

Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church

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Dave Smith

Sermon manuscript

Sermon Series: Encountering the Life-Changing Jesus

Behold the Man

(The story of Jesus)

Study #5

Introduction: The world's most compelling Man...

As you have no doubt learned from some hilarious internet memes, action star and martial arts expert Chuck Norris is a very interesting man. Among Chuck's interesting remarkabilities are that...

- ...his passport requires no photograph.
- ...new cars increase in value when he drives them off the lot.
- ...his business card reads, "I'll call you."
- ...when asked how many push-ups he can do, Chuck says, "All of them."
- ...his email account is gmail@chucknorris.com
- ...when he crosses the street, cars look both ways, 911 calls him in an emergency, and guns carry Chuck Norris for protection.

Some years prior to the Chuck Norris jokes, there were beer commercials that introduced us to "the most interesting man in the world." We learned that he...

- ...once had an awkward moment, just to see how it feels.
- ...is right-handed...AND left-handed.
- ...is invited to touch the art in museums.
- ...has won the lifetime achievement award, twice.
- ...bowls overhanded.
- ...is fluent in three languages that only he speaks.

Well, those are a couple of very impressive guys. Who could ever be as interesting or remarkable as these two?

Well, this morning we're considering Someone even more remarkable and interesting. We capitalize this Guy's pronouns. And, yes, He actually does walk on water. He is the world's most compelling Man: Jesus.

Over the past four weeks, we've looked at "role players" in the larger Christian story.

We started off with Mary Magdalene and then moved to Simon Peter. Then Jeff led us into studies of the Apostle Matthew and, last week, Judas Iscariot.

Today, we're taking a 40,000 survey of the Star of the show, the uber-compelling Jesus, and we'll use a line spoken by the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate, to kick off our study.

Setting the stage...

By sunrise on what we refer to as Good Friday, Jesus had already been:

- betrayed by one of His apostles.
- arrested and tried before the Jews.
- denied by a close friend - another of the apostles; and
- tried before Pilate.

Pilate had found nothing about Jesus deserving of death. So, in an attempt to pacify the crowds who wanted Him crucified, Pilate had Jesus scourged / beaten to within an inch of His life.

After the scourging, Pilate made a weak attempt to convince the crowds of Jesus' innocence. We picture them, standing together before the crowd. Pilate is dressed in finery and Jesus beaten to a bloody pulp.

Addressing the mob, Pilate simply said, "**Behold the Man.**"

For the next few minutes, we're going to do what Pilate invited the crowds to do. Whether you are familiar with history's most compelling Man or not, whether you are a committed disciple or a curious observer, you and I are going to "**behold the Man,**" together.

The enigma of Jesus...

Jesus has always been something of an enigma.

He lived for only thirty-three years and wasn't well-traveled. He never wrote a book, held political office, or built a building. But He has fascinated and perplexed men and women for the last two thousand years.

Even the community that formed in His Name, the church, had a hard time articulating what it understood about Jesus because His story explodes human categories.

The church needed to build new boxes, not to contain Him, but to try to answer the question, "Who is this Man?" They understood that there is, simply, no one like Jesus.

First off, today, let's think about WHAT He did. Then, based on that - His words and His works - we'll see if we can build a box that captures WHO He is.

The Distinctive "WHATs?" of Jesus' Life

December in April

I know it's April, but for just a minute let's pretend it's mid-December, the time of year when we typically think about Jesus' birth.

The Gospels tell us that Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit in the womb of the virgin Mary and that He was born in the stables of Bethlehem.

Then, like all babies and children, Jesus grew up.

Growing in Wisdom and Grace

He was raised by Joseph, a Galilean carpenter, who could trace his family tree all the way back to the great Jewish King, David. That genealogy gave Jesus the legal right to claim to be king of the Jews.¹

Aside from the stories of the visit of the wise men from the east, Herod's slaughter of the babies, and the flight of the family to Egypt, we know very little of Jesus' first three decades of life.

There is that one scene where, as a twelve-year-old, He was asking profound questions of the Jewish elders in the temple in Jerusalem.²

But, aside from that, all we have is the general comment that Jesus ***[Luke 2:40] continued to grow and become strong, increasing in wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him.***

Our exposure to Jesus begins when He turned thirty. He died a short three years after that. So, the four Gospels - Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John - are mostly concerned with the final three years of His life.

During these three years, Jesus recruited and trained followers, spoke to crowds of people, and performed miracles to validate His message.

His Three Years of Active Ministry

Teaching

¹ The belief that Jesus was born to a virgin is very important to our faith. First, it was necessary for Jesus, the Messiah, to be of the line of the ancient Jewish kings. However, he could not have come from the physical line of King Coniah, because he had been so utterly sinful that God declared that no one from the line of Coniah would ever sit on Israel's throne. Jesus, as the legal descendant of David through Joseph, but not Joseph's physical heir, escaped the curse while fulfilling the requirement to be of the kingly line.

² This is the scene (Luke 2:41-51) in which Joseph and Mary had mistakenly left Jesus behind and had to return to Jerusalem to find Him and take Him home. When His mother reproved Him, "***Son, why have You treated us this way? Behold, Your father and I have been anxiously looking for You.***" Jesus answered, "***Why is it that you were looking for Me? Did you not know that I had to be in My Father's house?***"

And what a Teacher He was. Even His enemies were impressed. They said, **[John 7:46] “Never has a man spoken the way this man speaks.”**

After finishing His most famous sermon (what we call The Sermon on the Mount), **[Matthew 7:28]...the crowds were amazed at His teaching; [29] for He was teaching them as one having authority, and not as their scribes.**

He taught about God, salvation, and ethics, heaven and hell. He taught about the past as if He had been there, and the future as if He knew. He spoke OF Satan - and He spoke TO him.

He called His followers to humble servanthood AND to radical followership AND to a vision for worldwide impact.

Whether He was teaching through parables, engaging with enemies who wanted to destroy Him, or equipping His followers with truth, Jesus’ words were powerful.

And, of course, the life of Jesus was interspersed with the miraculous.

Miracles

We count close to thirty-five of Jesus’ miracles in the Gospels. At several points we are assured that He performed more that are not recorded.³

His miracles weren’t sideshows or peripheral add-ons. So central to His mission and message were miracles that the gospel of John is arranged around seven “signs” that attested to Jesus’ deity.⁴

³ We know this because of comments throughout the Gospels that mention Him healing people of diseases, casting out demons, etc... without recording details being supplied; Matthew 4:23; 9:35; Luke 4:40; 6:19; 9:11. See also John 20:30-31 and 21:25, referencing other signs that Jesus performed that are not recorded.

⁴ Water into wine (2:1-11); raising up of the nobleman’s son (4:46-54); healing of the man at the pool of Bethesda (5:1-18); multiplying fish and loaves (6:1-14); walking on the water (6:16-21); healing of the blind man (9:1-41); raising of Lazarus (11:1-44).

His miracles showed that He had power over nature, over demons, over disease, and over death.

How would you summarize the life of Jesus?

Try this. He loved, served, and prayed, rebuked, affirmed, and taught like no one ever had. He displayed undaunted courage and the power of God. He was an incredibly compelling Man who led a towering life.

Now, what does WHAT Jesus *did* tell us about WHO Jesus *is*?

His words and deeds exploded the categories of normal, so we’ll need to build that box that will help us “get” Jesus.

This will be a four-sided box. And we’ll call the first side, humanity. Jesus was a human being. That may seem like a big “duh”, but it’s worth saying that in many respects He was just like you and me.

Based on His “WHATs?”, WHO is This Jesus?

Jesus is Fully Human (He is one of us)

Look at the Gospels and you see a man. In every respect in which you are a human being, Jesus was a human being.

Would it be pointless to list the attributes of humanity Jesus possessed? His body was precisely like that of every other man.

His muscles ached after a long day of work in the carpentry shop, and He got physically weary at the end of a long day with His disciples.⁵

He enjoyed the fellowship of friends, like you do. He experienced all the emotions you do.

In addition, Jesus knew what it was to be tempted by sin.

⁵ How else do you explain Him falling asleep in the hold of a fishing boat in the middle of a storm at sea? (Matthew 8:24)

After a forty day-long period of fasting, the devil came to Him, making tempting offers (Matthew 4). Significantly, He successfully resisted all these temptations.⁶

Jesus' humanity is also seen in that He learned (Hebrews 5:8), He grew (Luke 2:40) - and He eventually died (Mark 15:37).

It is worth mentioning the humanity of Jesus. In Christianity, a faith that centers on the Person of Jesus, it is possible to forget the mundaneness of His physical body and the routineness of His humanity.

There was not a luminous glow about Jesus. He looked just like any other man. No halo. He was fully human.

At the same time, Jesus was fully God. Here is the second side of the box we are constructing to understand Jesus. He wasn't the "50/50 God/man." He was **fully** man AND **fully** God. That's actually what the Bible teaches.

Jesus is Fully God (He is NOT like us!) (See John 8:56-58)

Read Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John and you'll clearly see that Jesus meant to present Himself as God.

Read the Gospels and the rest of the New Testament and you'll conclude that all the biblical writers intended for us to understand that Jesus was God in the flesh.

The Apostle John wrote these words, at the beginning of his Gospel, **[John 1:1] In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.**

⁶ The author of the New Testament letter to the Hebrews refers to that experience when he writes, **[15] For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin.**"

In that statement, John was equating the Word - the eternal, creating, life-giving, life-sustaining God - with the Man, Jesus of Nazareth.

One time, Jesus was speaking with a group of fellow-Jews. The conversation became heated, as He invited them to believe in Him. They balked. He promised that anyone who believed in Him would live forever.

They pointed out that Abraham, the father of their nation, had died, and Jesus responded, **[John 8:56] "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad."**

The opposition shot back at Jesus, **[John 8:57]... "You are not yet fifty years old, and have You seen Abraham?"** To which Jesus replied, **"[John 8:58] "Before Abraham was born, I AM."**

And at this, the Jews picked up stones to kill Jesus, clearly understanding that He was claiming to be God.

See, those words - **"I AM"** - were *code* to Jews.

Jesus was quoting God, who spoke to Moses at the burning bush and identified Himself as the great **"I AM."** He was claiming to be God, and His audience understood Him to be claiming to be God.

They didn't like it. But they understood perfectly well what He was saying.

When the Apostle Thomas saw the resurrected Christ, he cried out, **[John 20:28] "My Lord and my God!"**

Notice that Jesus didn't say, *"Now, Thomas, don't get all worked up over this. Let's not exaggerate"* No. Jesus received Thomas' words and his worship.⁷

⁷ After thirty years of studying this Person, Jesus, I still believe that C. S. Lewis, the British scholar and apologist for the faith, (1898-1963) has put together the best way to think about Jesus' deity. From Lewis: There are really only two possible conclusions to be drawn from Jesus' clear claims to be God in the flesh. Either His

Many students of the life of Jesus err on the side of rejecting one truth about Jesus and accepting the other, emphasizing one over the other. Scripture invites us to embrace mystery.

Jesus of Nazareth was fully divine, and He was fully human.

Our box is not yet complete. The third side of our box logically follows the second.

Jesus is Lord (See Philippians 2)

Since Jesus was perfect human and fully God, He is also Lord. He is King. He is Sovereign.

There is a fascinating passage in the book of Philippians that sheds light on Jesus' Lordship.

Paul, writing to followers of Jesus, tells us to imitate Christ's humility. Jesus didn't cling to His power, even though He was God. Instead, He *"emptied"* Himself. He served. He obeyed His Father. He died for us.

claims were true, or His claims were false. If His claims were false, then He either knew that His claims were false when He made them, or He did not know that His claims to be God were false. If He knew that His claims to be God were false when He made them, then He was a fool, for He ended up dying for claims He knew to be untrue. Worse than that, He was a liar. Worse than that, He was diabolical, because He urged people to stake their eternal destiny on His claim to be divine, and therefore able to take those who trusted Him to Heaven when they died. If, on the other hand, He did NOT know that His claims to be God were false but made them anyway, He was deluded, but on such an outrageous scale it is hard to even imagine. It is like a man who claims to be a poached egg. The other alternative is that Jesus' claims to be God in the flesh are true. If so, there are still two things that can be done with those claims. You can allow that truth to penetrate your soul, and then place your faith in Him for salvation. Or you can reject Him, knowing full well that you are rejecting your only hope for eternal life. Either Jesus was a liar, or He was a lunatic, or He is the Lord. Lewis ends this exercise in clear thinking with a killer thought - *"You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon, or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord but let us not come up with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human (moral) teacher. He has not left that option open to us. He did not intend to."*

The next words, though, show the trajectory of Jesus' story AFTER His years of earthly humility.

[9] Therefore also God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, [10] that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those who are in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, [11] and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

While Jesus lived and worked and walked His way through life, He selectively laid aside (*"emptied Himself"*) the prerogatives of deity when it suited God's purposes.

He continued to walk that humble road all the way to the cross, where He died.

But that was THEN. In the letter to the Philippians, Paul pulled back the curtain and gave us a glimpse of Jesus' NOW.

For thirty-three years, He was known simply as Jesus. He is NOW, the Lord Jesus. Post-crucifixion and post-resurrection, He is NOW the recognized Lord of all.

That was an extremely radical thing for Paul to write, because, by saying that Jesus is Lord, he was saying that Caesar was not Lord, explaining why Paul spent so much time in Roman prisons and why he was eventually executed by Rome.

Rome wasn't sovereign. Current political leaders aren't lord. Jesus is Lord.

And that, the Lordship of Jesus, is the third side of our "Jesus box." There is one more side to set up.

As the most compelling Man ever - fully human, fully God, Lord of all - He is uniquely qualified to also be Savior.

His role of Savior was fulfilled twenty centuries ago on the weekend we're celebrating now. Here is how that happened...

Jesus is Savior (see Matthew 28)

Jesus' death - for you and me

Jesus was put to death by crucifixion by the Romans, having been handed over to Rome by His own people, the Jews.

The hours leading up to His death were torturous. Having endured betrayal, denial, false accusation, trials and condemnation, a brutal beating and a death walk, Jesus was nailed to a cross on a Friday morning.

He died in the middle of the afternoon on what we call "Good Friday." It was good for us; horrific for Him. We never forget that when Jesus went to the cross it was FOR US.

On the cross, He fulfilled John the Baptist's words that He would be ***"the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world."***

While suffering on the cross, He endured the punishment that was due us. His Father turned away from Him as He became a sin offering, bearing our guilt.

Just before He took His last breath, His work of sin-bearing was done. We know it was done because of His cry, ***"It is finished!"*** He took away the world's sin. He took away your sin.

Jesus' burial

After He yielded up His spirit and died, He was buried in the borrowed tomb of a rich man, a man who up to this point had been a "secret" disciple, Joseph of Arimathea.⁸

It isn't surprising that right after Jesus was crucified by Rome for treason, there was not a long line of people signing up to declare themselves as Jesus' disciple. But there were a few.

⁸ Joseph had requested the body of Jesus quickly so that the land would not have been guilty of having a body hanging after dark on a Sabbath. ***[Deuteronomy 21:23] A hanged man is accused by God; you shall not defile your land which the Lord your God gives you.*** The poor were buried in the ground or in natural caves. Burial in artificial caves was reserved for the rich.

There was Joseph. And there were some very loyal women.

Mary and Mary at a closely guarded tomb

He was placed in the tomb late on Friday afternoon, watched by Mary Magdalene and another Mary known only as ***"the other Mary."***

They watched as the Roman soldiers sealed the tomb and then rolled a large stone in front of the entrance. This was all done because, while the disciples had forgotten about Jesus' predictions of His resurrection, His enemies had not.

The last thing His opponents wanted was for grave-robbers to steal Jesus' body, prompting the start of a resurrection rumor.

Sealing the tomb was one way to deal with the threat of a grave-robbery. The point was not that the seal was unbreakable (like the seal on our Tylenol bottles).

The point was that the seal was a Roman seal. The message of the seal was, ***"You break this seal and you're messing with Rome!"***

Another way to ensure there was no attempt by the disciples to steal Jesus' body was to post a guard. So, on the next day (Saturday), the religious rulers took action to ensure that Jesus' body stayed put.

They approached Pilate to get an official Roman guard for the tomb, in addition to the Jewish temple guard already in place. Pilate agreed with their concerns and gave them the guard they requested.

From the vantage point of the Jewish leadership, there was no telling to what lengths those crazy disciples might go to promote faith in Jesus.

But, really, the disciples were in no mood to try anything tricky.

For them, Jesus' death was the death of hope. There was no energy among the disciples to concoct a scheme to try and make people believe in a living Jesus when they knew full well that He was dead.

So, Friday was awful.

Saturday, if possible, was even worse, because the disciples were all scared out of their wits at the prospect of being arrested for having been associated with Jesus.

But now Saturday is past, and we come to Sunday morning.

Sunday...

The two Mary's who had been the last to leave the tomb on Friday got back there just before dawn. They arrived to a very chaotic scene.

Overnight, there been an earthquake that had rolled the stone away from the entrance to the tomb. But there was also an angel, who was evidently responsible for breaking the seal. (Evidently, God's angel wasn't all that concerned about *"messing with Rome."*)

Matthew tells us that the angel's ***"appearance was like lightning,"*** and we wonder what that means... Did he move quickly? Did he flash? The angel was sitting on top of the rolled away stone as the women walked up.

The Roman guards and the temple soldiers who had been assigned to stand guard over the grave were there - but not really. In fact, I've got an Easter vocabulary word to describe their condition. The word is *catatonic*.

The dictionary says that *catatonia* is a "syndrome characterized by muscular rigidity and mental stupor." These soldiers were catatonic. Matthew reports that they ***"shook for fear and became like dead men!"***

This is the scene that met the women on that Sunday morning: catatonic soldiers, a rolled away stone, and an angel blazing with light.

[5] And the angel answered and said to the women, "Do not be afraid); for I know that you are looking for Jesus who has been crucified."

Those words affirm what we suspected. These women hadn't come to the tomb expecting to experience a resurrection. They came to the tomb to embalm Jesus' dead body.

Yes, of course, they should have known better. Like the angel said, ***"He has risen, just as He said"*** - an angelically polite way to say, *"He told you so!"*

Nobody broke into the tomb; Somebody broke out.

I'm not making fun of the women. What He had said about rising from the dead was wild. Now, in finding the tomb empty, these women were getting their first taste of a *"too good to be true"* miracle.

This is a *"THAT changes everything"* morning for them - and it's only just begun.

The angel gave the women an assignment.

[7] "And go quickly and tell His disciples that He has risen from the dead; and behold, He is going before you into Galilee, there you will see Him; behold, I have told you."

So, Mary and Mary quickly obeyed.⁹ They ran off to find the disciples. Listen to Matthew's read of their emotional dashboard.

[8] And they departed quickly from the tomb with FEAR and GREAT JOY and ran to report it to His disciples.

Don't you just I love this!?! It is so true to life. Emotions all jumbled up, nothing nice and neat.

FEAR gripped them - despite the angel's ***"Do not be afraid!"*** because what they were dealing with was way beyond them. **JOY** beyond anything they had ever known filled their hearts because they had just started to grasp the impossible: Jesus is alive!

⁹ The original implies that they ran as fast as they could.

Then, as they were rushing out of the cemetery, they are greeted by the Lord of Life Himself!

[9] And behold, Jesus met them and greeted them.

When these two recognized that they were face to face with a VERY much alive Jesus, they did what you or I would have done. They dropped to the ground **“and took hold of His feet and worshiped Him.”**

Jesus repeated the angel’s **“Don’t be afraid!”** and then repeated the angel’s assignment.

[10] Then Jesus said to them, ‘Do not be afraid; go and take word to My brethren¹⁰ to leave for Galilee, and there they shall see Me.’¹¹

And, for a second time, off they go, to tell the guys the *“too good to be true”* news - Jesus is alive!

Conclusion:

And that’s where we end today. Yep, we’re done for this morning. I do promise that we’ll return to the Easter story next Sunday, but I’m finished.

Next Sunday we’ll open to the Gospel of Luke and watch as some of the first disciples take an eye-opening walk with the resurrected Jesus. But we’re done here. Except for one thing...

Before we break up for the day, you should know that Jesus is inviting you, today, to take a walk with Him, too.

Over the past few minutes, we’ve done what Pontius Pilate called people to do two thousand years ago: **“Behold the Man.”** We have just now *“beheld”* some of the highlights of history’s most compelling Person: Jesus of Nazareth.

We have seen that He was not simply a mild-mannered, nice man. He wasn’t merely a good moral teacher or an exalted prophet. He was a Miracle-Worker and an Out-of-this-World Teacher. He was fully human and fully divine, both Lord and Savior.

So, today, we have seen what is the core of Christianity.

The Christian faith isn’t a system of religious rules and traditions. It isn’t about organization or institution, politics or money. The focus isn’t land, buildings, bricks, or boards.

At the core of Christianity is not a “what” but a “Who”. It’s all about Jesus. So, today, look to Jesus. Not to the peripherals, but to the core. Jesus is the point of it all.

Maybe you’ve been following Jesus for a while, but have lost Him in the following. You’ve replaced passion for Him with busyness. Return to Jesus and walk with Him into a life-changing next.

Or maybe you’ve been turned off to Christianity by the imperfections of His followers. Or peripheral trappings have blocked your view of the main thing.

Look to Jesus, this most-compelling Man who is inviting you to take a walk with Him. Say **“YES!”** and take a next step into faith and receive the gift of eternal life.

His Risen...He is RISEN indeed!!

¹⁰ Luther - “If now, Christ is our brother, I should like to know what we still lack? Brethren have common possessions, have one father, one inheritance. So, we have common possessions with Christ, one Father, and a common inheritance.”

¹¹ This doesn't mean that Jesus was instructing them to have the disciples leave immediately for Galilee. We know that they didn't because of the appearances recorded in John while they were still in Jerusalem.