

This Is Jesus II: Dawn of a New Day
A New Kind of Resolution
January 7, 2018

PRE-SERVICE VIDEO

Prelude – Fierce

Feature Song – “The Middle of Starting Over”

Announcements – Shannon

Worship Songs – Fierce / Great God Who Saves

Good morning everyone.

<Prayer – God isn’t a distant Force who loves and saves “generically” but someone who actually did something: Jesus of Nazareth. HS Use our time to understand Him better.>

As Shannon said, today we’re moving into the second part of our mega-series *This Is Jesus ...* and I’ve given this particular set of messages the subtitle *Dawn of a New Day ...* because that’s exactly what was happening as Jesus of Nazareth traveled

throughout the villages of first-century Palestine

..

- Preaching and teaching
- Healing the diseased
- Embracing the outcast
- Casting out demons
- And even raising the dead.

God was doing something new in that place and time; something that, centuries before through the Hebrew prophets, He had *promised* would happen. It was the dawn of a new day.

And that's what we're going to be talking about over the next four Sundays.

Why This Matters

Of course, knowing that there are at least a few here today (or watching online) who are new to us and maybe even to church in general, I think

it's would be good first to explain *why this even matters* to people like you and me who are *not* living in the first century and who are *not* Jewish (at least, not the great majority of us).

Why should we care about some guy who lived such a long time ago in a land, far, far away?

I think there are several reasons.

For those who are Christians, the most basic one is that ...

1. Jesus of Nazareth is why we're here today.

The way Christians relate to God isn't some spiritual pathway dreamed up by ancient spiritual sages. We're not following a man-made program of self-help or self-improvement.

Our faith – our relationship with God – is inseparable from the historical person who went by the name Yeshua bar Yosef (Jesus son of

Joseph). Without Him and what He said and what He did, there is no such thing as “Christianity.” As the writer of one of the letters in the New Testament puts it: “He is the pioneer and perfecter of our faith and we look to Him.”ⁱ

I think another reason why anyone might care about the words and deeds of Jesus of Nazareth – and this one is broader; it applies even if you’re not a Christian ... is that:

2. Jesus is without a doubt *the* single most influential person in all of human history.

It’s not even close.

For example ... every time you look at a calendar; every time you sign and date a document, you’re bearing witness to the fact that the incredibly brief life of Jesus has somehow become the dividing line of human history.ⁱⁱ

Another example ... think of those fearsome leaders of the first-century world in which Jesus lived –

men like Nero and Caesar. 2,000 years later, you almost never hear their names unless you're talking about pizza, or a casino or maybe a dog.

Not so with Jesus. 2,000 years later, as pastor and author John Ortberg writes, "It is in Jesus' name that desperate people pray, grateful people worship, and angry people swear. From christenings to weddings to hospital rooms to funerals, it is in Jesus' name that people are hatched, matched, patched and dispatched."

But the influence of Jesus goes far beyond just His name. He has impacted almost every area of our daily lives – law, government, economics, fine arts, science, education, healthcare and family.

Check it out.

Video Clip 01 – The Influence of Jesus (4.6 min)

(Begin) Ortberg: "Children would be thought of differently."

(End) Orberg: "... an act of moral beauty."

Those are just a few of the areas in which Jesus (and His movement – Christianity and the Church) has shaped the world you and I live in.

And given *that* level of influence on our everyday lives (even if we don't recognize it), it's probably worth knowing at least *something* about what He was up to even if you're not a Christian.

And by the way, I understand that for those who are not Christians, it can be difficult to give serious consideration to Jesus because we've been told ...

- That science disproves the existence of God
- That history disproves the existence of Jesus (the stories about Him were made up much later)
- That the idea of God being three-in-one and one of those three becoming human is nonsensical.

... which is why, in December, the first part of this mega-series dealt with all three of those objections and why it is rational and reasonable to *doubt those doubts*. And if any of those are an issue for you and you weren't here last month, you can watch, listen to or read those messages on our app or website and you can also access the audio via our podcast.

But there's one more reason why someone might care about the words and deeds of Jesus of Nazareth. This one also applies not just to those who are Christians but to everyone.

3. Jesus can make a real difference in our lives, *personally*.

All that influence that Jesus has had on the world at large can be personalized. It can impact you and me. It can change us.

Or to put it in terms of this series, that new day that dawned so many years ago still continues to *this day*. And you can be a part of it.

In fact, as we'll see shortly, Jesus actually invites us to be part of it.

So, those are a few of the reasons why what happened in those first-century Hebrew villages matters and why we're taking such a deep dive on the subject of the man Yeshua bar Joseph ... Jesus son of Joseph ... Jesus of Nazareth.

By the way, you may have noticed that I almost never refer to Him as "Jesus Christ." I do that (or I *don't* do that) because I think it's confusing for some people.

- "Christ" is not Jesus' last name.
- He's not "Jesus H. Christ" (to quote the vernacular).
- "Christ" *is a title* not a name.

Our English word “Christ” comes from the Greek word *Christos* which simply means “anointed” or “chosen for a special purpose” which is why the first Christians applied it to Jesus.

They believed ...

- That He was more than just a man
- That He had been sent from God (and was God)
- That He was the Christ: the Chosen One, the Anointed One who would be the long-awaited Messiah of Israel.

... which brings us back – almost – to that “new thing” that was happening; that “new day” which was dawning in first-century Palestine.

An Intellectual Challenge

I say “almost” because before we get to that I need

to give you a bit of an intellectual challenge, especially if you've been a Christian or in church for a long time ... and not just for this particular message but for at least the three messages that will follow.

The intellectual challenge is this: Try not to begin with the end in mind.

One of the problems of modern Christianity (and therefore Christians) is that we already know “the answers” about Jesus so well that we tend to overlook the questions!

For instance, a lot of believers-in-Jesus rarely consider what it means ...

- That Jesus was *Jewish*.
- That his initial followers were Jewish.
- That almost all of the first Christians were Jewish.
- That Jesus did most of his ministry in a 10-mile wide area in the northern part of *Israel*.

- That Jesus believed what He was doing was significant in the *national life* of Israel.

Instead, because we have been so greatly shaped by The Reformation (of Martin Luther and John Calvin) and the epic divorce from Catholicism over how the death and resurrection of Jesus saves us from our sins, we reflexively jump to *that* whenever we think about Jesus.

“Jesus? Oh, He’s our savior who died on a cross for our sins and rose again on the third day following. And by believing in Him and trusting in him, all of our sins – past, present and future – are forgiven. The slate is wiped clean forever and we are made righteous in the sight of God.”

And just to be clear: that’s all true and right and good. I’ve preached it regularly from this stage.

But that’s the end of the story. *Jesus was much more than just the sacrificial lamb who takes away the sins*

of the world. There's a lot more going on *before* and in addition to that part.

So, try *not* to begin with the end in mind. Instead, try to put aside your preconceived notions of Jesus (which may turn out to be right). Try to pretend that you are a Jewish man or woman living in one of those first-century villages where Jesus came and went.

Of course, since we've never done that before, obviously we'll need to explain from time to time what that looks like.

The New Day

And let's begin by taking a short trip (via video) to a recently discovered first-century Jewish synagogue in the region where Jesus did most of his ministry. What we're about to see is courtesy of Pastor Andrew Gardener of *The Vine Church* of Hong Kong.ⁱⁱⁱ

Let's take a look.

Video Clip 02 – Magdala Synagogue (2.4 min)

(Begin) Andrew: “This around me now is the Magdala Synagogue.”

(End) Andrew: “... begins to teach his people what God was about to do in and through Him.”

And that's where we're going to begin ... that day when Jesus stood up in his local synagogue in Nazareth.

At this point, Jesus is about 30 years old. According to Luke's account, He's been baptized in the Jordan River by his cousin John, tested in the desert by Satan and He's now returned to the region of Galilee where he's from. He's just begun teaching in some of the area synagogues and He has performed at least a few miracles.

Luke writes in chapter 4 verse 16 that ...

He went to Nazareth, where he had

been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written:

“The Spirit of the Lord is on me because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, and to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.” [Isaiah 61:1,2]

Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him.

He began by saying to them, “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”

Luke 4:14-21 (NIV)

Now, to you and me (who are not first-century Jews), that sounds rather anti-climactic.

“Ok, so Jesus is saying He’s going to go around and do some preaching ... do some healing ... cast out some demons ... tell everybody how much God loves them. Eh, OK.”

But that’s not what those gathered at synagogue that day heard Him saying. What they heard Jesus saying was “Today is the dawn of a new day. Today, God is doing something new in Israel. And I am at the center of it.”

... which would have been astounding to them because that passage from Isaiah is associated with something the Jews called “The Year of Jubilee” – a time every 49 years when all debts were forgiven, all slaves were set free and land returned to the original owner.^{iv}

Sounds simple enough but during the previous four centuries, that particular concept – and this particular passage from Isaiah – had taken on a much more dramatic meaning. For reasons we

don't have time to get into this morning, it began to be understood as:

- A promise of release and forgiveness not just for individuals but for the entire *nation*.^v
- A promise to set free not just individual prisoners but all of Israel;
- A promise to give sight not just to individuals but to the entire nation.

And how would this happen? The prophets said that *God Himself would become King over Israel*.

In fact, the Hebrew prophet Daniel was very specific about it. He prophesied that it would be 490 years from the time Israel returned from exile in Babylon to the time when that would happen, i.e. the year of the Lord's favor.

... which is why at exactly the time when Jesus was growing up (almost five centuries later), there was a movement in Israel that said that it was time for God alone to be king^{vi} ; time for the long-

awaited deliverance from pagan domination to occur.^{vii}

So, by choosing this text to read, and claiming it was being fulfilled that very day, Jesus was drawing on a wealth of prophetic imagery to declare that *all of history* was coming to its climax in Him. Wow!

It's interesting that one of the criticisms often leveled at Christianity is that "Jesus never actually claimed to be God."

Technically that's true. There is no place in the written story of Jesus where He directly says, "I am God in the flesh."

But He didn't have to.

From incidents like this one in his hometown, people of His day understood what He was claiming because they understood the prophecies and they were looking forward to their fulfillment

– to the day when God would return to Israel as its King.

... which is also why Jesus went around saying things like ...

“The time has come. The kingdom of God has come near!” Mark 1:15a (NIV)

How did He know that? Why would He say such a thing?

Because He believed Himself to be the King of that Kingdom!

So What?

Now, there’s a very interesting end to this story (actually, it’s pretty shocking) and we’re going to get to it in just a bit but, first, I want to go back to what Shannon mentioned earlier: a new kind of New Year’s resolution; one that will over time, transform our entire life for the better.

And to explain what I mean by that we're going to jump forward in the timeline. Jesus has moved on from Nazareth. He's traveling around the region, doing more preaching and teaching, more healings. And His recognition is increasing. He's starting to attract big crowds wherever He goes.

And occasionally, he says to those crowds and to specific individuals in those crowds: "Follow me."

In some cases He means that literally.

- Peter, James and John leave their fishing business and start going around with Him.
- Matthew, a traitorous tax collector, leaves his tax collecting business and joins up with them.
- Women like Mary Magdalene from whom he had cast out seven demons and Joanna, the wife of King Herod's business manager,

along with many other women who supported Jesus from their own financial resources begin to follow Him.^{viii}

Others, who can't follow him *literally*, begin to follow him at a distance. They listen to his teaching, they observe his habits and they begin to apply it to their own lives.

And Jesus makes all of them a promise.

He says:

“Anyone who listens to my teaching and follows it is wise, like a person who builds a house on solid rock. Though the rain comes in torrents and the floodwaters rise and the winds beat against that house, it won't collapse because it is built on bedrock.” Matthew 7:24-25 (NIV)

He says:

“The thief comes only to steal and kill

*and destroy; I have come that [you]
may have life, and have it to the full.”*
John 10:10 (NIV)

He says:

*“Come to me, all you who are weary
and burdened, and I will give you
rest. Take my yoke upon you and
learn from me, for I am gentle and
humble in heart, and you will find
rest for your souls.”* Matthew
11:28-29 (NIV)

Add it all up and what Jesus is saying is “A new day is dawning. The King and Kingdom you’ve been waiting for all your life is near. So follow Me. Do what I say and do what I do. Try it out for yourself and you will find rest, abundance, and strength like you’ve never had.”

Quite a *proclamation*; quite an *invitation*; quite a *promise*.

And here’s what I want to say to you this morning. Here’s the “so what” of all of this.

The same proclamation, invitation and promise Jesus made to them, He makes to you.

“A new day is dawning. The leader you’ve been waiting for all your life is here. Follow Me,” Jesus says to you, “and you will find rest, abundance and strength like never before.”

So if you’ve thought about making a New Year’s resolution (or if you haven’t) I have suggestion for a new and different kind of resolution.

Here it is: Make 2018 “The Year of Following Jesus.”

If you have other goals, still do those – lose weight, get your finances under control, work on your relationships – all of that is great. But make a commitment to find out who Jesus really is and what He says (hopefully what we’re going to do on Sundays will help with that) and then, give it a shot. Put it into practice.

And by the way, you don't need to be a Christian to do that. You don't need to believe that Jesus is God or that He rose from the dead to do that.

After all, the first followers of Jesus didn't believe at the beginning that He was God. And they didn't believe in the resurrection because He hadn't yet been crucified!

They just followed Him and let their experience of what He said and did lead them to their own conclusions. And you can do that same thing, too.

The Rest of the Story

Of course, before you make that commitment, I should probably tell you the rest of the story of what happened that day at the synagogue in Nazareth.

After Jesus proclaimed that Isaiah's prophecy of God becoming King was being fulfilled, Luke tells

us that ...

All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his lips. “Isn’t this Joseph’s son?” they asked.

There’s a lot of hometown pride at that moment. This prophecy, this ancient longing of deliverance somehow has *something* to do with one of “their boys” which, of course, can only reflect positively on them!

But Jesus says:

“Surely you will quote this proverb to me: ‘Physician, heal yourself!’ And you will tell me, ‘Do here in your hometown what we have heard that you did in Capernaum.’”

“Truly I tell you,” he continued, “no prophet is accepted in his hometown.”

Then he says something very odd.

I assure you that there were many widows in Israel in Elijah's time, when the sky was shut for three and a half years and there was a severe famine throughout the land. Yet Elijah was not sent to any of them, but to a widow in Zarephath in the region of Sidon. [which means she was a Gentile]

And there were many in Israel with leprosy in the time of Elisha the prophet, yet not one of them was cleansed—only Naaman the Syrian.” [He was the commander of the invading army – and also a Gentile!]

Luke writes that, at this point ...

All the people in the synagogue were furious when they heard this.

They got up, drove him out of the town, and took him to the brow of the hill on which the town was built, in order to throw him off the cliff. But

*he walked right through the crowd
and went on his way. Luke 4:22-30
(NIV)*

Now, for a little bit more insight on this scene, let's check out one more clip from Andrew Gardener.

Video Clip 03 – Jesus Rejected (3.0 min)

(Begin) Andrew: “Nazareth is only about 500 people.”

(End) Andrew: “... so that my life might be fully lived for His.”

The King and Kingdom was coming but it might not be exactly what they – and we – expect it to be. There were going to be some twists and turns and surprises and even shocks when God became King.

And to make room for Him and those surprises about the Kingdom they – and we – needed to adjust ...

... which is why not only did Jesus say ...

“The time has come,” he said. “The kingdom of God has come near.”

He also said ...

“Repent and believe the good news!”
Mark 1:15a (NIV)

Repent means change your mind. Change what you think because you don't have the whole picture and the picture you do have probably needs to be corrected in places. Be ready to give up old paradigms and embrace new ones.

And that's what we'll talk about over the next few weeks.

Let's pray.

<PRAYER: The best year of your life; dawn of a new day>

Feature Song – Best Day of My Life / Offering

CLOSING COMMENTS

1. Small groups

Endnotes

ⁱ Hebrews 12:2

ⁱⁱ From John Ortberg's small group study of his book, *Who Is This Man?* ... which can be seen at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kkyWFMfBagA>

ⁱⁱⁱ *The Story of Jesus*, Vine Church of Hong Kong @ <http://soj.thevine.org.hk/>

^{iv} <https://readingacts.com/2014/09/28/jesus-in-nazareth-announcing-the-end-of-the-exile/>

^v See N.T. Wright, *Simply Jesus*, pg 75

^{vi} *Simply Jesus* pg 35

^{vii} <http://ntwrightpage.com/2016/07/12/imagining-the-kingdom/>

^{viii} Luke 8:2-3