

Week 43 – Tough Questions – If Jesus was so great, why such an obscure beginning?

Hey, Tim Perry here, pastor of Spiritual Discovery at Christ Community Church resuming my Tough Questions blog here as a part of Project 4:4

We're now into Week 43 and if you've been tracking through our Project 4:4 chronological Bible, you'll note that we're no longer in the Old Testament – we're now in the New Testament – so my videos for a few weeks here are going to center on questions related to Jesus.

Now speaking of Jesus, I wanted to let you know why I've taken a couple of weeks off from the videos. I've been launching the Jesus class here at Christ Community Church so I've been knee deep in wading through Mark's Gospel about Jesus in the format of what we call a manuscript study. It's pretty cool. Each week, I'm getting the class together and we're studying through Mark's gospel in an unformatted manuscript where we can write all over it, jot our questions out in the margin, make observations and sort out what is Mark trying to tell us about the person, the life and the teachings of Jesus?

So the question I want to deal with this week has to do with the origins of Jesus' public ministry. It has to do with how could such a phenomenally great character have such a humble beginning? In short, if Jesus is God – why does he have such a humble beginning to his ministry? Wouldn't he have a more opulent lifestyle? Wouldn't he use power in more self-serving ways? Why is that?

Well, I want to take you into the world of "manuscript" study - if I could – by showing you what it would look like if we just dove right into the text and answered some of these questions from the pages of what Mark, the gospel writer, gives us.

So let's go to our manuscript here for a minute and then I'll wrap up with a video at the end trying to tie together my answer little bit better there. Let's jump into the text for a few minutes. Check this out.

Well, this is what a manuscript looks like. I want to start reading Mark's Gospel and I've got a few comments that relate to our question about why Jesus would have such a humble beginning.

Mark 1:1

The beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God. (That's really the title for Mark's entire volume right there.)

Mark 1:2-7

It is written in Isaiah the prophet (and what follows in the text is a quote not only from Isaiah, but also Malachi). ***I will send my messenger ahead of you who will prepare your way – a voice of one calling in the desert, "Prepare the way for the***

Lord, make straight paths for him.” And so John came, baptizing in the desert region and preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. So here you have Jesus being introduced not in the capital city of Jerusalem, not in the temple, but out in the desert – he’s being introduced that way as a fulfillment of scripture. He is the Messiah people have been waiting for and so his entry onto the stage of human history is going to fit those Biblical predictions of him out of the Old Testament. It’s not going to fit human expectations for some great religious leader.

Well, look at the reaction to John’s preaching: *The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River. John wore clothing made of camel’s hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. And this was his message. “After me will come one more powerful than I, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie.*

So in answering our question about why someone so great would have such a humble beginning has to come from these lines right here in Mark’s Gospel. Jesus arrived this way as a fulfillment of scripture. If we look at the geography of the situation, it shows us another interesting set of details. Let’s look at that for a second.

So the starting point of Jesus’ earthly ministry makes a lot of sense when you look at the scriptures that his ministry was going to fulfill. He fits hand and glove with the kind of prophecies that we just pointed out in Mark’s Gospel.

Now look for a minute at a map and consider where Jesus began his early ministry. As you look at a map, it is true that Jesus was born not too far from Jerusalem in Bethlehem, but he wasn’t born in the capital city. He wasn’t born in the palace. He wasn’t born anywhere near the temple. In Jesus’ growing up years and the place from which he launches his public ministry is way to the north. The other body of water way up there is the Sea of Galilee and Jesus at the time that he begins his public ministry – he’s a fisherman in a city called Capernaum up on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee. He had also spent some time in Nazareth, which is probably the town he spent most of his years growing up in.

So if you just look at a map, Jesus doesn’t come out of the kind of a place that geographically makes sense for the Son of God to be born. And again, it starts to prove our point and that’s this – even though Jesus is the Son of God, he operates from a base of a power and authority that is self-contained. He is his own power source. He doesn’t have to derive his power from where he lives or from the family that he came from. He is who he claims to be. The Son of God using the power of God to announce the kingdom of God everywhere and anywhere he is. And as people listen to him and respond to his message, the Kingdom of God takes shape. So how could such a wonderfully powerful individual arise from such humble beginnings? Well, it’s because he didn’t need all of those other things that we ordinarily associate with greatness.

So if Jesus is who he said he is, he would have his own authority base and power base that went with him everywhere he went. He wouldn't have to derive his authority from some other source, he wouldn't have to live in the capital city of Jerusalem, he wouldn't have to live in the palace of Herod and he wouldn't have to teach in the temple. Everywhere he went he would carry around the authority of being God's authoritative son, God's prophet and God's ultimate spokesperson to people. He wouldn't have to quote anybody else, he would just be able to walk into a situation and take charge of it. And that's exactly what we'll see in the Gospels as they unfold.

So why did Jesus have such a humble beginning? He really didn't need any other kind of beginning. He carried everything that was essential about who he was everywhere he went and brought it into every conversation, every interaction, every act of compassion that we see on the fingertips of Jesus when he meets humanity in all of its dire moral and physical needs, Jesus is representing who God is in the use of his power. And it's surprising – it's a non self-serving power and it's a power that points to the reality of another kingdom that Jesus is the Lord of.

If you would like to check out the Jesus class, just go to cccomaha.org and hit on our "On line campus" and starting Tuesday afternoons, you will start to see a screen that looks like this and you can click on the link there to download the materials there that you would need to sit in on the Jesus class. You'd be welcome to join us.

If you've got any other thoughts that you'd just like to leave right here on the blog, hit on the "comment" link and we'll chat. Thanks for being with me.