

(mis)Understanding Jesus Part 10

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[0 : 00] Well, today we are coming to the final part of the series that we've been doing over the past couple of months on Sunday mornings, which is a series that has two titles. As we've been saying, our main title is understanding Jesus, and we've been trying to look at some key moments in the life of our Saviour to better understand who He is and why He's come, but our subtitle is misunderstanding Jesus, and we've been trying to identify ways in which Jesus has been misunderstood both by people in His own time and by people today.

We began the series 10 weeks ago by looking at the first statement made in each of the Gospels, and you may remember that that Mack told us that this message about Jesus is good news. Matthew told us that everything in God's plan is being fulfilled. Luke told us that what you're about to read in His Gospel is accurate and trustworthy, and John told us that Jesus is just mind-blowingly big. He's the explanation for everything. Today we're going to conclude our series by looking at the last statements made by Matthew, Mark, Luke and John in their Gospels. We're going to look at each of them in turn, but we can just read again from John's statement at verse 25 of chapter 21. Now there are also many other things that Jesus did where every one of them to be written, I suppose, that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.

Over these past few weeks we've looked at several key moments in the Gospels, and each of these are revealing crucial aspects of the Persian and work of Jesus. These are the two great headings that we use for understanding Jesus. We talk about His Persian and His work, His identity and His mission, who He is and why He has come. But what we've seen is that Jesus' identity and His mission are very easily misunderstood. Sometimes that leads to an outright rejection of Jesus. So in the New Testament you can see that there were some people who thought that Jesus was demon possessed, others thought that He was a blasphemer, and many people were offended by the things that He said and did. And today you see the same, some people are very hostile towards Jesus.

[2 : 43] So some say that He's a fraud, some see Him as oppressive, and some question whether He even existed at all. And so that kind of hostility is out there, but I don't think that that's the main issue when it comes to misunderstanding Jesus. And it's definitely not what I've come across in my own experience. The main issue is not that we misunderstand Jesus and push Him right out of our lives. The main issue is that we misunderstand Jesus and we confine Him to a small part of our lives. That's the big issue. And it's important to recognize that that applies to every single one of us as Christians, or maybe as those who aren't the ed Christians, are not sure where you stand.

We can all do it, we all have done it. We put Jesus into a very small corner in our lives. That can happen in lots of different ways. So we see that Jesus helps people in difficulty, and therefore we can see Jesus as a kind of useful crutch that we can sometimes lean on when we're struggling. In the Gospels that happen frequently, many people enjoyed seeing Jesus help people. Many people came to Jesus for healing themselves, but not all followed Him. A great example of that is in Luke 17 when 10 lepers cried out to Jesus for healing, and He did so.

But only one of them came back to thank Him. Today, many people are the same. We want the comfort of Jesus' promises. We want His protection when we feel threatened. We want help in the midst of a hard day. And I'm probably, I am guilty of this too. I think we're all guilty of it. I think it's proved by the fact that our prayer lives all improve rapidly when things are going wrong.

But when things return to normal, when we no longer need the crutch, Jesus is put back to one side. Or Jesus can be viewed as a handyman to fix our immediate problems. The people in the New Testament were very frustrated with their immediate circumstances. They were under Roman rule, they had no Davidic king on the throne in Jerusalem, and their national identity was being compromised by Greek influence. And Jesus was supposed to fix all that stuff for them.

And today we can be the same. We want Jesus to fix our immediate problems. That might be to give us a better job, it might be to give us a wife or a husband, it might be to take away an illness, it might be to vindicate our opinions, it might be to remove something that's inconvenient in our lives, it might even be a desire for Jesus to make life a wee bit difficult for the people that we don't get on with. And if that doesn't happen, if Jesus doesn't fix our immediate problems, then we get disillusioned and frustrated. Sometimes Jesus can be seen as an ally to fit in with our plans. That was very much the case in the Gospels. The people wanted a military leader to expel the Romans and to restore the Jewish nation back to what it was in the good old days when David was king a thousand years earlier. Now not many people today want Jesus to be a military revolutionary, but we definitely want him to fit around our agenda, don't we? We want him to give us a nice life, we want our career to go well, we want to avoid suffering, we want church to be the way we like it. And if Jesus doesn't fit into those plans, we just ignore him. And the classic example of that

[6 : 44] I think is probably when we refuse to forgive somebody who has wronged us. The only way a Christian can be unforgiving is by ignoring Jesus. That's the only way we can do it. So sometimes Jesus is this crutch, sometimes he's a handyman to fix our problems, sometimes he's an ally to fit in with our plans, or sometimes Jesus just becomes a kind of supplier or a merchant who we can get good things from. So people in the New Testament came to Jesus for healing, others wanted provision, others wanted status. In Mark 10, James and John said, look Jesus, can you put us at your right hand and your left hand when you come in your kingdom? Today it's the same, many people come to Jesus as customers. They want to be made to feel better. We've got a big decision to make, so we want Jesus to be writing in the sky so that we know what to do. We want success, we want a ticket to heaven so that we know that we'll be okay in the end. And if Jesus doesn't give us what we want, then we're suspicious of him or a bit resentful. All of these are pitfalls that we can easily fall into. All of them are a result of misunderstanding Jesus. All of them put Jesus at our service. All of them are confining Jesus to a little box in our lives where he fits in with what we want. But the result of that is that we are making Jesus accountable to us. We're basically wanting him to fit in with what we want. And we've got to ask ourselves, do you really think that you can do that? Do you really think you can say to Jesus, you've got to answer to me?

Jesus is not a crutch that we lean on from time to time. Jesus is the king that we fall on our knees in front of.

Jesus is not a handyman to fix our immediate problems. He is the Savior who has come to fix us because we are the problem. He's not an ally to suit our plans. He is the Messiah who has come to accomplish God's plans. And he is not the supplier who we can get stuff from. He's the Son of God that every single one of us needs to be united to. And it's all reminding us that for every single one of us we need to strive to make sure that we don't misunderstand Jesus. And please, please recognize that we all do it. I've misunderstood Jesus so many times. We all do it.

And it's something we've all got to try and think about. But we also have to recognize that understanding Jesus is not simply a case of accurate knowledge.

Understanding Jesus must also lead to the right response in all of our lives. And that brings us to the last statement of each gospel. And we're going to look at each one of them in turn. And we're going to start with Mark. And I'm going to read Mark verse 8. And they went out and fled from the tomb for trembling and astonishment had seized them. And they said nothing to anyone for they were afraid. Now, you may all be saying, Thomas, that's not the last verse.

[10 : 57] And those of you who've got an NIV or an ESV in front of you will probably see a note in the text that says something like, some of the early manuscripts do not include verses 9 to 20 of chapter 16 of Mark. And so you'll read that if you've got the app on your phone, it'll say the same.

Now, I don't want to spend too much time on this question, but I don't want to ignore it. We do need to just mention it briefly and explain the issue that's going on here. As you know, I'm sure the New Testament was originally written in Greek. And it wasn't written as a complete book. It was written as different materials by different authors at different times. Originally, they were circulated as manuscripts. And the first instance, these would have been scrolls. Then they were written on what's called a codex, a codex. And codexes are like a little bit like a little bit more like a book. They've got kind of pages rather than being rolled out. All of these, though, were copied out by hand. And an amazing amount of these have been discovered. There's in fact over 5,000 manuscripts or parts of manuscripts for the New Testament, some of which date as early as the second century. Now, that might sound, you might think, well, that doesn't really mean anything to

me. What we need to recognize is that is astonishing in terms of archaeological evidence and materials for the New Testament. To give you a comparison, one of the best attested classical writers is Euripides. So you may have heard of Euripides.

I think I have once upon a time heard of him. But he's one of the best attested classical writers.

There's about 300 manuscripts of his materials. So 300 New Testament, way over 5,000.

Homer's Iliad, which I'm sure you've also heard of. I'll be most impressed if any of you have read it. I haven't. Homer's Iliad, the earliest complete manuscript from that comes from the ninth century.

So that's only 1100 years ago. And so it's way later than what we have in terms of the New Testament. The manuscript evidence for the New Testament is in a league of its own. Thousands, literally thousands of manuscripts have been discovered. But because there's so many, there are some differences among them. So you're comparing thousands of different ones and there are minor differences. That's not surprising. They were all written out by hand. And almost all of these differences are just very minor, like spelling mistakes or grammar changes or a word here and there. They're all very, very minor. But there's a couple of places where there's big differences. And one of them is the long ending of Mark here. And the other is in John 7 with the woman caught in adultery. Here in Mark 16 verses nine to 20 are not in the earliest manuscripts. So what is going on? And how do we explain this?

[14:01] What do we think of it all? Well, what's the options? Were these verses added later on? Or were they lost from the first manuscripts that have been found? But they were preserved in another way? What's the explanation? Well, we don't know what for sure. And there's lots of, and lots of studies have been done on all this. But there is a lot of evidence to suggest that these verses were added at a later date. And to give you an example of that evidence, one of the key issues is that the style of the Greek in verses nine to 20 is very different to the rest of Mark. So you can read through it, read through the whole of Mark and the style is very similar all the way through. And in the last bit is different, very different. And I'm going to give you evidence of that. But in order to understand the evidence, you need to learn a Greek word. So the Greek word is chi. There you can see. And it means and or but or even or also. And it's a very common word. It's very common at the start of sentences. And so Mark does that a lot. And so if you read through the

NS, the ESV, you'll find that in Mark, lots of sentences begin with the word and. And so if you look at the first part of Mark 16, I'm going to put the Greek up in here. Don't worry if you can't read it. It's okay, but just just look for the word chi. If you look at the start of all the sentences, you can see chi chi chi chi chi. The rest of Mark is the same chi chi chi chi chi chi chi chi at the start of sentences. It's runs all the way through. It's very, very common. But now you look at verses nine to 20. It's very different. It's just a couple of examples. Verse 15 verse 18, you can see it there. Now this and and several other factors have led scholars to believe that that nine to 20 was added at a later date. And part of the reason for that is because verse eight seems like a very abrupt ending. And so you can understand why a scribe would maybe think, oh, this seems a bit abrupt. And maybe they're thinking, maybe we should put something on the end to round this off. All of that leaves us with three options to do with what we're going to do with these texts.

Option one is to say that Mark wrote the long ending. It's missing from the early manuscripts, but it's been preserved in the later manuscripts, and it was original to Mark. Option two is to say, well, Mark didn't write it. It is different. Someone else added it, but it's still part of his gospel.

Or option three is to say that Mark didn't write it, and we shouldn't view it as part of his gospel.

Instead, we should view verse eight as the deliberate ending of Mark. Most conservative, evangelical scholars are a number three. So people like Sinclair Ferguson, Don Carson, Michael Kruger, these are world respected, very, very solid theologians. They would all be a three.

Our own professor, John Angus McLeod, who's taught at ETS for the past 20 years, he is a three. I am also a three. It's important though to say that this does not in any way compromise a view of the inerrancy and inspiration of the Bible, because inerrancy and inspiration only applies to what Mark wrote. If someone adds something to a book of the Bible, whether that's last week or whether it's 1800 years ago, it's not part of the Bible. It's not part of the gospel.

[17:55] The addition, though, doesn't for one minute mean that the original isn't inspired. And we use the manuscript evidence to get back to the original text. And that's a really important reminder that our belief in the Bible as inspired is not based on kind of blind gullible. Oh, yeah, it's the Bible. We just believe it's the Bible. It's based on evidence. It's based on rigorous study and analysis that leads to the conclusion that this is the inspired word of God.

Now, time is marching on. And I don't have time to go over that anymore. But if anyone has any questions about this, please speak to me afterwards. I'll gladly show you some other aspects of the evidence that leads to this conclusion. More than happy to talk about it at any time.

And I'll tell you what I want to do at any time. Regardless of whether you're a one, two, or a three, everyone agrees that Mark wrote verse eight. And that's what I want to focus on. Here, Mark records the reaction of the women when they met an angel in the tomb telling them that Jesus had risen. And Mark tells us that they were trembling, that astonishment had seized them.

And they were afraid. And it's no wonder. Time picture these women. They'd come to anoint the body of Jesus and they arrive and they're met by an angel telling them that Jesus has risen. This left them stunned. It's the single most astonishing moment of their lives. And they are afraid.

Now, I think that that's a brilliant ending to Mark's gospel. Because it is teaching us a crucial lesson about how we need to respond to Jesus. It is teaching us that we have got to take this seriously. Jesus has got to be taken seriously.

[19 : 59] One of the easiest misunderstandings that we can fall into is to think that that in regard to Jesus, it's fine to just be casual to think that it's not that big a deal.

That is such a monumental misunderstanding. These women didn't say, oh, he's risen. Okay, cool. Let's carry on with our day. They were stunned. They were shaking. They were starting to realize that something massive had happened. And we are actually in exactly the same position as them. So, although we might not be standing in the empty tomb on the first day of the week back in Jerusalem, it's still the case that the reality of the person and work of Jesus is confronting us just as much as it's confronting these women. And we've got to ask ourselves, am I taking this seriously? We've all got to ask ourselves that question. It's so easy to be a bit casual, maybe even a bit flippant, a bit half-hearted, a bit not that bothered, a bit medium.

But is that wise? Or is that absolutely crazy? Never forget that there is no such thing as a human who will never take Jesus seriously.

It's not a question of yes or no. It's not a question of will we or won't we. It's a question of when. Because when Jesus returns, every one of us will appear before him to give an account of ourselves, and on that day no one will have a casual or medium view of Jesus.

[21 : 54] Mark is telling us that we've got to take this seriously if we don't, and we are misunderstanding Jesus.

Matthew, these are some of the most important and wonderful words in the Bible. This is Jesus's great commission. He says, go and make disciples of all nations. These verses are describing to us what the church should be doing. It's not applies to us as individual believers, it applies to us as collective believers, it applies to everyone who we hope will become a believer. This is what we're supposed to be doing. This is our job. And there's several, there's tons of things we could say about this.

I just want to pick out three or four very quickly. It's all reminding us about our response to Jesus. It's telling us first that we should be going, not waiting. Jesus says go, and the original word is actually going rather than just go. We have to reach out to our community with the gospel message. We cannot, we just cannot sit here and expect people to turn up, and that's the opposite of what the Bible tells us to do anyway. It doesn't say wait, it says go. We have to go and make connections. We have to reach out with the good news. We're also told that we should be baptising, not ostracising. We want to welcome people into the community, into our, we want people from our community, from the community, into our community. We want people to come into God's covenant community.

We want people to hear Jesus's invitation that says to come, and we want to grow together as a united body in Jesus. It's reminding us that we don't go out to look down our nose at everybody, to criticise or ostracise people who don't believe. We are going out there to call them to Jesus, to call them to repentance, and to welcome them into God's family. We don't want unbelievers to be kept at arm's length. We want unbelievers to be baptised because they've started believing.

They've repented and turned to follow Jesus. Baptism is that great symbol of unity, of our unity as believers, and we want to welcome more and more into that community as God works among us. So we need to be going, we need to be baptising, we need to be teaching, teaching, not speculating. Being a disciple of Jesus is all about learning. That's why preaching and teaching go hand in hand. That's why it's so important to study the Bible together, to talk, to ask questions, to grow in our knowledge. We don't make up our own ideas. We don't jump to our own conclusions.

Instead we want to learn more and more of what God has revealed to us in His Word.

[24 : 55] That's why discipleship is so important. We are learning and going together as we are being taught. And then last of all, we are to be observing all that He commands, not ignoring His commandments.

It's incredibly easy to pick and choose the bits of the Bible that we like. It's incredibly easy to pick and choose the bits that we want to obey. That's not how it works. If Jesus is Lord, then we want to follow Him in every part of our lives. We want to observe everything He commands us to do. Now all of these verbs, going, baptising, teaching, observing, they're all reminding us that what we know about Jesus must result in action. This is not theoretical. It's not abstract. It's not some nice religious stories for us to think about on a Sunday and then crack on with the rest of our week without a second thought. It's got to shape the way we live.

Matthew tells us that the gospel must result in action. If it doesn't, then we are most definitely misunderstanding Jesus. Then we come to Luke. I love this verse as well. Luke says, they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy and were continually in the temple, blessing God. Here Luke gives a wonderful description of the disciples' response to Jesus' resurrection and ascension. They worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy.

Now, giving you lots of Greek lessons today, I want to tell you the Greek word for great. Now, this is actually a Greek word that you already know, but you just didn't realise it. The Greek word for great is the word mega. And I love that because it's telling us that these disciples returned with mega joy. And I just think that's so cool. It's such a good reminder that the gospel is good news. It's amazing news. In other words, it is not depressing news.

It's so easy to think that. It's so easy for those of you who are maybe not yet Christians or not true who you stand. It's so easy to think being a Christian is going to spoil my life and make things depressing. It's not for us as Christians. It's so easy to think that because our sin is so awful, because we keep making mistakes, we should go around in misery. That's not true either.

[27 : 24] Both of these are monumental misunderstandings of Jesus because Jesus is the giver of mega joy. He has risen. He saved us. He's given us hope. He's transformed our eternity. He's come to give life to a dying world. He's come to put right every injustice. He's bringing us into an amazing family that stretches across the whole world. And most amazingly of all, he loves you. He actually loves you. And that is just brilliant news. If you want to be depressed, go home and read the BBC news.

If you want mega joy, then read the good news of Jesus Christ. But notice that that joy is linked to worship. And God have mercy on us if people come to our worship services and see people who are miserable. Every Sunday morning, our smiles should be broad. Our hearts should be bursting. Our hands should be raised. Our singing should lift the roof. Our joy should be overflowing. Now that doesn't mean that life is never hard for Christians and that we're happy all the time. That doesn't mean that at all. It means that we recognize the fact that Jesus has made such a wonderful difference to our lives that even if we have a rubbish week, we have a joy that is bigger than our circumstances. Luke is telling us that the gospel brings mega joy. And if you don't think that, then you're misunderstanding Jesus. And then last of all, we've got John. This is one of my favorite verses. Now there are also many other things that Jesus did where every one of them to be written, I suppose, that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written. The gospels are full of amazing information. Words that Jesus said, things he did, places he went, people he helped, miracles he performed, teaching he gave. There's so much amazing stuff, but John is giving us a wonderful reminder that we don't even know the half of it. And that's reminding us that you must never worry if you don't understand it all. Please don't think that this series is saying, you know, you have to understand Jesus or you can't become a Christian. I'm not saying that at all. I'm saying that no matter how much we understand, there's still so much amazing stuff to learn with all learners. And this is why confining Jesus to a small box is so foolish, because if we do that, we're basically saying, oh yeah, I understand Jesus and I understand that he belongs in this wee box in my life, and that's where I'm going to keep him. And I'll pick him up and I'll put him down as I need him. If you've learned anything from this series,

I hope that you've learned that we can't do that. Jesus is the most important person in history. He's the most influential person in history. There's no argument about that. That's an empirical fact.

Jesus is the most captivating person in all of history. He's absolutely amazing. And John is saying to us, yeah, but there's still so much more to discover. If you think that you know it all, then you're

misunderstanding Jesus. So these closing statements from the Gospels are teaching us that we need to take Jesus seriously. They're teaching us that our relationship with Jesus must shape the way that we live our lives. That means tomorrow and Tuesday and Wednesday and every day for the rest of our lives. They're teaching us that you can have mega joy in Jesus.

[31 : 38] And they're teaching us that there's still so much more to discover about Jesus. That's what makes it so good. There's just so much amazing stuff to learn. But I want to ask you, what do you think of all that? What do you really think about all of that? Now, I want to ask that question because it's easy for it to feel a wee bit intimidating. And in a one sense it is, we are talking about the stuff that really matters. And life is always easier. It's always easier to talk about stuff that doesn't really matter. Find it a lot easier to lie in my pillow at night and think about football than I do to think about what my health will be like if I reach my 80s. Stuff that doesn't really matter is always way easier to think about. So it can be a wee bit intimidating. But what I want to suggest to you is that the response that these statements are all expecting, this is not something to be scared of and it's not something unnatural or intimidating or horrible.

I want to suggest that this is actually what every single one of us craves. So when I say this is something that we need to take seriously, what makes that something we crave is because I am pretty sure that every single person here is fed up of a society that's becoming a force. I really, really, really don't like making political statements and I don't really have any particularly strong political affiliations. I think I've voted for every party at different times at different times. I take each election as it comes. I don't have strong loyalties in either way.

But the last week of our lives politically has been a joke. It's been a national embarrassment to see a Prime Minister say there was no party while at the same time he accepts the resignation of the woman who was joking about the party that didn't happen.

It's a farce. I'm not saying that to make a statement at all. It's just a fact. It's just ridiculous. And in the midst of that it's so good to have something, someone we can actually take seriously in Jesus. When I say that the gospel needs to result in action, how many of you are fed up of pouring your energy into stuff that doesn't really matter? How often do we do that? We pour our lives into stuff and then you think, what was the point? Jesus gives us something to pour our lives into that is of eternal value. When I talk about mega joy, how many of you have thought of just one thing that if you just get it, it would give you that joy? I've done that so many times from a pair of shoes I wanted as a child to buy myself a new musical instrument a couple of years ago thinking, oh, I just have that. That'll be it. It's never it, is it? Whether it's possessions or relationships or whatever or status, we think that's going to give me mega joy. It doesn't.

It often leaves us empty. Jesus will never leave you empty. It gives you that real, real joy that you crave. And when I say that Jesus, that there's still so much more to discover, how many of you want a Lord and a Savior that you can just put in a wee box? Do you really want that?

[35 : 49] Or do you want a Lord and Savior that you can spend eternity marveling at, learning more and more and more about how amazing he is? That's how massive Jesus is and yet the great message of the gospel is that he has come to save you because he loves you. So let's all stop misunderstanding Jesus and let's all just follow him today, tomorrow and for the rest of our lives. Amen. Let's pray.

Lord Jesus, we thank you that you are the one that we can and must take seriously. We thank you that you call us to a new life that makes a real difference to the way that we live. We thank you that you are the giver of mega joy and we thank you that there's still so much more to learn about how great and wonderful you are. Please, we pray, help us to understand these things more and more. May that be true of us all and may it be true of our community in the days and years ahead as well. Amen.