom – with my time, my money, my plans – **every part** of my life.

So let me finish with just one challenge for you today. It’s February. What plans have you made for this year? Work, school, holidays, career, family, money, travel – what plans have you made? ...

My question is this: where is God in your plans? Is he right up the front, centre stage? Or is he in the background? Is Jesus an appendix to your plans? A nobody? Or a spare kidney, a “just in case Jesus”? Or he is the heart of your plans?

- Is 2010 a year planned for your kingdom? Or God’s kingdom?

So start just with this week. Ask yourself: How is Jesus going to be **essential** in my life and plans this week? How is he going to be **centre stage**? How am I going to be focussed on **his** kingdom and not my own?

Let’s pray.

In our day to day lives, the way we speak and act, the time we take to pray, to read and study your word, the way we spend, the way we give, in the way we plan our future, for ourselves, our family, our career, ... may you always be our Christ, our essential, our heart, our King, Jesus. Amen.