

Jesus – Who is Jesus to you?

Do you ever have those moments when someone close to you reveals how much you mean to them? Like, it might be your husband or wife who texts or calls you during the day to say how much they love you and are so glad that you are doing this thing called life together. It could be a best friend who surprises you with a gift and says how much they love being around you and how much they treasure your friendship. Maybe it's even a work mate who says how much they enjoy working with you and they're glad you're on the team. Or maybe it's one of your kids.

As a proud dad of four boys I love having times where my boys let me know how much I mean to them – because it doesn't happen all the time! I mean after all the bath times, nappy changes, stories read, times hanging out together and just “dadness” of being a dad, when it does happen it really means something. And it's quite affirming.

Case in point. Earlier this week I went home to have lunch with Roxy – as we often do together. On the way I picked up Judah from kindy, he's two and our second youngest child, and he was so excited to see me. Calling out “Daddy” and then rushing to give me this huge hug. That was pretty cool. But it didn't finish there. Usually Judah will give me a kiss before I leave the house and that's about it. But not this day. Oh no! He decided he didn't want me to go.

As I was leaving he ran up to the door and started getting quite emotional. “Don't go, Daddy.” I gave him another kiss and then hopped into the car to reverse out the drive. Next thing, as I'm reversing, he is right next to the car door crying. So I give him another kiss and then say “See you soon, Judah.” By the way, Roxy is there at this time, so it's not just him alone on the driveway as I'm reversing. Just to let all you safety-conscious people out there know.

So I reverse again down the drive and there he is running to the end of the drive, tears streaming down his face. I'm thinking, this isn't like Judah. He usually gives me a kiss, a wave and I'm off.' I stop the car and do another little goodbye and then head back to work. As I'm looking in the windscreen mirror all I can see is Roxy holding Judah and Judah crying and reaching out his hand.

I tell you, moments like that break my heart. And affirm me in my role as being a parent. In that moment I could see how much Judah loved me and wanted me to be with him at that point in time. Like I said, that doesn't happen all the time, but it's pretty awesome when it does. And I'm sure all the parents here could agree with that!

Moments like that put everything else into perspective when it comes to parenting. When we find out just how much we mean to our kids – or how much we mean to our spouse, friend, work mate, family member, even God himself.

(SLIDE 1)

Here at OBC we're going through a series looking at the life of Jesus in the gospel of John, and we've seen some glimpses of how much we mean to Him and what His life and ministry was like.

It's quite incredible that most of Jesus' ministry has been recorded for us to get to know him and see how he lived on earth. I mean think about it, how privileged are we that any time we can reach for our Bibles or connect to our Bible app and flick through his life.

We see his birth and how this was foretold through the prophets over hundreds of years beforehand.

We see him begin his ministry at the age of thirty.

We see him recruiting followers to become his first disciples.

We see him perform miracles and demonstrate the power of God to those around him.

We see him teaching the people about what it means to follow after Him and how He and God are one.

All this was part of His public ministry in the gospel of John. Then the environment and tone changes to his private ministry with his disciples as He prepares them for his imminent departure.

We also are in a season of preparation here at OBC. As well as preparing for Brian and Gay to depart for Tauranga Central, we're also preparing for Easter. This is a time where we prepare our hearts for connecting with the Easter story, the time leading up to Jesus' death on a cross and His resurrection.

Last week Brian led us through the time of prayer Jesus had for his disciples then and in the future, this morning we're looking at what happens afterwards. And the focus changes immediately from the private ministry time with his disciples to the public arena of his trial.

Jesus literally goes on trial for his life. How will people respond to him? What does He mean to the people around him during this time of his life?

(SLIDE 2)

Who is Jesus to these people? That's the focus this morning.

Let's start with his betrayal at the hands of one of his disciples. We're in John chapter 18, verse 1:

(PRAYER TIME)

(SLIDE 3)

18 When he had finished praying, Jesus left with his disciples and crossed the Kidron Valley. On the other side there was a garden, and he and his disciples went into it.

2 Now Judas, who betrayed him, knew the place, because Jesus had often met there with his disciples. 3 So Judas came to the garden, guiding a detachment of soldiers and some officials from the chief priests and the Pharisees. They were carrying torches, lanterns and weapons.

4 Jesus, knowing all that was going to happen to him, went out and asked them, "Who is it you want?"

(SLIDE 4)

5 "Jesus of Nazareth," they replied.

"I am he," Jesus said. (And Judas the traitor was standing there with them.) 6 When Jesus said, "I am he," they drew back and fell to the ground.

7 Again he asked them, "Who is it you want?"

"Jesus of Nazareth," they said.

8 Jesus answered, "I told you that I am he. If you are looking for me, then let these men go."

9 This happened so that the words he had spoken would be fulfilled: "I have not lost one of those you gave me."

John's gospel is the only one that does not recount how Judas betrayed Jesus. With a kiss. Judas' sign to the soldiers and officials around him was that the man he would kiss would be the one they arrest.

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In Luke's gospel Jesus responds to him saying, "Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?"

Jesus is saying to him, really? This is really how you're going to do it, Judas. You've been with me all throughout my ministry, you've seen countless miracles, you've heard me teach on love, forgiveness and the kingdom of Heaven, you've known me and I've known you. And this is how it's going to be?

I don't think Jesus is mad here. I actually think he's sad. Heartbroken. He has poured his life into Judas and Judas has chosen to betray him. Judas has let his true feelings show. Feelings of not caring about Jesus but instead caring about the money he will receive from this act. He's thinking about himself and his wealth. Not about Jesus at all.

So, who is Jesus to Judas? Jesus is a means to an end.

(SLIDE 6)

Someone Judas betrays and disowns, in order to get what he wants. Is Judas sorry for what he does? Quite possibly – and Judas does show some repentance later on - however by then it's too late. The damage is done and is irreversible.

We may say poor Jesus here. But I say poor Judas. He had a front row seat to the life of the Messiah and was in His inner circle. But he chucked it all in. Judas knew that when he planted that kiss on Jesus it was a sign that he'd gone that far and was not coming back. It was a seal of Jesus' fate – and Judas' fate as well.

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Matthew 26:24 says: "The Son of Man will go just as it is written about him. But woe to that man who betrays the Son of Man! It would be better for him if he had not been born."

Judas has cast his lot and sealed his fate. He has missed out on who the true Jesus is. His response to Jesus: Judas *disowns* him. And we'll leave Judas there this morning.

Let's keep reading, from verse 10:

(SLIDE 8)

Then Simon Peter, who had a sword, drew it and struck the high priest's servant, cutting off his right ear. (The servant's name was Malchus.)

11 Jesus commanded Peter, "Put your sword away! Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?"

This is loyal Peter, fighting to the bitter end. He is rugged and ruthless, grabbing at his sword to defend Jesus.

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Peter's the action man – a GI Joe type figure. To Peter, Jesus is his master and Lord, one to whom he looks up to and will fight for. So Peter springs into action. And it must have been a good cut, to get the guy's ear off. But Jesus has to teach Peter something here and put things into perspective.

Peter, drop your sword. This is all part of the plan for me. God has ordained this from the beginning. Remember all the pep talks I gave you about my death and departure. That's what you need to think about now. Not about getting even or helping me to escape what's happening. It has to happen, Peter.

After this, Jesus is bound, arrested, and led to a man called Annas, the father-in-law of the High Priest.

And then we come back to Peter, who has been following Jesus as he is led away.

Let's pick it up in verse 15:

(SLIDE 10)

Simon Peter and another disciple were following Jesus. Because this disciple was known to the high priest, he went with Jesus into the high priest's courtyard, but Peter had to wait outside at the door. The other disciple, who was known to the high priest, came back, spoke to the servant girl on duty there and brought Peter in.

"You aren't one of this man's disciples too, are you?" she asked Peter.

He replied, "I am not."

We can read this and make an instant judgment on Peter. Coward. Quits when the going gets too tough. Unworthy to be a disciple. But I think this would be a mistake. See, I think Peter is scared, and he's trying to save skin here.

He doesn't want to face the same punishment. He isn't ready for that. He's close to Jesus, but keeping his distance at the same time. He knows what will happen if he confesses his allegiance to Him.

There's a bit of an interlude where Jesus is questioned by Annas about his disciples and his teaching, Jesus is then sent to Caiaphas the high priest, and we pick up Peter's story again in verse 25:

(SLIDE 11)

Meanwhile, Simon Peter was still standing there warming himself. So they asked him, "You aren't one of his disciples too, are you?"

He denied it, saying, "I am not."

26 One of the high priest's servants, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, challenged him, "Didn't I see you with him in the garden?" 27 Again Peter denied it, and at that moment a rooster began to crow.

Peter *denies* Jesus.

(SLIDE 12)

Three times. If you remember, earlier in John's gospel, Peter vows to lay down his life for Jesus and Jesus responds by telling Peter that he will deny him three times before a rooster crows. I imagine when Peter heard this he was shocked and in disbelief. There is no way I could deny you, Jesus. I've walked alongside you all these years, I've declared you as the Christ, the Messiah, I've watched you heal people and bring dead people back to life, I've left everything to follow you. So how could you say that I will deny you?

In Simon Peter's mind there is not a chance that he could do this to Jesus. No matter how tough the road ahead might get.

Let's pause here for a moment. When Jesus tells Peter he will deny him three times there's not a lot of pressure on Peter. Jesus has been walking with his disciples for many years and sure they've faced some issues over the years but nothing too major so far, and now Jesus is alone with them and teaching them in the comfort of an upper room. Things are pretty comfortable right now. So Jesus telling Peter that he will deny him just seems way out of context for Peter. Peter's given up everything to follow Jesus and this has become his life now. I mean Peter's in the inner circle with James and John, so how could this be?

When things are going well in our lives how often do we adopt a similar mentality to Peter? Things are easy at the moment, there's not much pressure at work or home, we give people around us our best, and we're not worried about the future.

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It's a she'll be right type of attitude that we're good at putting on.

I certainly experience this. Earlier this year I enjoyed a three week break. For the first week I stayed at home with my family and by the end of it I was starting to feel quite relaxed.

For the second week I went over to Melbourne and visited my brother and his family. This was a great time, great holiday – even saw some of the Tennis over there. For the third week I was back at home and starting to feel even more relaxed, enjoying my time with Roxy and the boys, getting them settled into their new school, and having fun as a family.

There was no pressure at all. My foot was off the accelerator of life. Everything was pretty relaxed, I must say. It didn't matter if there was a bit of mess in the house or if we slept in a little bit longer than usual. It was all good.

The next week it was time to get back into work and the routine of everything else. And I can't remember who I was talking to, but I've been back about a month now and it sort of feels like I never left. The deadlines have crept in again, pastoral situations have come back up, there have been meetings galore, this little thing called Easter camp to prepare for, basically the pressure of ministry and work.

On the home front it's been a busy month as well and I feel like my family have come off second best. So I've made a call in my life to not give them second best, but to care for them as much as I can, to not use home as a dump ground (which is my default), and to enjoy the time we get to spend together.

You can't really minister to others, or help others, if you're not ministering in your own home.

(SLIDE 14)

Coming back to Peter, Jesus has been ministering to him all throughout his time on earth, and it's been relatively relaxing for the most part. But now, the pressure is on for Peter. The warm, fuzzy feeling, the easy-going nature of life has all but disappeared. Jesus has been arrested and is on trial. The disciples are nowhere to be seen. Peter is all by himself.

Have you ever felt like that? That through circumstances either of your own making or others, you feel left out and by yourself. I certainly have. And it is quite a lonely place to be in, isn't it?

Peter is in that place. And when that rooster crowed, I think his heart literally sank. How could I deny Jesus? He means everything to me. I think after this Peter went through what we sometimes call the dark night of the soul. A time of wrestling with God and ourselves; a time of reflecting on how life is going, *really* going; a time of soul searching. And we'll leave Peter there this morning.

Back to Jesus, He is taken from Caiaphas to a man called Pilate. And Pilate questions Jesus about whether he is the king of the Jews and what he has done to deserve this fate. Jesus answers him:

(SLIDE 15)

"My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jewish leaders. But now my kingdom is from another place."

Pilate seems to find no fault in Jesus and nothing deserving of death.

(SLIDE 16)

In his mind Pilate *declares* Jesus innocent. He reminds the people of the Passover custom of releasing someone. Should he release Jesus? They are fired up and shout, "Not this man, release Barabbas!" Barabbas was a murderer. So instead of Jesus they want a murderer back on the streets. What is the people's response to who Jesus is?

(SLIDE 17)

People *despise* Jesus. In their minds he deserves to die.

Pilate has Jesus flogged and beaten. The soldiers put a crown of thorns and a purple robe on him. Pilate then presents Jesus before the people saying he finds no fault in Him. In other words, I have ordered him flogged and beaten, is this not punishment enough for this innocent man?

But they answer, "Crucify him!"

I imagine Pilate might have been thinking at this point, "This is crazy! This man has done no wrong. Why do the people despise him so much? What has he even done to them?"

So Pilate says to them, "You take him and crucify him. As for me, I find no basis for a charge against him." Again, Pilate declares Jesus innocent. The Jewish leaders insist, "We have a law, and according to that law he must die, because he claimed to be the Son of God."

This frightens Pilate and I think now he really feels for Jesus and his life, as the people are well and truly out for blood. So he asks Jesus, "'Where do you come from?'" But Jesus doesn't answer. Pilate asks him, "Do you refuse to speak to me? Don't you realize I have power either to free you or to crucify you?"

Jesus answers now. "You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above. Therefore the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin."

Pilate is amazed at this man before him and sets out to free him from here.

Pilate declares Jesus innocent.

But the people declare him guilty. And after a lot of back and forth arguing, Pilate reluctantly and finally hands Jesus over to the bloodthirsty people to be crucified. And we'll leave Pilate and the people there this morning.

It's all a little bit bleak really isn't it? Judas betrays Jesus. Peter denies him. Pilate washes his hands of him. The people despise him. Jesus is led away to be crucified.

All of these people or groups of people made up their own minds to the question, 'Who is Jesus to you?'

To Judas, he is a means to an end. A way to get ahead, make some money, and live comfortably. That didn't end well for Judas.

To Peter, he is the Lord, his teacher and mentor. Peter lost his way a little bit and denied knowing Jesus. But I have a feeling Peter will work his way through that dark night and get back to following Jesus.

To Pilate, he is an innocent man not deserving death. He is also a bit of an enigma and Pilate can't work him out. So he washes his hands of Jesus and gives him over to the people. I don't think Pilate was the same after his dealings with Jesus. And I hope he came to see the truth.

To the people around Jesus then, he is someone who has to pay for claiming to be the Son of God. They despise him and want to see him held accountable for these "crimes".

This is who Jesus is to them.

(SLIDE 18)

But the real question is "who is Jesus to you?"

The question I asked at the start was do you ever have those moments when someone close to you reveals how much you mean to them? These people in Jesus' life revealed how much He meant to them. Some, like Peter and even Pilate, showed how much they loved him and were on his side even though some of their actions were questionable. Others, like Judas and the people, showed that they were really out for themselves and used Jesus to get ahead or to satisfy their quest for supposed justice.

As we flip that on its head and follow Jesus from here to the Cross, we see how much we mean to God. How much He loves us and sacrificed for us. How far He was willing to go to allow us to have a personal relationship through His Son, Jesus.

This Easter season, take some moments to spend some time with Jesus. Tell him how much He means to you. Listen for Him telling you in response how much you mean to Him. And for us as a church, let's go forward knowing how much Jesus cares about every person here at OBC and how the next stage of our journey is in His hands.

(SLIDE 19)

So, who is Jesus to you?

I'm going to play a video now, a song called 'Jesus'. Let's listen to the words together and hear what God might be saying to us.