

WHO IS JESUS CHRIST?

CLASS ONE - SUPERSTAR

1. Introduction

[Play Music] I thought some music might help set the mood for our class. For the next several weeks, we will look at Who is Jesus Christ? I don't remember if I have ever been in a Bible class before specifically with that topic. We will not simply go through one or more of the gospels, but will look at passages across the whole Bible to find things about Jesus. My goals for this class are: (1) maybe stretch our minds a little bit by trying to look deeper - I plan to occasionally dip into some scholarship - some of the modern controversies about Jesus to help us have a deeper understanding and able to resist what the world might say; (2) to make Jesus more real for us - I started reading through the gospels a few weeks ago and it is sometimes hard for me to see Jesus as real; I read his words and apply them to my life, but I forget he was a real man who really said and did these things in real situations; I will bring in some video clips to help make the stories about Jesus alive for us; and (3) I hope this class will inspire us to renew our love and devotion to Jesus - to help revive us spiritually so that each of us individually, and the church as a whole, can see Jesus at work in our lives in new and powerful ways. Does that sound good to you? Turn to Luke 8.

II. Amazing

One thing I want to do is make the class as interactive as possible. [Come down from stage]. I thought I would try teaching from down here; can everyone see me ok? In Luke 8, starting at v.22, we have a story we are very familiar with, but I want us to get beyond the familiarity and try to imagine being there. Maybe think about how you would film this scene in a movie. What was it really like? :22-24a. A squall. A sudden, furious storm. In a small boat. Anyone here had that experience? What's it like? [COMMENTS] I have a sailboat on Lake Lanier. I try to avoid difficult weather, but I have been in my boat when the wind was blowing so strong and the waves so high that you feel like the boat is going to turn over at any moment. You want to try to hold the boat so it won't tip, but you have no control. It is no fun at all. A couple of years ago, Barbara and I with an instructor learning how to sail coastal waters near Pensacola. I was at the helm and Barb was making lunch. We came upon a barge dredging in the middle of the Intercoastal Waterway and didn't know how to go around it. The instructor told me to turn the boat around in the channel and he went below to raise the barge on the radio. What we didn't know was a storm was coming up right behind us. As soon as I turned the boat, the storm hit and visibility went to zero. I couldn't see the channel markers and the boat stopped moving forward because of the wind. I had to throttle up to make headway and simply hope I was still heading down the middle of the channel and wouldn't run aground. Fortunately, the intensity didn't last long and it was soon over.

Here in Luke 8, the disciples were experienced fishermen who knew the lake. This must have been one serious storm. Loud. Violent. No visibility from the rain and

spray off the water. The boat tossed in the waves; water coming in over the sides. Feeling like “We are going to drown!” :24b-25. They wake Jesus in a panic. Jesus puts a stop to it. He flips a switch and turns off the storm. Just like that. All was calm. The waters like glass. How would you feel if you were there and Jesus did that?

[COMMENTS] Look at how the disciples reacted? They were completely freaked out! They were amazed. I noticed recently the word “amazed” or “astonished” appears many times in the gospels. That’s the effect Jesus often had on people. Not only the miracles, but sometimes merely the things he said amazed people. Question to think about: Is Jesus amazing to you? Does he astonish you? Or do you take Jesus for granted. Has it been so long since he did something incredible in our lives that we have forgotten? Should I play the Superstar music again to wake us up? [PLAY MUSIC?]

Look at the question the disciples ask. Who is this? What kind of man could do this? That’s the question I want to focus on in this class. Who is Jesus Christ? As disciples, we have put our faith in him and have convictions about him, but I want to re-examine Jesus, look back to the 1st Century and get a feel for how people felt when they first encountered him. What was he like? What effect did he have on them? 3rd Quest.

III. Superstar or Prophet

Turn to Mat 16. The 1973 Broadway show by Andrew Lloyd Weber & Tim Rice said Jesus Christ was a Superstar. Let’s talk about superstars. Who are superstars in our world today? Who gets all the press and attention? [Sport stars (LeBraun/A-Rod/LT). TV stars (Oprah). Movie stars (Denzel/Tom Hanks/Julia Roberts). Rock stars (rapper?). Politicians (Obama).] Celebrities: our culture is obsessed with them. Next question: Will anyone be talking about these people 50 years from now? 100 years from now? How about 2,008 years from now? Jesus is a superstar and more. Jesus is someone whose impact on the world continues unabated 2,000 years after he lived. And not just remembered in history books, but still affecting peoples’ daily lives. Someone far beyond a modern superstar. Who was this Jesus who still has impact 2000 years later?

:13-14 Jesus asks his disciples who do people say his is. What if Jesus asked us that question today. Who do people today say Jesus is? What does the ordinary man on the street think about Jesus today? Good moral teacher like Buddha or Confucius. 1st Century rabbi who founded Christianity and people later embellished the story. Someone who taught love and peace and toleration and was never judgmental or self righteous; helped the poor and downtrodden; a nice liberal democrat. Lots of weird stuff out there. Dan Brown: husband of Mary Magdalene who fathered the Merovingian dynasty of medieval France – a secret hidden by the Catholic Church for centuries. James Cameron TV special: (The Jesus Family Tomb) claimed he was buried in a tomb found recently in Israel with other members of his family. James Tabor – a real scholar - illegitimate son of Mary and a Roman soldier named Pantera. If you ask about Jesus, I find people often say “I think Jesus . . . and then they will fill in their own opinion about what religion should be. Sometimes in reaction to a negative experience they have had. Jesus - the ultimate rebuke to whoever has done you wrong.

Now look back at the scripture. What did people in Jesus time say? Who did to the ordinary man on the street in 30AD compare Jesus to? JB, Elijah, Jeremiah or one of the prophets. Throughout the gospels, the crowds frequently refer to Jesus as a prophet. That was their frame of reference for what Jesus was like. What kind of men were the prophets? Who are they comparing Jesus to? [COMMENTS] Men of God. Men who brought a message from God. And not a wimpy message; a powerful message usually calling people to repent or face God's judgment. Men of conviction and controversy. Men who often challenged the authorities. I looked up "shrinking violet" in the dictionary; I did NOT find a picture of Elijah or Jeremiah. What did these men do? Elijah stood up to the prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel. Taunted them. Had them all killed when they failed. Jeremiah preached judgment on Israel when no one wanted to listen. Told the nation that the Babylonians were coming. Got into serious trouble with the political and religious leaders of his day. Was thrown down a well.

What about JB? What was he like? Hold your place in Mat 16, and turn to Luke 3. In Luke 3, starting in verse 1, Luke tells us about the ministry of JB. His role is to prepare the hearts of the people for Jesus. Starting in v.7, we get a flavor of John's preaching. :7-9. Wow! Pretty bold and in your face stuff. Yet Jesus preached a very similar message in Mat 23, didn't he? He also called the Pharisees "snakes and brood of vipers." Jesus was countercultural, that's true, but not exactly like a hippie of the 1960s. Question: Is this your image of Jesus? Do you see him as a powerful preacher of God's word who challenged people – including powerful people in authority – and called them to repentance? Is that how you think of him? He might say some strong things. Rebuke some people. Stir things up. That was his reputation. I don't think Jesus spoke calmly all the time like he is sometimes portrayed in movies. I think he got intense. I think he got in people's faces. I think he was loud sometimes – he spoke to large crowds and didn't have a microphone like me. He stirred people up with strong messages from God. That's the kind of person people compared him to. Is that how you see Jesus? Jesus of course also had a compassionate side and we'll look at that too in this class, but I think we have been neglecting the stronger aspects of Jesus. I might do a whole class on "Was Jesus Nice?" Let's turn back to Mat 16.

Jesus asked the disciples another question and the exchange is very familiar to us. :15-17 Peter makes the ringing statement Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God. Jesus confirms this answer and says it was revealed to Peter by God Himself. These are familiar words to us and we all believe they are true. But have we thought much lately about what these words really mean? Christ is the Greek word for the Messiah, the promised Deliverer of Israel from the OT. Next week, we will look at prophecies about the Messiah in the OT. Peter also said Jesus was the Son of God. The fancy name for that is the Incarnation. The Word became flesh. We will also have a class on that. The Christ, the Son of the Living God. Let's close with a prayer.