

WHY...
JESUS?

CHAPTER 1

Why: Finding answers to 5 of life's big questions

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Why? Finding answers to 5 of life's big questions.
Revised Edition
Chapter 1, Why Jesus?

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WHY... JESUS?

This booklet contains chapter 1 of
“Why? Finding answers to 5 of life’s big questions”

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Chapter 1

Why Jesus?

Imagine you're walking down a street, looking in the windows of the shops that line the footpath. A sign hanging over one door catches your attention, "The God Shop." Stepping inside, you see shelves and display cabinets filled with every kind of object and trinket, and models of every human activity; the "gods" from which people come to choose. Signs posted on the walls describe the offerings in categories like "Feel Good," "Attractive but Silent," "Modern," and "Traditional." Other shoppers are examining the various gods on offer, reading the descriptions accompanying each one and trying a few on for size. You watch as customers make their choice and head back out to the street, happy to have found a god to their liking. You look around, wondering which god is best for you and not wanting to make a poor choice. Where to begin?

Does that sound appealing? Lots of people think so! You could pick a friendly god, or a happy god, or a traditional god. You could even have one made to order – a god made in your own image! In fact, when the God Shop store keeper comes up to you to ask if you need any help, you could point to a selfie

on your phone screen, and say, “I’d like a god who looks just like this, please!”

Lots of people have different ideas about what God is like. Some people want a god that makes them feel good. Some people want a god that will give them an easy life. Some people want a god that offers some kind of meaning or hope.

The danger we face though if we go “shopping” for a god is that we’ll end up with a god made in our own image. We’ll end up with a god who looks just like us!

Which definitely has its appeal! And when life is going well, it could be great to have a god who’s just like me.

We’d get on well.

God would never tell me off.

God’s standard would be my standard.

God would want me to have the things that I want to have.

Life would be sweet!

Until things get a little rough.

When life gets difficult.

When things are rushing along out of my control.

When life is like that, I don’t want another me there! The second me would be just as useless as the first me when someone I love is dying, or when I’m feeling depressed, when

I can't find work, or I'm flunking my studies, or when I can't find meaning in my life.

A god who's a mirror image of me would be no use at all!

So, if we're serious about finding God, finding out about God, or finding out what God is like, we at least owe it to ourselves to look a little further than the nearest reflection of us.

But maybe at times you've felt a bit like a customer in the god shop and wanted to know - how do we know who God is?

What's God like?

Does God matter?

And why Jesus? What's so special about this guy?

Well, the opening few pages of the historian Mark's account of Jesus' life give us some answers to those questions. In addition to helping us get clarity on these questions we may have, Mark's Gospel also makes some significant claims as to who Jesus is, and why he, out of every person who has ever walked the face of the earth, is uniquely placed to help us get a picture of what God is really like.

So, consider Mark, 2000 years ago as he sits down to write his record of Jesus' life, his "theological biography" if you like. As Mark looks at his piece of parchment, which in those days averaged about 10 metres long, he needs to decide which aspects of Jesus' 33 years to leave in, and which bits to leave out. And even if we consider just the three years of Jesus'

public life, Mark still needs to make some decisions about what gets included and what gets left out. All of this means that we know that nothing got put into Mark's gospel by accident. He wouldn't have been trying to fill up space or pad out his book like a university student who realises they don't know enough about their topic to reach the minimum word count for their assignment! Mark would have needed to be very deliberate, and the information he includes, he includes for a reason.

Take a look at how he starts:

The beginning of the good news about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God, as it is written in Isaiah the prophet: "I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way" - "a voice of one calling in the wilderness, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.'" And so John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

Mark 1:1 – 4

As soon as the reader opens this book, Mark tells us who he's writing about, and why he thinks it's important for people to read about Jesus. He's left off the flowery introduction, the clever illustration, the cute story, and gets straight to the

point. What we have when we read Mark's historical account is the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

Being that it's the very first line, it's easy for us to gloss over it when we read it in the Bible and say, "Let's skip to a good bit where Jesus slays a demon or something exciting like that!" But if you're looking for an answer to those questions "Why Jesus?" "What can Jesus tell me about God?" or "Why is Jesus important?" or if you know people, or live with people, or work with people, who are asking those questions, here's our answer - right at the very beginning. We don't have to go wandering through the God Shop or even foraging in the depths of the Bible to find out. Right here in opening words of his book, Mark gives us his answer.

So, what is he actually saying?

Firstly, Mark tells us that when someone picks up his book, which for us is generally when we open a Bible, what they hold in their hands is Good News. He uses a Greek word that is the source of our word "gospel." Originally this Greek word wasn't even a religious term. It was used to describe any sort of public announcement that was considered good news – victories in battle, acts of benevolence from the authorities, relief from taxes, that sort of thing. But because of the significance of the good news that Mark and the other New Testament authors wrote about, today gospel is a word that is generally associated with Christianity.

That original Greek word is the same word we get “evangelism” from. If you’ve heard of evangelism, it’s not some scary religious technique, it’s just telling people good news.

Interestingly one of the few non-Christian uses of this word is among Mac computer users. Many of them have adopted the label “Mac-Evangelists” which sounds like something to do with a fast food chain, but simply illustrates Mac computer users’ desire to tell others the “good news” about the benefits of using a Mac!

But as far as good news goes, Mark says, this is the pinnacle! What you read in those pages is the good news about Jesus. And he spends sixteen chapters explaining to us as his readers, *why* it’s good news. In fact, he doesn’t wait very long to start that explanation, the next part of that opening line gives us the first steps towards an answer.

This Jesus isn’t just a figment of someone’s imagination. He’s not an apparition that you can conjure up when the need arises.

And he’s not some sort of amorphous construct that you can push into any shape you like.

He is an historical person, the details of whose life have been recorded for us by eyewitnesses, historians and authors, and Mark’s introduction tells us that Jesus is the Messiah, and the Son of God.

Of course, “Messiah” is not just one of Jesus’ family names. It’s a title and a pretty impressive one at that. The titles “Christ” and “Messiah” (which are the same word in two different languages) mean God’s anointed one, or God’s chosen one. For

Mark doesn’t waste his time or his parchment with mediocre titles like “wise man” or “moral example.” What’s much more important to Mark is that we understand that Jesus is the Messiah, the fulfilment of God’s promises over the centuries.

centuries before the time of Jesus, God had been promising the Jewish people that he would send a Messiah, a Christ, who was going to rescue them, restore them and lead them. Because of their disobedience, the people had continually fallen short of living the kind of lives God wanted for them. The Messiah would help them live up to their full potential.

So, the Messiah was going to be the leader who would bring God’s plans to fruition.

The Messiah was going to deal with the problems that plagued God’s people.

The Messiah was going to set things right, once and for all.

Little wonder then, that the Jewish people had been waiting for this person to arrive! Mark’s big claim here, in his opening line, is that Jesus is the fulfilment of those centuries of expectation. Jesus is the one who brings God’s promises of rescue and restoration to completion, and in the very next line

Mark gives us an example of one of the promises God has made – a promise about the Messiah’s arrival and the messenger who will precede him.

Mark’s original audience may have heard Jesus described in a number of different ways. Certainly today we hear all sorts of opinions about Jesus;

Some say he’ was a great teacher.

A fine moral example.

A wise man.

Mark doesn’t waste his time or his parchment with mediocre titles like “wise man” or “moral example.” What’s much more important to Mark is that we understand that Jesus is the Messiah, the fulfilment of God’s promises over the centuries. Can you see how that’s a substantially bigger claim than, “he was a wise man” or “he’s a good teacher”? Those sorts of titles are insignificant in comparison to the claim about Jesus that Mark is making here.

But Mark doesn’t stop there.

Not only is Jesus the fulfilment of God’s promises to generation after generation, he is the Son of God. That means the relationship between Jesus the man and the eternal God of heaven is unique.

There’s no one else who relates to God the way Jesus does. No one else who can show us what God is like in the way that Jesus can.

No one who makes God known like Jesus does.
Jesus is God's Son.

We've just heard Mark make a pretty big claim about Jesus being the Messiah, but I think this one takes the cake; stating that Jesus is the Son of God. It's not very often we hear people seriously making claims like that and then assembling evidence to back up their claim. Actually, in just a moment we're going to see a pretty staggering claim that Jesus himself makes about his identity, so there's a lot for us to consider about who Jesus is.

As we hear these claims being made and as we investigate them, consider your opinion of Jesus. Is it an informed opinion, or is it simply an assumed opinion? On what basis have you formed your conclusions?

As we hear these claims being made and as we investigate them, consider your opinion of Jesus. Is it an informed opinion, or is it simply an assumed opinion? On what basis have you formed your conclusions? Are your opinions open to

refinement as we consider the historical evidence and the eyewitness accounts? How might your opinion of Jesus be shaped as we hear the words from his own mouth and as we listen to the testimony of those people who walked with Jesus, learnt from him and had their lives transformed through their encounters with him?

The claims that Mark and others make about Jesus are audacious and their implications, even for us today, are huge. Many would consider them beyond belief, and they probably would be if there wasn't any evidence to back them up. Mark however, spends the 16 chapters of his book giving us the evidence for these astounding claims he makes about Jesus. He reminds his readers at different points throughout the book of Jesus' true identity; the Messiah, the fulfilment of all those centuries of expectation. Jesus is God making good on his promises.

About halfway through Mark's historical account, Peter, who is one of Jesus' closest followers, seems to have grasped this for himself and declares that he knows Jesus is the Messiah. Instead of leaving well enough alone though, Peter goes on to rebuke Jesus for talking about his upcoming suffering and death (Mark 8:31 – 33). Jesus' reply to Peter feels harsh, but his response is so strong because Jesus knows that to follow Peter's advice would be to abandon God's plan for the great rescue that the Messiah would achieve. So, knowing what Mark wants us to learn from his book, let's look at this other staggering claim about who Jesus is and what we learn about God from him.

This claim of identity comes from Jesus' own mouth, but it's also accompanied by some of this evidence that Mark is assembling for us in our quest to find out what's so special about Jesus. Imagine if you will, that you've invited a friend

into your home and they're one of those people with a gift for speaking. They really capture - and hold - people's attention! Perhaps they can explain things so that everything just becomes crystal clear. Maybe they like to share new concepts with others and people just can't get enough of these fresh ideas. Perhaps they're just a great storyteller to whom people love to listen.

Whatever the reason, your friend is talking to your family and one of the neighbours walks in. It doesn't take more than a few moments of overhearing the conversation for your neighbour to realize that everybody in her house would benefit from hearing this too, so she runs home and soon her family is seated all around your lounge room. Some more friends stop by on their way home from a shopping trip and sure enough, they too decide to stay and hear what your guest has to say.

Meanwhile, everyone else in your street is wondering what's going on at your place - there seems to be crowds of people arriving for a party but there's no party noise! It doesn't take too long before curiosity gets the better of them and one by one, they wander up to your door, listen for a few minutes to your guest and then slip inside. Soon, every room of your house is filled with people hanging on every word out of your friend's mouth. I don't know about you, but that sort of thing has never happened to me when I've had guests stay over! If

people started to pile into my home to listen to my guests speak, I'd be more than a little surprised!

A few days later, when Jesus again entered Capernaum, the people heard that he had come home. They gathered in such large numbers that there was no room left, not even outside the door, and he preached the word to them.

Mark 2:1 - 2

Jesus is teaching in someone's house, explaining the Scriptures and the crowd listening to him is so great that they can't even all fit inside. It's a picture we get time and time again through the eyes of the witnesses and Jesus' contemporaries; people flocked to hear Jesus teach.

He taught with such authority and understanding that people were amazed.

He explained the Scriptures to the crowd.

He taught them about God.

He taught people about themselves.

He explained to them that God's Kingdom was coming, that is, God's rule and his relationship with people was about to be seen in a completely new and different way.

He urged people to repent, to turn back to God.

And the crowds just couldn't seem to get enough, such that on this occasion, the house is packed to the rafters (and even

beyond, as we're about to see!) with people hanging on Jesus' every word.

If a gathering like this in my home would surprise me, then what happens next would have me pinching myself in a reality check! Some men arrive, carrying their paralysed friend, but the crowd is so great that they can't even get in the door. So, do they give up? Do they look down at their friend and shrug their shoulders as if to say, "Sorry, we tried." Do they walk away without giving their friend the life-changing encounter with Jesus they had apparently hoped for? No! Their actions show us they're convinced that it's worth getting their friend to meet Jesus, no matter what.

Since they could not get him to Jesus because of the crowd, they made an opening in the roof above Jesus by digging through it and then lowered the mat the man was lying on. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralyzed man, "Son, your sins are forgiven."

Mark 2:4 - 5

These men are convinced that Jesus offers some kind of solution to their friend's problem and what's more, their actions back that up! It's one thing to say you believe something, but another matter altogether to back your words up with your actions - to "walk the walk" as much as you "talk

the talk.” I’m sure we can all think of people who say one thing but their actions don’t back that up.

Maybe they say they’re a Christian, but they certainly don’t live like it.

Or they say they’re your friend, but they talk about you behind your back.

Or they say they their job is not the most important thing in their life, but it’s their boss who gets the best effort, the most time and the majority of attention, meaning everyone and everything else misses out.

A person’s actions can tell you a lot about what they really believe, and the actions of these four men show that they really believe Jesus can help their friend – they’re totally committed to their cause.

In this day and age of steel roofing and concrete roof tiles, it might be a bit difficult to replicate the achievement of these men, but in order to get their friend to Jesus, they cut through the roof of the house. 2000 years ago, the roof in a house like this one where Jesus is teaching probably would have been made from clay. The men could, with some effort, cut away a hole large enough to lower their friend through.

Imagine the scene; people are pressed in around Jesus, so many gathered that there was no room left, not even outside the door and then all of a sudden, dirt, and dust, and chunks of broken clay start to rain down on the crowd. In a house this

crowded you could hardly just take a discreet step to the side to avoid the falling debris! The “remodelling” of this ceiling would have to become the focus of everyone’s attention. This is a scene-stealing entry!

Many of us, when we read this episode, find ourselves worried about the damage to the roof;

What did the homeowner think?

Did the men repair the hole?

What did the crowd think about this wilful destruction?

Mark however makes no attempt to answer any of these questions, although believe it or not, others had actually entered crowded buildings this way before! Sure, this was someone’s home. Certainly, it now has a gaping hole in the roof, but Mark wants to direct his reader’s attention to things of eternal rather than temporal significance. His focus is on the details and interactions which give us a picture of who Jesus is and which make a difference to people’s relationship with God. His attention is given to the great plans and purposes of God as they reach their fulfilment. So, our modern questioning, wanting to know who will pay the repair bill, must go unanswered – there are much more significant answers to be found! And how much more significant they must be, if the questions of repair work and builders’ invoices don’t even rate a mention!

So, despite what seems to us and probably to the assembled crowd an unorthodox method of bringing their friend to

Jesus, the determination of these men paid off. He finds himself at Jesus feet, looking up at the Messiah, and most likely with every eye in the room looking down at him. There can be little doubt in the minds of those present what this man and his friends want from Jesus. He has an obvious physical need. He is paralysed. He cannot walk. His friends have gone to extraordinary lengths to bring him face to face with Jesus in the expectation that something can be done to meet his great need.

And a significant need it is too. 2000 years ago there was no reconstructive surgery available, no government disability benefits. The wheelchair wasn't even going to be invented for another 1600 years! People who couldn't work because of physical disability were often forced to beg or depend on others for their food. What this particular paralysed man has in his favour is a group of friends who obviously care for him – a great help in a society that placed minimal value on those with physical disabilities. There is no underestimating his great physical need and the dramatic difference to his life that Jesus could make, if as his friends suspect, Jesus is able to deal with his need.

It is however, an altogether different and infinitely more significant need that Jesus identifies. Jesus interrupts his talk, looks at the man sitting on the mat at his feet and says, “Your sins are forgiven.”

Have you ever been in a crowded room when someone has said something really inappropriate? Maybe a coarse joke, an embarrassing confession or simply a comment in bad taste? If you've ever been in that situation, you may feel like you'll never forget that exact moment. It's the sort of experience people sometimes describe as seeming to unfold in slow motion - like watching a frame-by-frame replay on television. The words slip out, those who hear them gasp, and everyone just out of earshot, strains to work out what just happened, asking the people around them what they missed. This is one of those exact situations, though of course Jesus' comment wasn't a rude joke or an off-colour comment, but it was definitely both unexpected and provocative.

It is however, an altogether different and infinitely more significant need that Jesus identifies. Jesus interrupts his talk, looks at the man sitting on the mat at his feet and says, "Your sins are forgiven."

Now some teachers of the law were sitting there, thinking to themselves, "Why does this fellow talk like that? He's blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?"

Mark 2:6 – 7

Imagine you walked into my office one afternoon and found me sitting at my desk. We exchange greetings and I ask you what I can do for you. You tell me that you have been doing some reading on a particular topic and you were wondering if I might be able to loan you a book to help you in your investigation. I get up out of my chair, and naturally you assume I'm going to the shelf to find the book that will be helpful for your study, but instead I turn towards you, look you in the face and say, "Your sins are forgiven!"

How would you respond? What would you think? Most likely you would think I had lost my grip on reality! "Who does Clayton think he is? I come in here on a simple errand and he starts telling me my sins are forgiven! Is he out of his mind? This started out as a discussion about a book and now he thinks I should be turning over a new leaf or something!"

I'm sure those are the sorts of thoughts that would run through your mind if I came out with an outburst like that. And with good reason! What sort of madman would make such a statement in that situation? That's what the teachers of the religious law thought when Jesus said this, although they didn't just think he was a madman. They thought it was blasphemy.

All through my childhood I thought blasphemy was simply saying "Oh my God" or using Jesus' name as a swear word. As I've got a bit older, I've learned that blasphemy is more than

just those two specific examples. One of the books on my bookshelf (maybe the one you wanted to borrow in our hypothetical situation!) defines blasphemy as “a word or act detracting from the power and glory of God.” Mocking God or showing contempt for God would come under the definition of blasphemy too. So would saying or doing anything that minimises God’s uniqueness. Those teachers of religious law in the crowd thought that Jesus’ claim to have forgiven the man’s sin detracted from God’s power and glory.

They understood (rightly!) that sin is a problem between humans and God. They heard Jesus’ words and thought he was putting himself in God’s position. To their ears Jesus is saying, “I can do God’s job,” and they saw that as an insult to God.

Think about another hypothetical situation where, for the sake of illustration, once again we’ll imagine I’ve taken leave of my senses! Suppose you tell me that you’ve just bought a block of land and you’re keen to build a house. You might tell me what sort of house you’re interested in, how many bedrooms you want and how you’re planning to decorate it. Imagine, that, much to your surprise I respond by saying, “I’ll build it for you! I can build you a house. It can’t be that hard! All it takes is a few pallets of bricks, some timber, a bit of plumbing and wire and I’ll have it done for you!” You would be right to respond with shock and horror! “No one can build a house without the right training and accreditation!” you’d say. “I need a builder, an electrician, a bricklayer and a

plumber. There's nothing about you that makes me think you're in any way able to build me a house!" That should be your response!

That's the very same reaction as the teachers of the religious law in verse 6 and 7. "What? Forgive sins! This is blasphemy! Who but God can forgive sins?"

Let's put the story on hold for a few moments, and consider what Jesus is talking about when he says to the paralysed man "Your sins are forgiven." What comes to mind when you hear the word "sin"? I'm fairly confident that if we stepped out into the street and took a quick poll on that question, most of the answers we receive would be about physical actions, the sorts of behaviours we might have read about in the Ten Commandments if we went to Sunday School as children; stealing, murder, adultery, lying.

Now, if you did go to Sunday School as a child and were taught that these things are wrong, then I'm very pleased! Some probably long-since-retired Sunday School teacher obviously worked hard to embed them firmly in the dark recesses of your mind! What we need to remember, however, is that these "thou shalt nots" as you may remember them, are not sin, per se, but rather symptoms of sin.

Let me explain. Perhaps you've had chicken pox and had those little red spots all over you. The little red spots aren't actually

the cause of the problem. They're a symptom. Sure, they itch like nothing else and might make you feel self-conscious about going out in public because they're so obvious, but the red spots are really just a symptom of the virus in your body. There are other symptoms too; fever, headache, fatigue and loss of appetite. If you put some lotion on your spots to cover them up and stop them itching, that doesn't mean you're healed, and it won't take away all your other symptoms. To deal with chicken pox you need to deal with the virus and then the red spots and all the other symptoms will go away.

That list of behaviours that we might recite if we were asked to define sin are actually just symptoms of a deeper problem.

The main problem is that we have declared independence from God. These other symptoms flow from this declaration of independence.

The main problem is that we have declared independence from God. These other symptoms flow from this declaration of independence.

Because people have rejected God and thrown off the pattern he established for our lives, we treat others badly, we lie, we're selfish, and we steal. If we all lived the way that God intended us to live, none of these things would be a problem. None of those symptoms would occur. If we were all living God's way, we wouldn't hurt each other, but because we reject God's way, our life and our choices hurt other people.

Think of the headlines in today's paper or the lead stories on the television news tonight. Almost certainly the major stories will be about the consequences of people throwing off God's pattern for our lives and therefore making decisions that impact negatively on others.

So, our primary problem is being out of step with God. Sin is therefore a problem between us and God. We see the consequences of sin in all areas of our lives and the lives of people around us, but the root of the problem is our attitude to God and whether or not we are willing to sit under his rule and to follow the pattern for life that he established. It follows then, that if sin is a problem between us and God, then it's God and no one else who can bring reconciliation and deal with the problem. If we keep thinking of chicken pox as an illustration of the problem, the medical textbooks tell me that in most cases, our bodies can overcome the virus and then it and all the symptoms go away. The difference with the problem of sin couldn't be more significant, however. There's nothing we can do to overcome the problem ourselves. God is the only one who is able to provide a solution. God's solution to the problem of our rebellion against him is discussed in greater length in chapter 2 – Why did Jesus die? For now, we just need to remember that sin is our offence against God, so God is the only one who can forgive it.

Let's get back to the story and to the religious leaders' anger and indignation at Jesus' pronouncement of forgiveness. Here was someone who appeared to be a mere man and yet claimed to be able to act as God does. He claimed to be able to do the things that only God can do. He is acting as if he's God! Little wonder the religious leaders were angry!

But you might say, "Now wait a minute, I can forgive someone if they sin against me, and even the Bible tells us to forgive others, so how can these religious leaders say only God can forgive sins?" And that's a good question. Do these religious leaders really think it's impossible for me or you to forgive someone if they wrong us? This is where it's important to remember the difference between the problem and the symptoms. The things that I do against you that are wrong, and the things that you might do against me, are the symptoms of the real problem. When we do things that are wrong, we should ask people to forgive us, but we need to remember that those wrong actions are not the root of the problem.

Primarily we have wronged God, and that's what causes us to do wrong to other people. That's why ultimately, no one can forgive sins except God. It's he who we have wronged and he has the authority and the power to forgive us, to wipe our slate clean and to remove our sin so it isn't blocking the way to our relationship with him.

This episode from Mark chapter 2 shows Jesus doing God's job and in doing God's job, he is equating himself with God. To say, "Your sins are forgiven" is to claim authority that belongs only to God. Of course, just from making that claim, no one knows whether Jesus is actually equal with God or not. It's easy to say, "Your sins are forgiven!" There's not a green light that appears above the man's head when his sins are forgiven. His complexion doesn't change once his slate gets wiped clean! There's no way the observers can tell whether Jesus' pronouncement is effective or not. Jesus could have said to the paralysed man, "your sins are forgiven," picked up where he left off in his sermon and no one would have known whether he actually had the authority to say that or not! But that's not what Jesus does, is it?

Immediately Jesus knew in his spirit that this was what they were thinking in their hearts, and he said to them, "Why are you thinking these things? Which is easier: to say to this paralyzed man, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up, take your mat and walk'? But I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins." So he said to the man, "I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home."

Mark 2:8 – 11

You may have noticed that Jesus talks about himself in the third person, using the title "the Son of Man." This is one of

Jesus' most common ways of speaking about himself and it actually refers back to part of the Jewish Scriptures (Daniel 7:13 – 14), a passage probably known to the all audience and most certainly familiar to the religious leaders present. The title was used in those Scriptures to refer to a specific person to whom was entrusted unique authority. Jesus wants to show that he does in fact have the power and authority to do the things he claims he is able to do, so he gives a demonstration of his power that nobody can refute.

While nobody can tell from the outside if a person's sins have been forgiven, everyone will notice if a paralysed man gets up and walks! It's as if Jesus is saying, "It's easier for me to say, 'you're forgiven,' than 'be healed' because if I say, 'you're forgiven,'" and I'm a fraud, no one will know! But if I say, 'be healed,' and I'm a fraud, you're all going to know it as soon as this man attempts to stand up."

So, in order that the crowd knows that Jesus is capable of doing the things he claims to be able to do, he makes a pronouncement which is going to be very obviously effective or not. Either the man can stand, and Jesus is shown to have power and authority beyond any human and his words are trustworthy, or the man is still paralyzed and Jesus' claim to be able to heal is shown to be false.

He got up, took his mat and walked out in full view of them all. This amazed everyone and they praised God, saying, "We have never seen anything like this!"

Mark 2:12

That was all the proof the crowd needed that Jesus had the power to follow through on his words. The claim they could verify was shown to be true and Jesus passed with flying colours! He acts with God's power when it comes to healing, what reason could they possibly have to doubt that he acts with God's power when it comes to forgiveness? Jesus can recreate a man's flesh and bones instantaneously and before their very eyes, not by praying to God and asking for the power to do it, but simply by speaking. Given everything that the crowd has witnessed, it seems a bit presumptuous and foolish to doubt Jesus' other claims!

But let's not miss the point; Jesus heals this man, not because his primary mission is to make people better physically, but as evidence that he is able to do what he says he can, and to demonstrate that he has the ability and the authority to forgive sins. God's power and authority are being displayed in completely new and different ways to what anyone has experienced before, and while the religious leaders don't seem entirely comfortable with what they're witnessing, they clearly understand what authority this is; Jesus is claiming to be equal with God.

He is claiming to act as God acts.

Jesus claims to be God.

Mark presents us these eyewitness accounts and these dramatic encounters because he doesn't want us to misunderstand who Jesus is. There is a danger that we may confuse popular opinions of Jesus constructed 20 centuries after the fact with the words and experiences of people who actually witnessed his life. We owe it to ourselves to take the contemporary sources seriously. It's on that testimony that our opinion of Jesus must be formed.

Mark and his witnesses are clear.

Jesus is the Messiah, the long-

awaited messenger from God.

Jesus is the Son of God. In fact,

Jesus is God himself. He acts with

the power and authority that

belongs only to God. No wonder the religious leaders in the

crowd had trouble dealing with what they witnessed!

Jesus is claiming to

be equal with God.

He is claiming to act

as God acts. Jesus

claims to be God.

So why Jesus?

What does Jesus offer that no one else does?

What can Jesus do that no one else can?

Jesus can represent God to us, because he is God.

Which means, if you're looking for God, you need to look to

Jesus.

If we want to know what God is like, we need to listen to Jesus'

words.

To get God's perspective on life, take a look at Jesus' life through the eyes of these eyewitnesses.

As I hinted in the beginning, it's often tempting to think that a God who is the mirror image of me would be a great God to have. It's an appealing idea, isn't it?

But maybe a God who keeps his promises to his people is a better idea.

Maybe a God who has power and authority over the created order is a smarter idea.

Maybe a God who can heal and restore is what we need.

Maybe a God who can forgive my sin is a better God.

Based on the evidence that Mark lays down for us, I'd say not maybe, but definitely!

A God who keeps his word.

A God who holds all power and authority.

A God who heals, restores and forgives.

That God came in the flesh, the man Jesus Christ.

If you're in the God Shop, don't fall into the trap of picking one who looks like you, stay with me over the next few pages and find out some more about the God who looks like everything we've ever needed.

The clearest picture you'll ever find of God is in the person of Jesus.

Why: Finding answers to 5 of life's big questions

CHAPTER 1

WHY... JESUS?

In this series

Why Jesus?

Why did Jesus die?

Why believe in the resurrection?

Why trust the Bible?

Why have faith?

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