

# Who Was Jesus?

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Preacher: Archie Winnington-Ingram

[ 0 : 00 ] Thanks so much, Ian and Susan. As you've probably worked out, my name's Archie, pastor in training here. If you do want to have that open in front of you, John chapter 6, it's on page 1069 of the Pew Bible.

So do get that open in front of you. And as you do that, let me pray. Heavenly Father, by your Holy Spirit, in the hearts of each and every one of us, in my heart, would you do your work to open our eyes and our ears that we might see Jesus this morning for who he says that he is, that we might hear and believe, and that we might desire him for your glory.

Amen. I wonder who you think Jesus is. Is he a prophet? A good man?

A teacher? A political revolutionary? The son of God? Whoever Jesus was, we know history would tell us that two millennia ago he died hanging on a cross.

And the claim is, of course, that he rose again the first Easter. But who do you think that he was?

And maybe more importantly for us this morning, what do you think or desire that he would do for you today?

[ 1 : 32 ] That's where we're headed this morning. Who is Jesus? And what has he got for you?

Let's begin with a story. Adolf Beck was a Norwegian man living in London in the 1890s.

He was a short, stout, gray-haired man, and there he is, epic moustache. And on an ordinary cold December morning, he stepped out of his house only to be blocked by a young woman.

This young woman accused him of having stolen from her a watch and some jewellery. Outraged, he brushed her aside. He went on his way. But she followed him and continued to make this accusation known.

Before long, Beck appealed to a nearby policeman, claiming that this woman was harassing him. The woman demanded that the policeman arrest Beck. And so they were both taken down to the station.

And the story was told. She claimed that he had tricked her by claiming to be a wealthy man in order to woo her, and then borrowing her jewellery and her watch to go and get more expensive equivalents made in her size.

[ 2 : 37 ] And it turned out that over the last two years, 22 women had reported almost exactly the same sort of crime. And when they were asked to pick the man from a lineup, they all accused Beck.

And so at trial, he was found guilty, sentenced to seven years in prison. Five years later, he was released on parole. But then just three years after that, a woman reported a crime identical to those that Beck was originally convicted of.

And so he was arrested again. But at this point, Wilhelm Meyer enters our story. Because this time, while Beck was in prison, Meyer was caught red-handed, caught committing a crime with the same unusual pattern as those Beck had been convicted of.

He was also short and stout and grey-haired and had an epic moustache. Turned out, Meyer had been the culprit all along.

And Beck was given a pardon. He was given £5,000, something like £20,000 in today's money. Not sure I'd take £20,000 for five years in prison, but there you go. It's a terrible case, isn't it, of mistaken identity.

[ 3 : 49 ] It almost sounds like something from an Arthur Conan Doyle novel. And it's a familiar storyline, the mistaken identity storyline. Maybe you know it from some of these films, like *The Big Lebowski*, or *The Life of Brian*, or *Dumb and Dumber*, or *North by Northwest*.

It's a gripping storyline. Often it's a hilarious storyline. But it can be deathly serious. I mean, it was pretty rubbish for Adolf Beck.

It's even more rubbish for those over the years who have been sentenced to death and having been executed turned out to be innocent. If you're the prosecution or the judge or the jury or whatever, ensuring that you don't have a case of mistaken identity is super important.

Here's the point. Getting identity right, there is no case in which this is more important than with Jesus. Because in those films, the consequences of mistaken identity are often hilarious.

In the case of Beck and Maya, the consequences are pretty brutal. On death row, it can be life or death. Well, here, with Jesus, it is eternal life that is at stake.

[ 5 : 02 ] If you've got that Bible open in front of you, if you don't, get it open at chapter 6 and have a look at verse 40. I know this isn't in the passage that we've read, but it's sort of a preview of where we're going in the next couple of weeks.

Verse 40. For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day.

You see what's at stake here? The claim is that Jesus is offering eternal life. And so we've got to ask, who is this Jesus?

And what does it mean to believe in him? Even as we begin, who is Jesus? But you know, the passage that Susan has read for us this morning goes even further than that.

It's not just who is Jesus, but what would we desire that he would do for us today? We've seen over the last few months in John's Gospel that Jesus has gathered quite the following.

[ 6 : 02 ] Have a look in verse 2 of chapter 6. It's a great crowd. And why is it that they're following him still in verse 2? It's because they've seen the signs. We've seen this sort of language before from John as people see the signs that Jesus is performing, and they're amazed, and they follow him.

But we've got to ask, and John is encouraging us to ask, what is it that they want from Jesus? We'll see in this chapter, again, they see Jesus perform this sign, and they make it pretty clear what they want from him.

But then Jesus gets to teaching. This is really a preview of the next couple of weeks. He tells them why he's come. And see how they react. Sorry, I know we're jumping about a bit, but down in verse 60.

See how they react. On hearing it, many of his disciples, that's not the 12, that's just those who are following him. Many of his disciples said, this is a hard teaching.

Who can accept it? And the kicker in verse 66. From this time on, many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him.

[ 7 : 12 ] This teaching from Jesus that we're going to see over the next few weeks that reveals what his signs point to is like a church growth strategy gone very badly wrong.

From a crowd in verse 1 to many no longer following him here in verse 66. And so I guess a warning for us over the next few weeks.

If we're willing to be really honest with ourselves, I think this might get quite uncomfortable. As we ask, who is Jesus? Like, who do we really believe that he is?

And what do I desire that he would do for me? Why am I here? Like, what brings me to church? Why am I following him? Because our answer to those questions, I think, might be challenged by John over the next couple of weeks.

Let's dive into the text then with those questions in the back of our mind and see how this story works. In verses 1 to 3, John sort of sets the scene. In verse 1, we get the where this happens.

[ 8 : 21 ] It's on the far shore of the Sea of Galilee. The far shore, i.e. from the scene before. They're now on the other side of the sea. That is the Sea of Tiberias. It's quite strange for John to give us the Roman name of the sea there, the Sea of Tiberias.

Just keep that in your back pocket for later. But this is where it's happening. And more specifically, it's up on a mountainside in verse 3. And then we also get the when in verse 4.

The Jewish Passover festival was near. Why does John record these details as he sets the scene? I mean, I take it is because this is when and where it happened. But it's not just random.

The original readers of this gospel and the people there at the time, their minds would have gone straight to the Exodus here, to Moses, to that story that Ian has just read for us.

If you know the history of Israel, they were slaves in Egypt. God raises up Moses to be a prophet and a leader for them, to lead them out of slavery. And that's where the Passover festival comes from, as God provides away the Passover lamb for his judgment to come on to Egypt and not on to

his people, the Israelites.

[ 9 : 31 ] And more than that, the imagery of mountainside is also straight out of that Exodus. And mountains come to have this significance for Israel. It was on a mountain that Moses encountered God, where God reveals his name to Moses, the I am who I am.

Again, keep that in your back pocket for later. But for now, back in John chapter 6, the people who have followed Jesus, what do they desire Jesus to do?

Well, in those first few verses, all the stars are aligning for big, Exodus-like, led-by-Moses things to happen. And then we get this sign.

See in verse 5, the people, they have nothing to eat. And it's such a big crowd in verse 7 that it would take more than half a year's wages to feed them. And if you've got a slightly different translation, you might just have 200 denarii there.

The translators of the NIV don't bother with the unit. They just tell us rightly, and actually probably quite helpfully, that it's more than half a year's wages for these people. In other words, there's no way to feed this crowd of people.

[ 10 : 40 ] And then this boy appears in verse 9, and he has five small barley loaves and two small fish. Not exactly fine dining, but a pretty ordinary meal in the ancient Near East. And notice, John makes sure that we know that they're just very small loaves and small fish.

Definitely not enough, in other words, to feed 5,000 people. And I guess we know what happens next. In verse 11, Jesus takes the loaves, he gives thanks, and everyone eats as much as they wanted.

In fact, in verses 12 and 13, there's plenty left over, and the people are pretty impressed. Notice how they react in verse 14. Surely, this is the prophet who has come into the world.

And then they try and make him king by force. They're impressed. We'll come back to that. Exactly what they desire Jesus to be. But then we get this second miracle.

Notice it's the same day. It's in the evening. But this time, it's only the disciples who are there. In verse 15, Jesus has disappeared up a mountain again, and they're on their way back to Capernaum, back to the other side of the lake without him.

[ 11 : 50 ] Have a look at verse 17. It's dark. Verse 18, it's stormy, and they row out onto the lake about four or five miles in verse 19. In other words, they're not in the shallows anymore, and things are getting pretty hairy.

And yet, there's Jesus, in verse 19, walking on the water. No wonder, they're frightened. And he tells them, doesn't he, not to be afraid.

They bring him into the boat, and then all of a sudden, in verse 21, they've reached the other side. That's the story. What a day. Right? What a day. But what are we to make of it?

What are these two signs supposed to point to? Well, hopefully this will be helpful as we unpack the text under these two headings. Here are the headings.

The king they really wanted, and the king they really needed. So first, the king they really wanted.

Two things I think John wants us to see that this crowd wants, that they want Jesus to be for them.

[ 12 : 58 ] Firstly, a prophet king, and secondly, a military king. A prophet king. Again, we've seen the Moses imagery in verses three and four, the echoes of Exodus, as Jesus goes up a mountain, and it's Passover, and then Jesus performs this sign, providing bread for the people to eat.

Providing, in verse 11, abundantly, so that each would have had as much as they wanted. Again, if you were listening, as Ian read from Exodus earlier, the people have been led out of slavery in Egypt.

They're hungry. They grumble to Moses. Moses pleads with God. God sends them quail, but he also sends them manna, bread from heaven. And did you notice the way that it was described in those verses?

They eat each of them as much as they need. Do you see in verse 14 who the people think Jesus is then? Not God himself providing the manna, but the prophet who has come into the world.

They think Jesus is a new Moses, and that's what they want from him. A man who would provide for their physical hunger, their desires, by pleading to God on their behalf.

[ 14 : 11 ] A prophet king. And they also want him to be a military king. See back in verse 1, John gave us that Roman name for the Sea of Galilee, the Sea of Tiberias, because Galilee was part of the Roman Empire.

Tiberias was the Roman emperor, the ruler, the monarch, and so this lake has been named after him. And John wants his readers to be thinking in terms of worldly power, and specifically Roman power.

Why? Well, just notice two more details in the text. In verse 10, how many people are mentioned? It's actually quite hard to tell, isn't it, in verse 10, because it just says 5,000 men.

And maybe that's recorded that way because it was a patriarchal society, and it's just numbered by the heads of the household. And really, we're meant to think many more than that, 10, maybe 20,000 people. But I wonder if there's something more going on here.

See, a Roman legion, that's a unit of fighting men, numbered 5,000 men. I don't think that's an accident. In other words, this crowd is a very good number of men to be led by a military king.

[15:20] Indeed, in verse 15, Jesus knows that that is their intention, to make him a king by force. So who do they think Jesus is?

What do they desire that he would do for them? I think he's a military king to challenge the occupying Romans. Now, the people here, they're not doing anything actually all that bad, certainly nothing evil.

They've been waiting for the promised prophet king, the new Moses, for centuries. And they've been waiting for a military king to rescue them from Roman occupation. This is the king that they really want.

I hope we're still asking ourselves the question, who is Jesus? Who do we want him to be? What do we desire that he would do for us today?

This is who they think Jesus is. And this is who they really want him to be. But for John, and this is our second heading, this is the king that they really needed.

[16:28] See, Jesus was a prophet king. He came with a message from God. That's really what a prophet was. And he was a military king in the sense that he came to defeat God's enemies.

Not that enemy, not the Romans, but the final enemy, death. And the reason that he could do that is because of who he is. As we'll see, the king of the universe.

Notice the imagery in this second scene. We saw in verse 18, it's a stormy sea, and the wind is blowing. We've talked about it before, but the sea, especially the stormy sea, it's a sort of anti-God chaos image in the Bible.

Think back to Genesis chapter 1, the very first page of the Bible. Boom, creation happens. And the spirit of God, literally the wind of God, is hovering over the water. And from that moment on, you have all of these God and water moments where water is chaotic, but God, the king of the universe, is in control.

I think of them, Noah and the flood, the Exodus again, as they part the Red Sea, the story of Jonah, and Job and the Leviathan, the entry into the promised land through the river Jordan.

[17:46] Water in all of those scenes is supposed to depict chaos, and only the God of the universe can command it. Now look at verse 19 again.

Jesus is walking on the water. That is a massive statement from John. For only one who is fully God and fully man could do that.

Only God can command the waters in this way, and only man can walk on them in this way. Next week, we're going to hear a song from Kids Church, at least I think we are, entitled, Totally God, Totally Man.

And the chorus goes like this. To save the world, fulfill God's plan, he had to be totally God, totally man.

The people in this story, they wanted Jesus to be their prophet king, and their military king, but he was so much more than that. Totally man, yes, but totally God, the king of the universe.

[18:57] And he needed to be both. Here's why. Human beings, that's me and you, we were created by a loving God to exist in a loving relationship with him.

We walked away from that relationship, we rebelled against him, and there was and is a consequence for that. The loving relationship broken, and death is the end of that story.

A consequence then, that only a human could face. For God cannot die, and only a human could die. See, a price that only a human could pay.

And so Jesus had to be a human to pay that price. He also had to live the perfect life in relationship with the father that we haven't lived, because only then could he pay the price on our behalf.

For a man who had not lived the perfect life would have his own price to pay. Instead, Jesus, the innocent man, pays ours.

[ 19 : 58 ] He had to be totally man. But to do that, he also has to be totally God. For only by his own divine power could he bear the weight of the sins of the world on his shoulders.

And only by his own divine power could he rise again and secure eternal life with him. My rugby coach once said this.

He once said this. We'd been pretty badly beaten on the Saturday. We were doing some video analysis of the match on the Tuesday night. And he really wanted us to see the good that we'd done despite being beaten.

He said this. You are never as good as you think you are when you win. And you are never as bad as you think you are when you lose. That is gold. I immediately wrote that down.

Not because it's true about rugby, though it is, but because I knew that one day it would be a really helpful gospel illustration. It's true. It is true. And here's a Christian way of putting something very similar.

[ 21 : 01 ] Graham, our pastor, tweeted this earlier this week from Jerry Bridges. Your worst days are never so bad that you are beyond the reach of God's grace. And your best days are never so good that you are beyond the need of God's grace.

Aren't those wonderful truths? No wonder how bad you think you are this morning. You are not out of reach of God's grace. No matter how good you think you are this morning, you still desperately need God's grace.

And because he is totally God and totally man, he can offer us forgiveness and freedom and forever life with him.

This is the king that they really needed. But of course, the people in John chapter 6, they don't know it. And this sign is supposed to show them.

We'll do more of this next week and what a time it will be to do it on Easter Sunday. But have a look down in verse 20. Jesus is dropping breadcrumbs for his disciples here.

[ 22 : 08 ] He says, it is I, maybe more helpfully and literally, I am. This is precisely the name that God reveals to Moses on the mountain.

Jesus is saying to his disciples, it's me. Don't you get it? The I am, the king of the universe. What does that have to do with the multiplication of bread?

Well, have a look at verse 35. Again, more of this next week, but verse 35, I am the bread of life.

Jesus isn't just providing bread for them to satisfy their physical hunger.

It is to point to himself and who he really is. And ultimately, this is what is really on offer. Him. Back in verse 20, it is I, I am.

Do not be afraid. He's saying the king of the universe is with you. You have him. You don't need to be frightened. I am is here. This is the king they really needed.

[ 23 : 13 ] The king who would fulfill their greatest need to pay the price for their sin, not just so that they might be forgiven, not just so that they might get a free pass to eternity, but why?

So that they might get him. And here we really get to the point. Who is Jesus? And what do we desire that he would do for us today?

Right? It's not just who do we think Jesus is. That is important. But who do we want Jesus to be?

There are those, maybe this is you, who really want Jesus to just be a prophet.

That's what Islam would say about Jesus. But actually, I think quite a lot of my friends think about something similar. Like he was probably a good guy, a religious sort of man, taught some good moral stuff, but they just rip God right out of it.

Basically just a prophet, a teacher. Maybe that's you. There are those, maybe this is you, who primarily want Jesus to be the social justice guy. This is where lots of modern liberal Bible scholars would go with this.

[ 24 : 22 ] This isn't a miracle at all. Again, they just rip God right out of it. Instead, Jesus got the boy to share and then others just copied him. And so those who had plenty were giving to those who had none.

And everyone is sharing. It's social justice, Jesus. Maybe that's you. There are those, maybe this is you, who really want Jesus to be like a vending machine of blessings, giving us all that we want, answering all of our prayers, often with a real focus on stuff in this life.

Might be silly, practical stuff like, please Jesus, help me find the remote that I've lost. It might be deeper stuff like healing and life transformation and peace or help passing your exams or whatever else it is.

Jesus giving us all we want today. It's vending machine Jesus. Maybe that's you. There are those, and I guess this is more of us, maybe most of us in the room, who really want Jesus to be the get out of hell free card.

The get to heaven card. The get resurrection life card. The grace filled, forgiveness giving Jesus. We want Jesus to be the one who died in our place so that we can live forever.

[ 25 : 42 ] Maybe that's you. Now hear me loud and clear. Jesus is all of those things. He is a prophet.

His teachings are incredible, transformational. Our whole society is really built on them. He is the ultimate social justice guy. He cares about the downs and the outs more than anyone in history, those in desperate need.

He does answer prayer and give us all that we need. And of course, he offers us eternal life. This is Jesus. But the irony here, because all of that is from this angle, what can he do for me?

None of that is about him. It's about us and what we can get from him. They're wonderful things, wonderful promises, but the very best thing on offer here is him.

Dying on the cross, he gives us himself. But we're about to share in the bread and the cup together. We often call that communion, right? And there was a time when that language, communion with Jesus, didn't just mean eating bread and drinking wine.

[ 27 : 01 ] The Puritan John Owen wrote an amazing book, Communion with God. And there, he wasn't writing about this sacrament of bread and wine at all. He was writing about relationship.

It was just common language for relationship. In that sacrament, God is communicating something about himself to us as we come to the bread and the cup together.

But I think we need to know this morning that the primary way that this communicative relationship between creator and creature happens as he reveals himself to us by his word.

In Deuteronomy chapter 8, reflecting on the bread in the wilderness exodus thing that we've been looking at, Moses says this, man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.

If you've been here as we've gone through John's gospel, maybe you remember how John uses that language in John chapter 1. The word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.

[ 28 : 08 ] In other words, Jesus is the word. This book that we call the Bible is God's word to us and that his word to us is Jesus. It's all about him.

Every passage of scripture is about Jesus. And so if you want to invest in your relationship with him, you've got to start here. Don't run away from your Bible into the woods or into the mountains and expect to find Jesus there apart from his word.

Don't hear me wrongly as I say that. There is nothing wrong with seeking God and his creation or through art or creativity or music or good food or whatever else. We're all wired differently. But would you let the Bible be the place where you go to commune with him?

For man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.

For what it's worth, for me, that looks very often like getting up a little earlier than I'd like to.

I don't always do this, but I try to. Making an unnecessarily expensive cup of coffee, sitting in my favorite chair, and just reading for 10 or 15 minutes.

[ 29 : 20 ] Some of you are like, are you kidding? I've got two kids under five. That is not happening. And that's fine. How you can access God's word might be very different from that. But make a habit of engaging with God's word.

Turn it into a habit. It becomes easier and easier like any habit the more that you do it. We began with this story of Adolf Beck and Wilhelm Meyer where the mistaken identity storyline had real consequences.

And that's true. Who Jesus is, his identity, is just so important. In fact, it's of first importance because eternal life is on the line.

But more than that, it's not only who Jesus is, but what we would desire he would do for us. It was so encouraging to hear Bogdan's testimony as he was baptized last Sunday.

He said lots of encouraging things. But what struck me most was this line. As he explained the hardships that he'd faced and his time in hospital and how through all of that he had turned up to

church and prayed, but he really knew that he was seeking Jesus for what Jesus could do for him. [ 30 : 31 ] And then this line, as he realized how empty that sort of religion was, he turned to Jesus and in Bogdan's own words, this might sound crazy, but it was the start of a relationship.

Maybe that does sound crazy to you, but that's my story too. If you're a Christian in the room today, I guess it's yours. If I'm really honest, Jesus was just another way for me to get the things that I wanted in life.

Not necessarily bad things and not necessarily material things, but things for me. Peace and community and approval and forgiveness, even eternal life. Good things, but the offer is so much more than those things.

The offer here, what Jesus gives us, what he is offering, is himself. And he's the king that we really need this morning.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you so much for this wonderful passage of your words.

[ 31 : 37 ] We thank you that as we have spent time in it together, you have been at work by your Holy Spirit pointing us to your son. Lord, we thank you so much for him.

We thank you as we come up to Easter and celebrate all that he did in dying and rising again. Lord, we thank you that we can have a relationship with him because of what he has done.

Lord, as we think of all the wonderful things that he does for us and all the wonderful things that he promises to do for us in this life and the next, would you help us to keep our eyes fixed on him who is the prize and help us to value Jesus above all things in this life and above all other things that you might give us.

Help us by your Holy Spirit to desire him for we pray in his precious name. Amen.