



SERMON COMMENTARY WEEK ONE- WHO IS JESUS?



Opener: (Video resource available under video folder)

Around the year 56 A.D. (*a little less than 2,000 years ago*), a Jewish man from Syria wrote a letter in Koine Greek to a house church in Corinth, a large commercial city in the Roman Empire. A town on the Eastern coast of Greece.

His letter included a Creed. A creed is similar to a poem - rhythmic, easy to memorize, like the "ABC song" or "Jack and Jill went up the hill." Historians and Bible scholars believe it is one of the earliest examples of a Christian Creed. A Jesus creed. A little rhythmic statement for a group of people who are largely unable to read.

Here is what the Apostle Paul wrote: ³ For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, ⁴ that He was buried, that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, ⁵ and that He appeared to Cephas (*Peter*), and then to the Twelve. ⁶ After that, He appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. ⁷ Then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles, ⁸ and last of all He appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born. -1 Corinthians 15:3-8

According to the Scriptures, this is Jesus Christ, the one who died for our sins. He was buried, raised on the third day, and He appeared to people (*lots of people*) after He was dead.

Now imagine hearing that for the first time.

Imagine the confusion. Dead men do not come back to life.

Imagine the doubt. How can someone die for *my* sins?

Imagine the awe. Someone predicted all of this in the Scriptures?

Imagine the wonder. Who is this person called Christ?

We believe,

Following the last steps of Jesus leads us to the first steps of new life.

This is why over the next month we are taking a trip back to the early 30s A.D. We will look at the *Last Steps* of Jesus on earth and the week leading up to Easter Sunday.



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We are going to examine the footprints of a few unique encounters, prophetic connections, and surprising situations that help to answer a question. Maybe the most critical question in the world. This is a question we believe defines your destiny and brings purpose to you today.

Exactly, **Who is Jesus?**



Set Up:

Aside (for podcast, online, other campus, or not-yet-believers listening):

If you find yourself struggling to follow Jesus or find your footing with the Church or a Christian faith because of some past hurt or bad experiences - we are so thankful you are joining us.

*We have some Good News! We believe the **Last Steps** of Jesus' time on earth tell a story and show all of us the way to a new life, promising forgiveness, peace, and freedom from all the missteps in our own lives.*

And while we hope this week helps you to see Jesus in a whole new way, we hope even more that you will want to take your next step in following Him.

Reset Moment:

Population scientists estimate that something close to 100 billion people have lived on earth, spanning all of time. For the next four weeks, we will follow the footprints of just 1 of the 100 billion.

This One is worshiped by Christians and is called the Son of God.

This is One that Muslims believe is the great prophet.

This One's impact is hard to quantify, even after His death, resurrection, appearances, and ascension.

Illustration: Many Faces of Jesus (maybe cycle through them one by one while laying out Jesus' story or make a collage of some of the different faces)

<https://tinyurl.com/2hkbe6ee>



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For almost two thousand years, artists have used their imaginations to reconstruct and capture the image of this one man. Of course, the first black and white photographs were not printed until the 1830s, and the first video was not made until the 1880s. History does not have any pictures or videos of Jesus.

And while we do have art from the first century, nobody during Jesus' lifetime made a portrait or carved a statue - though from what we know and read about His life, Jesus probably could not sit still for the 60+ hours it took to make a portrait.

So, **Who is Jesus?**

He was a Jewish man who lived in first-century Palestine. He did not come from a family of great wealth, and instead was a working man from His late teens to early 30s.

(pictures of tools or have some woodworking ones on a table)

The word describing His profession | **tekton** | is best understood as **manual labor, woodworking, and construction**. (**Blue Letter Bible, 1996**)

No Dremels or mitre saws, just awls, lathes, planes, and hammers made of forged stone and steel.

Around the time of His **Last Steps** on earth, Jesus is in his 30s but looks older to our modern eyes. In a time before medicine, SPF-30 sunscreen, and before orthodontists - Jesus' skin is tanned and aged, and His teeth are imperfect.

Like most other Jewish men from that region, He probably sported a beard and long sideburns, but surprisingly not long hair as many might believe.

Still, as much as we would love to know, nobody took the time to record all the details of Jesus' public appearances. Why would they? He was just a construction worker turned teacher from the backwoods of Nazareth (*the armpit of Galilee*).

But you know what is important about Jesus?

He looks like us. He is human. He has a face. He has a body. He eats fish and drinks wine. Jesus does not walk around with an ethereal glow and angels do not sing at every footstep. He does not have a hazy yellow glow around His head.



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When He stubs His toe on a rock, it hurts.
When a briar from an Acacia tree pricks His arm, He bleeds.
And Jesus has a mom.

He has a name. Jesus' name in Hebrew is Yeshua, which means Yahweh Saves. This wonderfully historic Hebrew name connects to Moses' chosen replacement as the next leader for the Jewish people: Joshua. It is a shortened version of Joshua. Mary and Joseph, his parents, were instructed to call him Yeshua (*Jesus*) in a dream (*Matthew 1:21*).

That is who Jesus is... *well, most of who He is anyway.*

But the real question is, *Who is Jesus to you?*



Story:

Even in His time on earth, people are inquisitive about Him. For three years, this man has been walking with a group of men and women from town to town. Spending almost all of His time in a 12 square mile area (*use the a similar size area of your city, county, Parrish, or state for reference*), He has been teaching about how to live in the Kingdom of God.

Taking Hebrew Scriptures and explaining them to people, He warns about following religious laws with an attitude of arrogance. Not just that, He also begins doing things people simply do not do.

What did Jesus do?

He walks on the Sea of Galilee.

He exorcizes demons.

He heals the blind and ill (*in some cases on the Sabbath*).

He feeds crowds of thousands of people.

He makes a man (*Lazarus from Bethany*) who was dead for days come back to life.

The last miracle leads us to where we will follow the beginning of the end and the *Last Steps* of Jesus. The third and fifth books in your New Testament (*Luke and Acts*) were written by a man (*Luke*) we think never met Jesus.



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Luke was a physician and a traveling companion of the Apostle Paul. And his two books (*sequels*) are a history of the Jesus movement, compiled after years of interviewing and fact-gathering.

¹ Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. ² A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; was a chief tax collector and was wealthy. ³ He wanted to see who Jesus was, but because he was short, he could not see over the crowd. ⁴ So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him since Jesus was coming that way. -Luke 19:1-4

Who was Zacchaeus?

A chief tax collector (*and very wealthy from it*), historians believe he was as short as 5'2" or so. Two thousand years later, it is hard for us to imagine someone of Zacchaeus' stature. Less for his height and even lesser for his station in life.

Joke:

Was he like the Sheriff of Nottingham from Robin Hood going door to door, filling up brown burlap sacks with gold coins?

Or was he more like the Monopoly guy with a top hat and monocle, just hoarding all the money?

It is not hard for any of us to imagine a tax collector as the villain. But maybe you don't know just how bad they can be...

Tax collectors in general were despised. They were extortionists. They preyed on the rich and the poor. They stole. They were dishonest. In fact, the Mishnah (*a book of Jewish instruction*) says it is not sinful to lie to a tax collector to protect your property.

Tax collectors collaborated with the Romans. The Romans did not respect them because they were traitors to their own countrymen. And guess what? Zacchaeus was not some random tax collector. He was *the* chief tax collector. Zacchaeus was a mob boss of a crooked and greedy first-century mafia.

Aside: *Like the scammers who call up your great-grandparents and convince them to buy \$5000 in Best Buy gift cards. He was the ultimate outcast.*

When we look at the last few interactions Jesus had with people in Luke 18 (*a widow, a tax collector, children, and a beggar*), it is basically a who's who list of the lowest-status people at the time.



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Now, in one of Jesus' **Last Steps**, He somehow manages to go one rung lower on the social ladder than all the people in **Luke 18**. What does this mean?

Jesus is someone who makes sure the Gospel is available to everyone.

In verse 3 of **Luke 19**, we see Zacchaeus is curious to see who Jesus is.

How about you?

Does the story and life of Jesus spark curiosity in you?

What would Jesus think or teach about social media, identity, racism, or any other number of issues that we seem to struggle with today?

Jesus is someone who attracts people and makes them curious.

You might find people who are done with the Church or no longer interested in Christianity (*the number seems to be growing everyday*), but people are still interested in and talking about Jesus even today.

Luke continues,

⁵ When Jesus reached the spot, He looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today." ⁶ So he came down at once and welcomed Him gladly. -Luke 19:5-6

Jesus is someone who is already looking for you (and everyone you know).

Zacchaeus may have been looking for Jesus, but Jesus was looking for Him first. Jesus is looking for our friends, our family, and people who are far from God. Everyone shares a Shepherd who is looking for them.

But watch this.

All the people saw this and began to mutter, "He has gone to be the guest of a sinner." -Luke 19:7

Jesus is someone who loves taking a sinner to dinner.

If Jesus was walking around today instead of all those years ago, He would not be making dinner plans with (*your name or another pastor's name from church*). He would not be making dinner plans with (*important Christian figure*). If you are a Christ-follower, He would not be making dinner plans with you.



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Can you imagine it? Being stood-up by Jesus for a fentanyl dealer.
For a human trafficker.
For a problematic Instagram Influencer.

Aside: "Oh, Jesus, anybody but them!"

Now that you know a little more about who Jesus is, what are you going to do about it?



Solution:

Reset Moment:

If you find yourself struggling with knowing what your next step in following Jesus is, let us help encourage you this week [insert instructions and details on how to access + Social Posts + Text Sequence]

This curious moment with Zacchaeus is one of those **Who is Jesus?** moments that puts a rock in your shoe. It bothers you; you cannot get it out; and most of all, you know it is there.

Which leaves us all with a choice. What are we going to do with that rock in our shoe? Here are some questions to help you follow in the Last Steps of Jesus and take your next step:

If Jesus loves taking sinners to dinner,

1. Who does God want you to invite to dinner (maybe even at their house) before Easter?

Look at what happens when Jesus invites the tax collector.

⁸ But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount"

⁹ Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham." -Luke 19:8-9

Now, let's compare Zacchaeus' story to a well-known story Luke shares just a chapter before these **Last Steps** of Jesus, in **Luke 18**.



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¹⁸ A certain ruler asked [Jesus], "Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

¹⁹ "Why do you call Me good" Jesus answered. "No one is good—except God alone. ²⁰ You know the commandments: 'You shall not commit adultery, you shall not murder, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, honor your father and mother.'"

²¹ "All these I have kept since I was a boy" he said.

²² When Jesus heard this, He said to him, "You still lack one thing. Sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me." -Luke 18:18-22

2. What is God calling you to do today?

Unlike the rich young ruler who keeps all the commands, Zacchaeus is a thug.

However, unlike the rich young ruler, Zacchaeus' spontaneous turn from his thuggish ways is as clear a sign of repentance as any in the New Testament.

How about you?

Whether you stopped following Jesus, or if you never did in the first place, you can follow Him by simply asking Him what your next step is, and then doing it.

Unlike Zacchaeus, this is the rich young ruler's response,

²³ When he heard this, he became very sad, because he was very wealthy. ²⁴ Jesus looked at him and said, "How hard it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God! ²⁵ Indeed, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God." -Luke 18:23-25

3. What are you holding back from God?

Is it money? Is it your time? Is it your joy?

For the rich young ruler, the cost of following Jesus is too high.

For Zacchaeus, the cost of following Jesus is a small price to pay for purpose and a relationship with the person of Jesus.

After he became sad, followers of Jesus seem bothered by the next step Jesus gave the rich young ruler,

²⁶ Those who heard this asked, "Who then can be saved?"

²⁷ Jesus replied, "What is impossible with man is possible with God."

-Luke 18:26-27



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But when we hold up the rich young ruler's response to Zacchaeus' response, Jesus clears it up for everyone. Following in His footsteps is only possible with God's help.

So, while the steps we need to take to follow Jesus may be difficult, Zacchaeus must be overjoyed to hear the Good News when ⁹ **Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come."** -Luke 19:9



Send Out:

Reset Moment:

Potentially consider sharing this part as the last component of the experience to tease next week and book end the experience in the story of Jesus' Last Steps.

²⁹ As [Jesus] approached Bethphage and Bethany at the hill called the Mount of Olives, He sent two of His disciples, saying to them, ³⁰ "Go to the village ahead of you, and as you enter it, you will find a colt tied there, which no one has ever ridden. Untie it and bring it here. ³¹ If anyone asks you, 'Why are you untying it?' say, 'The Lord needs it.'"

³² Those who were sent ahead went and found it just as He had told them. ³³ As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, "Why are you untying the colt?"

³⁴ They replied, "The Lord needs it."

³⁵ They brought it to Jesus, threw their cloaks on the colt and put Jesus on it. ³⁶ As He went along, people spread their cloaks on the road.

³⁷ When He came near the place where the road goes down the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of disciples began joyfully to praise God in loud voices for all the miracles they had seen:

³⁸ "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!"

"Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!"

³⁹ Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Jesus, "Teacher, rebuke your disciples!"

⁴⁰ "I tell you," He replied, "if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out."

⁴¹ As He approached Jerusalem and saw the city, He wept over it ⁴² and said, "If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace—but now it is hidden from your eyes. ⁴³ The days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment against you and encircle you and hem you in on every side. -Luke 19:29-42



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If you are not sure what this means, then make sure to join us next week as we continue to follow the Last Steps of Jesus.



Gospel:

In the last words Jesus is recorded saying about his time with Zacchaeus, He says, **"For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."** -Luke 19:10

If you still feel a little lost and are not quite sure if you are a follower of Christ, we have some Good News for you! Just like Jesus was looking for Zacchaeus before he even knew it, God is looking for you!

Even better, He wants to have a relationship with you. And just like the rich young ruler and Zacchaeus, each of us has a decision to make. Will we follow Jesus or go our own way?

If this week you would like to take your first step and begin following Jesus, the apostle Paul clearly lays out some of the first steps to take in Romans 10.

⁹ If you declare with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰ For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved. -Romans 10:9-10

So before we go, we want to give you a chance to take your next step with God. If you're ready - we're going to pray together because we do not want anyone to pray alone.

Prayer

[Give action steps for your church, i.e. raise hands, come forward for prayer, communication cards, etc.]



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Generosity:

Local Partner

Story Prompt: *Share a story or video of a local partner who is serving people who are different or might otherwise be seen as outsiders or outcasts.*

Check out our Generosity Partner Video Guidelines (located in general resources folder)!

[Give action steps for your church, i.e. passing buckets, bins in the back or lobby, online giving, etc.]

Thank you for walking in humility and service, and continuing your commitment to walk in faith and generosity!