

WHO IS THAT MAN?

Matthew 4:17

I. INTRO

- A. How many of you have been paying any attention whatsoever to the whole US Presidential election thing that's taken over the news these days? There's quite a bit of drama going on, isn't there—pit bulls with lipstick—lipstick on pigs. No detail remains unreported—no stone from the past is left unturned.
-People are fascinated with almost every detail of what's going on—cause everyone wants to know what these people are **really** like beyond all the surface stuff. Who leads a country—and what they're like—their character, their dreams, the decisions makes a huge difference, doesn't it? If you don't agree, ask the people who elected Hitler—or Nelson Mandela!
- B. Two thousand years ago, a man showed up in a tiny country occupied by Rome—claiming to inaugurate a new kingdom—which was actually quite dangerous. And he ultimately claimed to be King of that kingdom—even **more** dangerous. He called it the **Kingdom of God**, or the **Kingdom of Heaven**. He taught his people to pray for it, to root their values in it—that this new Kingdom was the best news that had ever hit the planet. That this kingdom was worth trading **everything** for. We're going to spend several weeks talking about it—and what it means.

-I think we can learn a lot about it by checking out the One who came teaching about it—because, just like in our current political world, **who** He is says a **lot** about what His government will be like.

-It's one thing to find out who someone is when you have live footage of them, real live decisions they've made—and people to interview who've spent a **lot** of time with them—like the presidential race going on in the US. It's a whole other deal when you're looking back over 2000 years and have to rely on what others wrote about the last three years of their life. Like Jesus. No photos. No physical descriptions. No interviews with childhood friends. Just **solid impact**. One historian made the comment, "You can tell the size of the ship that's passed by the wake they've left behind." If you've even been in a small boat when a ship's gone by—you know that's true.

1. Every year, usually at Christmas or Easter, Jesus makes the front of Time, Newsweek or MacLean's magazine—and there's a brand new theory about who He was and why He came. If you looking for multiple choice, there are a **bunch** of options out there; that Jesus was:

*a political revolutionary; a magician who married Mary Magdalene, moved to France, and had kids; a Rabbi; a magnificent teacher—but just a **man**;

2. Whatever anyone wants to say or believe about Jesus, you can't just flip off someone who splits history in half. Jesus once asked his closest followers; "What are people saying about me?" Their answers were quite predictable—that one of

the great prophets had come back from the dead. But then Jesus asked, “Who do **you** say I am?”

-And that is a profound question. Jesus claimed to be the Messiah; the Son of God. Eyewitnesses—hundreds of them—say they saw him rise from the dead, called Him Lord, and laid their lives on the line for him. Almost all his closest followers—those who **knew Him best** died with His Name on their lips.

-So—who **is** that Man? Who is Jesus? I believe the answer to that question—if you really, **really** get it will change your life—and your eternity. The answer will change your value system—what’s important, and what’s not. The answer will change what you want out of life—and what you do with your life. It’s not a philosophical answer—or a theoretical answer—or a theological answer. The answer has to come from your heart.

II. JESUS SNEAKS UP ON US!

- A. The narratives of Jesus life start with the story of Jesus’ birth. Rulers like Caesar Augustus and Herod are just mentioned—almost as footnotes in the story. But they weren’t footnotes in the history of the culture Jesus was born into; they were bullies. If you didn’t cooperate with them, you’d likely get crushed, killed or tortured.
- Rome ruled the world of that day. To do that, they would literally terrorize subjects into what they called, *pax romana*. Roman peace. If you didn’t cooperate, you went to a cross—usually along some highway—as an example of what happens to people who cause trouble. Israel was a hotspot for trouble—and sometimes **thousands** of Israelites were crucified at a time.
1. To live in Jesus’ was tough. Rome dominated, Rome taxed people into poverty, and Rome treated defeated people like dirt. The Jewish people seethed with hatred—and begged God to just show up!
 2. But Rome wasn’t the only problem. There was also Herod—a paranoid, power-hungry king with an insatiable appetite for attention. So, he too taxed people so that he could build magnificent buildings and dedicate them to his Roman friends to whom he was indebted. He had a spy system that would turn the SS green with envy. Of course, anyone caught talking behind his back got killed.
-Most people in that world literally became slaves to those who ruled their lives—without rights, without property, and with just barely enough to live on.
 3. Ironically, Jesus was born into this mess in Bethlehem—simply because of Caesar Augustus’s grab for more tax money. When Mary and Joseph did move back to Israel after a detour through Egypt, they lived in Nazareth in Galilee. Within sight of their little town was this amazing city on a hill 3 miles away called Sepphoris. It was a major building project that hired Jewish carpenters and stone masons for miles around. Joseph, in fact, may have worked there.
 4. When you read some of the words in the Bible narratives about Jesus—you may not realize how powerful—and controversial they were. For example, Caesar Augustus had been proclaimed Lord and Savior of the world of that day. He was proclaimed as the one who would usher in an era of peace to the world—his reign

would **never end**. And the edicts he sent out to all the Empire were called the **Good News** or the **Gospel**. Ever heard any of those phrases?

-The burning question in every Jewish person's mind that day was, "What do you do with the Romans?" What **do** you do with an enemy that robs your country, offends your deepest values, tramples your rights and executes your friends? Well, just like us—they responded—or **reacted** in a variety of ways.

- a. One group, the **Essenes**—chose radical pacifism. Their response was to escape the problem, hole up in little communities in the desert. They believed that if they could be pure enough and separate enough, God would send the Messiah to deliver them.
-Anyone here familiar with the Amish? That might be the best visual for what Essenes might look like in our world.
- b. Another way to deal with a power like Rome is to make them your friend and help them. The **Sadducees'** plan was, "Help the Romans keep everything under control so that don't come and take **everything**, destroy the temple. The other group that collaborated made money off the deal by volunteering to collect taxes from their own people.
-When Nazi Germany was terrorizing Europe, there were opportunists in every country they conquered who turned on their own people to get a better life. The Sadducees and tax collectors would be on the same level.
- c. Brutality always spawns hatred. Some people think that violence is the only way to deal with injustice. In Jesus' day—those people were called Zealots. They not only assassinated Romans, they went after the moral **infidels** among their own people. Truth is, their uprisings kept the Romans busy making crosses.
-In our world, this group of insurgents would probably be labeled as **terrorists**.
- d. The fourth political party was the **Pharisees**. The Pharisees were reformers. They loved the Bible, and they maintained very high standards of personal purity. You could call them the **Moral Majority**. To be honest, most of the common people in Israel at that time respected them and identified with them. They were practical—they didn't hide from the Romans or collaborate with them or rile them up. They just daily looked for the coming of the Messiah—believing that he was their only hope.

- B. Jesus grew up right in the middle of all these clashing political viewpoints. The surprising thing about Him is that He didn't stand out at all. Maybe the most important thing to know about Jesus is that He was Jewish—which meant that he experienced the same oppression, poverty and mistreatment as everyone else. He **looked** like any other Middle Eastern man in that day—dark hair, dark eyes—God in disguise! As a Jew, he celebrated Passover in Jerusalem, ate kosher food, observed the Sabbath from sundown on Friday to sundown on Saturday—and went to the synagogue.
-Here's the real problem for him being the Messiah; he was born in Galilee—which was considered redneck territory. Land of the bean-eaters and hillbillies. Think of the most hick, backwoods place where someone could be born in North America where their

accent and misuse of the English language would immediately give them away. You know, like Punxsutawney, or Timmons, or Greenbow Alabama.

-In light of that, I wondered, “Hmmm! I wonder what Jesus’ music preferences would’ve been? Maybe blue-grass—or country western. Then I realize, “Duuuh! Of course! Jesus likes organ music. It goes so well with the stained glass! Actually, not.

1. There was quite a fanfare when Jesus was born. Angels speaking to Mary—telling her that this baby would be a Savior—a deliverer; that he would be **Immanuel. God with Us!** Joseph was told in a dream that God was behind the whole thing—that God was going to save his people. When Jesus is born, God lights up the hillside with angels and scares a bunch of shepherds half to death. Court magicians come from another land and give gifts—and God uses angels to warn Joseph on how to play a game of chess with Herod to protect Jesus’ life -Jesus didn’t have a halo or anything. He didn’t even go out to the desert and live on bugs and honey—like his cousin. He was called the Son of David, but he didn’t practice with the slingshot in the backyard—or hang out with shepherds. In his mid-teens—when every boy chose a career in that culture—he seemed to simply be following his earthly dad—as a carpenter. It had to feel strange—with his supernatural beginning, and then—**nothing!** At least for about 30 years.
2. One day, Jesus apparently said, “It’s time.” And He changed careers. He shows up at the Jordan, gets baptized by John the Baptist, the Spirit descends and the Father speaks out loud about his love for his Son. Then he goes into the desert for a 40 day showdown with Satan. And then he began to speak for the very first time. His message, as summarized by Matthew, author of the first Gospel, is, **From then on Jesus began to preach, “Repent of your sins and turn to God, for the Kingdom of Heaven is near.” (Matthew 4:17 NLT)**

I’m **really** looking forward to talking about what Jesus meant when He talked about His Kingdom. I think it’s going to be an eye-opener for me—and hopefully for you and your friends.

C. But first I want to spend some time talking about some characteristics you see in Jesus as you study Him. What **would** we have noticed about his personality?

1. First, I think we would’ve noticed the exceptional compassion he had. He always seemed to notice those who were left behind—the people everyone else walks around and steps over. Poverty and disease was rampant in that culture—and people just got used to seeing people with their hands out—eyes a mass of white, sightless tissue; people with twisted limbs—who got stuck on a mat in a prominent place—with a bowl or a cup.

-Over and over again, you hear the words, “Jesus was **moved** to compassion.” And he was incredibly interruptible. Busy important people in our world tend to have pit-bulls guarding their offices and their time—and yet the One who was on a mission to save and restore everyone and everything always seemed to have time to talk. Children, widows, people with dumb questions—some who just wanted to **use** Him—it didn’t matter. He **never** denied a request!

2. I think we would've also noticed his charisma. Everyone was drawn to Jesus. In fact, the more scandalous their lives were—the more they wanted to hang with him. On one occasion—people sat in the wilderness for three days with nothing to eat—listening to him teach!

-Mind you—some were there to pick him apart and trap him. But no one ever walked away from Jesus feeling smug and self-satisfied. If you'd messed up your life, you never walked away from Jesus feeling crushed and humiliated. Jesus had this great way of equalizing everyone. And, of course, that **really** bothered those who didn't want equalized!
3. Something else about Jesus you would notice—and that's his **relational intelligence**. Jesus found a way to cut right through the fog to **anyone**—and meet them where they needed truth and life the most. He had a way of telling people the truth in a way that drew them in—without speaking in condescending ways. He had this warmth about him that instantly attracted others. Jesus was both incredibly wise and insightful—and yet unassuming.
4. Sometimes when you watch the old movies about Jesus—He almost seems flat and emotionless—looking out into the distance above the heads of others and talking like He's drugged. That's not the Jesus of the Bible. Jesus is **very** emotional—more so than most men. He breaks down and sobs over Jerusalem. When his disciples come back from their first successful mission—he's walking on air; ecstatic. When he's in the Garden of Gethsemane facing the death the next day, He wails to the Father—asking if the cup of suffering could be removed—and begs his disciples to stay close. When you read about Jesus, you find that he's incredibly strong and manly and courageous—but he's not your usual **macho**—cool, calm and collected guy.
5. Maybe one of the most interesting things about Jesus was his diverse friendships. Let's be honest; we mainly choose friends who are kinda like us. So, here's Jesus—Son of God, raised in the boonies—and He's friends with fishermen—guys who've spend their life hauling in nets, gutting fish and salting them down. That kinda fits.

-But He's also friends with wealthy women. Jesus had several women “of means” who traveled with him and his disciples—like the wife Herod's finance manager. Imagine—Herod is inadvertently financing the ministry of the King his Dad tried to kill! Jesus was friends with chief tax collectors—people **no one** would be seen with!

-Did you think that Jesus just went to church? Nope! Jesus went to parties that damaged his reputation. Matthew, this former tax thug turned disciple follows Jesus when he stopped by his tax booth one day—kind of a tax shelter. He throws a party for all his questionable friends—and there's Jesus, right in the middle of the smoke, the booze and the laughter!

-And Jesus was also friends with powerful people—like Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea who were religious rulers. Remember the Romans—and how much people hated them? Jesus was friends with some of the Roman officers—stationed in Israel! He was friends with lepers—people no one touched in that day. He was friends with prostitutes, too. Imagine what you would think if you

saw a snapshot in the National Enquirer of Billy Graham having a private conversation with a hooker? Or a mobster? Or a terrorist? Jesus **didn't care!** His love took him **way** beyond the limits of religious professionals!

6. Maybe the thing you and I would've noticed most, if we would've followed Jesus around--is His extravagant claims for Himself. Here he is—flesh and blood, wearing clothes, growing whiskers like everyone else. Having to eat, drink, sleep, wash himself, and—pardon me for being crude—relieve himself. He looks like everyone else—talks with this accent that's a dead giveaway that he was born in redneck territory—and yet says, “Come to **me** all of you who are weary and burdened down!”
- A guy gets let down in front of him for healing. Jesus says, “Your sins are forgiven!” Jesus accepts worship—something angels **never** did. Jesus said, “If you've seen me, you've seen the Father.” Jesus even takes on the Psalm 23, “The **Lord** is my Shepherd” and says, “**I'm** that Shepherd.” He says, “I and the Father are One!” “Someone greater than Solomon stands in front of you!” He claims that he will come again and judge the world. Then he takes it right to the top. In John 8, he claims the very name God had given for Himself to Moses. **I AM!** And Jesus says, “Unless you believe that **I AM** you will die in your sins!”
- Jesus—the One who is so incredibly humble, who needs friends, who is careful to not do his miracles for show—quietly—yet repeatedly makes these astounding claims. Unlike anyone who's ever walked here—apart from people who are insane—he urges people to trust **him**, believe **him**, receive life from **him**, follow **him**.
7. You see this all through Jesus' life—the clearly natural bumping right up against the supernatural. One of my favorite stories about this takes place in one of my favorite places—a boat! Let me read it for you. Jesus and his disciples are crossing the lake at night—and a fierce storm cuts loose. Let me read it: **High waves were breaking into the boat, and it began to fill with water. Jesus was sleeping at the back of the boat with his head on a cushion. The disciples woke him up, shouting, “Teacher, don't you care that we're going to drown?” When Jesus woke up, he rebuked the wind and said to the waves, “Silence! Be still!”**
- Suddenly the wind stopped, and there was a great calm. Then he asked them, “Why are you afraid? Do you still have no faith?” The disciples were absolutely terrified. “Who is this man?” they asked each other. “Even the wind and waves obey him!” (Mark 4:37-41 NLT)**
- Do you see the contrast? Jesus is so wiped he's fast asleep on a cushion—right in the middle of a crusher storm. His disciples start freaking out because of the waves.
- So Jesus wakes up, wipes the sleep from his eyes—then scolds the wind and the waves like naughty children—and **BAM!** Everything immediately calms down. Anyone here ever done that? The hurricanes prove that the wind and rain are pretty much out of our control.
- And the disciples ask a **very** profound question that every person needs to answer. **Who is this man?**

III. JESUS WILL NOT JOIN YOUR PARTY

- A. Remember all the categories I listed above about the political parties of that day—most of whom were concerned with, “What should we do about the Romans—who are crushing, humiliating and impoverishing us? How many of you think that the answer to questions like that is a political one? Most politicians will tell you that they have the answer. “Vote for *me*, and you’ll be safe, free, prosperous—and really, *really* smart!” So. Is Jesus a Conservative or a Liberal—or a Socialist? Is Jesus Republican or Democratic. Is Jesus Essence, Zealot, Sadducee or Pharisee?

-And the answer? None of the above. Jesus had friends in all categories. He had friends who were pacifists and escapists—and he had friends who were collaborators to the extreme. Imagine sitting around the campfire talking politics with Matthew the ultimate collaborator on one side, and Simon the Zealot—the terrorist on the other. I’ll bet they didn’t hold hands and sing Cum By Yah! It’s strange. The group you’d think Jesus would *most* associate with—the Moral Majority of that day--*hated Him!*

1. And my point? Jesus will *not* join a party, a social group, an organization, a denomination—or even a religion. By the way, did you know that Jesus *wasn’t* a Christian? Jesus stands outside and above every organization. He didn’t come to found a new religion. Religions tend to institutionalize faith and knowledge and let people know whether or not they’re on the way to God. Jesus came to *save* people from religion—because it will never get us to God. To quote Bruxy Cavey from The Meeting House, *Jesus hates religion!* Jesus came to invite irreligious people—and save people from *all* religions—including Christianity. He asks everyone to come to *Him* and find life—and rethink *everything!*

-Everything about what they believe; about what they think is important and want to invest their lives in. Everything about how they live in really, *really* tough times, and how to handle relationships, money, sexuality, marriage, promises they’ve made, their kids, their cars, their jobs—everything. **EVERYTHING!**

2. Know what our temptation is? To make Jesus like us. In his book, *On God’s Squad*, a former lineman for the Miami Dolphins wrote, “I guarantee you Christ would be the toughest guy who ever played this game... If he were alive today I would picture a six-foot-six inch 260 defensive tackle who would always make the big plays and would be hard to keep out of the backfield for offensive linemen like myself.”

A guy named Fritz Peterson, a former NY Yankee, sees Jesus in a baseball uniform. “I firmly believe that if Jesus Christ were sliding into second base, he would knock the second baseman into left field to break up the double play. Christ may not throw a spitball, but he would play hard within the rules.”

(p 19—TJINK). In contrast to this, listen to how Isaiah describes Jesus:

There was nothing beautiful or majestic about his appearance, nothing to attract us to him. He was despised and rejected—a man of sorrows, acquainted with deepest grief. We turned our backs on him and looked the other way. He was despised, and we did not care. (Isaiah 53:2b-3 NLT)

-Do you see our tendency? To make Jesus, “Kinda like me—only a little better. After all—we agree on so very *many* things!” To make our opinions *His* opinions; our favorite music—*His* favorite music.

-But in the middle of all this—we need to understand--Jesus didn’t fit any party then—and he doesn’t fit any political party or socio-economic group or ethnic group now. He was a Jewish guy—who loved Samaritans, whores, thieves, adulterers, soldiers—and *Romans!* He was a man—but he treated women and their needs with deep respect—as equals in a world that didn’t consider them equal. He was perfect—but the people who considered themselves perfect—or as close as a human could get—really, *really* didn’t like Him!

- B. And this gets right to the heart of Jesus’ coming. His first message—which we’re going to spend the several weeks talking about—was...and still is...

**“Repent of your sins and turn to God, for the Kingdom of Heaven is near.”
(Matthew 4:17 NLT)**

-Jesus coming was the start of God’s Kingdom coming here—and bringing this invasion of God’s leadership, God’s power, God’s love and grace and kindness and restoration to *all* the kingdoms on this planet.

What Jesus doesn’t say is, “Please invite me into *your* kingdom—your little sphere of influence where you make things happen and run stuff—and I’ll fit in and make it better than you ever dreamed!” No—He invites you and me to totally re-think *all* of our lives.

To bring *our* kingdoms—our plans, our marriages, our relational world, our little kingdom of money and stuff, our desires, our work—all the places where we exercise our will and influence—under *His leadership*.

-As if to illustrate this, the very next thing Jesus does is select people—right in the middle of where they work and live—and listen to His call:

One day as Jesus was walking along the shore of the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers—Simon, also called Peter, and Andrew—throwing a net into the water, for they fished for a living. Jesus called out to them, “Come, follow me, and I will show you how to fish for people!” And they left their nets at once and followed him.

**A little farther up the shore he saw two other brothers, James and John, sitting in a boat with their father, Zebedee, repairing their nets. And he called them to come, too. They immediately followed him, leaving the boat and their father behind.
(Matthew 4:18-22 NLT)**

1. Notice what Jesus *doesn’t* say, “Let me follow you around and help you build your fishing business and make you successful and healthy and smart and popular.” Jesus always calls people—including you and me—to *follow* Him. And he won’t chase after us. Jesus, in his ministry, had a *lot* of people just walk away from Him. They didn’t like what He said. They didn’t care for his style—so they just *left Him*. Imagine that. Son of God. Creator of all. The One who’s always existed—gave life—and people say, “Hey, Jesus—if you won’t fit into my

Daytimer, say cool things *I* agree with, fix my boo-boos, play my game, give me the power I want—forget you!”

-Jesus never chased them down and said, “No, wait—pleeeaaase! I’ll customize my expectations!” Jesus does work with us gently wherever we’re at. But His call is always, “Come to me....Follow me...Believe in me...let me be Lord.” Jesus will not play our games—or let us domesticate Him—tame Him down—put him in a box or in jail or make him write a recommendation for our business deal. Jesus is Lord.

2. Jesus’ plan has never changed. His plan is not to make our lives cozy, problem free and prosperous where we die in our beds at 95 with a smile on our faces. His plan is that His **followers** do just that. **Follow Him!** Treat Him as He is—Lord of All. Intent on spreading his sphere of leadership and goodness and kindness and grace and love—to us—and then through us. We receive the Good News of His leadership and mercy—and then we **become** the Good News wherever we go.
- 3 And that means that we have to make a critical decision about following Him. Will we move over—and give Him His rightful place at the **very center of our lives**—the place He deserves, the place He belongs—the place He **needs** to have to do what He wants?
 - Or, will we try to make Jesus our back-pocket Lord—you know, where we haul Him out in emergencies—our flashlight when the electricity goes out; our GPS when we get lost; our first aid kit when we get sick; our shoehorn when we’re in a tight situation, our savings account when we’re in a financial pinch?
 - Do you see how vastly different the approaches are? One says, “Hey Jesus, join my plan—come to my parties, solve my problems—be my emergency backup plan when my plan isn’t working; ride shotgun with me—just in case.” The other says, “Jesus—you are the center of my life. I want to find out where **You** are working—and be a part of it. I bring—and submit—my money, my relationships—all these little kingdoms I have to you—and choose to follow **no matter WHERE you lead—and no matter WHAT it costs**. You are Lord—I’m not!
 - What plan are you on?

IV. CLOSING

- A. Years ago, I heard a trainer from the Top Gun school speak—you know, the office who trains smart aleck Navy pilots to land on ships. He talks about one pilot that he was following who was in a dogfight with another plane. He asked her if she knew where she was. She radioed back, “I’ve got my target locked in—and I’m climbing at Mach 1!” What she **didn’t** realize is that she was flying upside down—and was locked in on a white petroleum tank on the ground—seconds from ending up in what fighter pilots call a **very hot taxi**. I.e.—splattered!
- B. We live in a world where **we** think we’re flying right-side up. And we’re going at Mach 3—thinking we’re getting closer and closer to what we want! Jesus says, “You’re flying upside down! You’re going to wreck **everything!**” And so—we have to decide who we’re going to believe. Jesus—or everyone else! Jesus says—“Follow **me!**”