

Who is this Man?

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[0 : 0 0] This is the evening service at Holy Trinity on the 4th of March 2001 This is the first in a series called Mark This Man The sermon today is preached by Paul Barker with the title of Who Is This Man?

and it covers Mark chapters 1 to 4 When important people come to town there's often a lengthy build-up We've seen it with the Grand Prix this weekend I guess For the last few weeks there have been advertisements for the Grand Prix and over the last few days on the news or in the newspapers we've seen Murray Walker arrive in town we've seen Michael Schumacher arrive and the Ferraris get unloaded from planes and so on If it's the palace that's sending a visit they usually send a preliminary corgi to sniff out the scene If it's Barbara Streisand there'll be advertisements in the newspapers trying to convince us that she's still worth hearing If it's a foreign cricket team there'll be a long con job to try and pretend that they're any good and worth going to see and think that they'll put up a fight against Australia The lengthy build-up before important people arrives includes press releases adverts newspaper articles sometimes interviews replays of previous visits government announcements from time to time and then of course when there is an arrival there's the media melee at the airport flashing cameras trying to get the first and the best pics of whoever it is that's arriving the red carpet the limousines waiting to whisk them away to some salubrious hotel that none of us could ever afford to visit let alone stay in and of course the ubiquitous sunglasses that famous people wear as they come out of aeroplane gateways

I must say whenever I arrive at Tullamarine I think I should be wearing my sunglasses and maybe there'll be a great crowd to wait for me but it never happens after the build-up often comes a surprise people comment about how old the Queen looks these days or how short she actually is how hopeless the music is at the concert how poor the visiting cricket team is there are often things that we should have known it's not as though the Queen changes height every time she does a royal visit it's not as though Barbara Streisand ever improves I mean she's always well I'll let you make your own mind up but sometimes not only are we surprised but when important people come to town sometimes there's even some hostility that might be engendered sometimes you even hear people booing visiting cricket teams for example I remember I think it's probably about 25 years ago when Frank Sinatra was in town and he I think left early and there was a great furore because he flew into a great rage about the Australian media and press and I have a feeling that one of the famous golfers of yesteryear

Lee Trevino did the same 20 years ago or so on well a few years before TV came the Messiah came to town he actually came to Galilee not Melbourne and there was a lengthy build up for him as well about 2000 years but of course we've got to bear in mind that communications were slower then so you couldn't get instant TV sort of press releases and so on and certainly the build up for the Messiah coming to town grew in intensity in the years when the Romans ruled Palestine they conquered it from the Greeks in 63 BC and in the following 70, 80, 90 years the build up for the Messiah almost reached fever pitch so much so that there were Messiah impersonators floating around from time to time trying to say that they were the person an early press release from Isaiah News Limited announced a forerunner for the Messiah in about 750 BC see I am sending my messenger ahead of you who will prepare your way the voice of one crying out in the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord make his path straight well Isaiah News Limited there was appealing back to two prophets in fact one called Malachi and one called Isaiah and it took 750 years for that person to arrive

John the Baptist was his name of course they didn't have modern air transport in those days and so it took a long time for him to actually arrive but when he arrived he also issued a press release anticipating the person to come he said the one who is more powerful than I is coming after me I'm not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals I have baptised you with water but he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit so that's the second press release announcing the Messiah to come and the third one's the most important of all because it was a rather booming voice from heaven it was actually God's voice this time to make sure that everybody heard and God said you are my son now at this point the Messiah had arrived in town but just so that we all got it right there was no doubting who he was a voice came from heaven at the beginning of his adult ministry you are my son the beloved with you I am well pleased three announcements one from the Old Testament one from John the Baptist the forerunner that the Old Testament also anticipated and then when the Messiah arrived on the scene a booming voice from heaven to confirm it all those words of God about the Messiah you are my son are actually confirmed later on at the very end nearly of Mark's Gospel there as Jesus hangs on a cross dying a Roman centurion not even a Jew says truly this man was the son of God so at the beginning and the end of Mark's Gospel we get a very clear declaration

[6 : 20] Jesus the Messiah is God's son we ought to be in no doubt about that and even though the question is who is this man we the reader know from the beginning it's been announced several times God's pronouncement has made it clear and by the time we get to the end of Mark's Gospel it's very clear truly this man was indeed the son of God when the Messiah came he issued his own press conference he's had people speak about him now it's his turn to speak and his first words are these the time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God has come near repent and believe in the good news that was an announcement not just about him giving good news but announcement about himself in effect that he is the good news and now is the time to repent and believe in him in the good news personified now expectations of what this Messiah would be like varied just as they are when any famous person comes into town for the first time what's he going to be like does he meet our expectations will he blitz the field or not there were many Jews probably even most of the Jews at this time we're talking about 30 AD or just before that who fully expected that the chief goal of the Messiah would be to overthrow the Roman rule that had been there for about 90 years or so most of those

Jews had in their expectations that when the Messiah came he would be an official figure who would mix with the rich and the famous who would affirm the leadership the Jewish leadership of the temple and the synagogues and so on but Jesus didn't quite meet their expectations on the one hand there are abundant miracles that left people agape with wonder at what he'd been doing the crowds were wowed but on the other hand the company that he kept raised eyebrows some of his actions seemed rather questionable so people pondered who is this man is he indeed the Messiah or not some of the things he does seem rather extraordinary but others seem rather questionable now there's no doubt that Jesus was a person of authority we saw some of that last week but let me recap after that initial announcement about what he's going to do we find that Jesus is up in Galilee and he calls four fishermen two pairs of brothers to follow him

I don't think that it's the case that he'd never met them before I suspect he had if we read I think John's gospel and put them together but certainly here out of the blue Jesus comes and says follow me and they leave their nets they leave their family business which in those days was very significant to keep in the family business line fishermen in their case and they follow Jesus they left everything for him and there is a picture of a person who's got great authority some might just say charisma that some people would be duped to follow him but certainly there is a personal authority there that these four fishermen accepted because they left their nets and their business and their families and followed Jesus Christ and then we find he's in a synagogue in a town called Capernaum on the shore of the Sea of Galilee and there he teaches in the synagogue and the people there are astounded at his teaching but the reason they're astounded is not because he's full of exciting stories or not because he's got a funny accent but because he has short sermons or something like that they're astounded at his teaching for he taught them as one having authority and not as the scribes that is the scribes and other teachers the rabbis would teach in effect by authority that is they'd be set apart or ordained or licensed or fully trained to do that

I guess there's a sense in which I preach here by authority that is by having an archbishop's license etc but Jesus doesn't teach only by authority but rather with authority that is it's not a sort of official position for him there is an authority inherent in him and his words that captivates his congregation and leaves them astounded at his teaching but not only that in the synagogue itself as we heard last week he casts out an unclean spirit and this again was something that the people were amazed about we're told in verse 27 of chapter 1 they say what is this a new teaching and with authority and he commands even the unclean spirits and they obey him no wonder his fame spread no wonder it goes on to tell us that throughout the whole of the region of Galilee in the north of the land of Israel or Palestine then

Jesus' fame was growing quickly and the crowds got bigger and then we find him just near the synagogue at the house of Peter one of the fishermen's mother-in-law it's probably a house that's been found today it's been excavated in recent years they're found on the inside wall of this house over which now there's a sort of hideous looking church but on the wall of this house some graffiti that is writing on the wall that acknowledges that Jesus is Lord and the dating archaeologically of that writing is the middle of the first century AD I think that's an astonishing archaeological find it is saying that in 50 AD thereabouts just 20 years after the resurrection in that building people were worshipping Jesus Christ and the archaeologists suspect that it could well have been Peter's mother-in-law's house because it's mentioned in the Bible and it's probably his home base that later got converted into a place of worship it's there for you to see today on the side of the

[12 : 54] Sea of Galilee in Capernaum but there he heals Peter's mother-in-law who had a fever but she's healed instantaneously there's no slow recuperation period instantaneously she is better and the crowds continue to get bigger and bigger and bigger I wonder how you'd react if I was to tell you that today we've had a series of phone calls this afternoon it's all true no it's not really Andre Agassi's next tennis tournament in Australia is going to be played on our tennis court here extraordinary isn't it isn't that fantastic news we'll be able to charge people they'll all come and crowd around watching him play and we'll raise enough money for our building project and what's more Russell Crowe is going to perform some theatre and he'll be in our main hall on our stage up there behind those curtains that we sometimes draw you wouldn't believe it would you because you'd think that if Andre Agassi was playing tennis in Melbourne he'd be at Melbourne Park some really super duper tennis court that can accommodate many many visitors and watchers who pay a lot more money than they'd ever come here to pay and if

Russell Crowe ever did any theatre in Melbourne well it'd be in the concert hall or it'd be in the Her Majesty's Theatre or the Regent Theatre or somewhere it's not going to be in the main hall of Holy Trinity Doncaster there are unlikely places to find the stars is what I'm saying and when we think of that there's something puzzling about what we've been reading about Jesus here because you'd think that if the Messiah came to town he would be at the Temple of Jerusalem the most important place but he's not he's at Capernaum a little tin pot hamlet village on the back roads in effect it's a little tiny border town of no consequence not in the Old Testament and even today nobody lives there except for some Franciscan monks and they're only there because he was there it was a really dumpy little place quite a nice view it was sort of lapping on the shores of the Sea of Galilee so I guess it'd be quite pleasant but it's not a place where you'd expect to find a

Messiah it's way out of the way I mean even Galilee's way out of the way the people in Jerusalem looked down on the people of Galilee it'd be like Jesus coming instead of Capernaum as though he came to somewhere like Orbost I mean it's sort of on the way into New South Wales through Gippsland I mean you know nobody thinks much of Gippsland I mean it's pretty backward isn't it you don't send Andre Agassi to play tennis in Gippsland do you sorry Fiona you get the point Jesus the Messiah has come to an unexpected place a rather lowly place in effect and there he teaches and preaches and performs miracles and sets up his home base in this little town of Capernaum and even though he travels for quite a while that's his base it's all around Galilee apart from little excursions down to Jerusalem but culminating of course in a trip to Jerusalem to die but also in these words that we've just been seeing we've heard we've seen just a skerrick of hint that something is wrong that there is opposition developing against

Jesus here because we're told that he preached as one with authority and not as the scribes now nothing more is said of that but throughout Mark's gospel we see that gradually there is opposition to Jesus and it comes from the Jewish leadership and the scribes are foremost amongst those who are opposed to Jesus no preacher likes another preacher coming into their territory and preaching better than them and these scribes presumably didn't like that either well in the next paragraph the last paragraph of chapter 1 two odd things happen in this paragraph Jesus heals a leper and that's a marvellous healing but the two odd things firstly Jesus touches the leper to heal him now that's significant because any respectable Jewish leader would do anything they could to avoid touching a leper because that would make them ritually unclean unable to be part of worship and sacrifices and synagogue worship and so on for at least a day if not a week

Jesus touches him in order to cleanse him so here he is associating with the down and outs in a way that is unexpected but in a way that not only heals the leper but actually transfers the uncleanness onto him and nothing much is said of it here but it's a glimpse of what Jesus ultimately will do in a far grander scale when dying on the cross those who believe in him find their own sin and guilt transferred onto him and themselves found sinless and guiltless before God just a glimpse of it here by touching this leper the other thing that's odd about this is that he commands the leper not to say anything now usually when an important person comes to town and they do a noble act like they donate some money to charity or they go and visit somebody in a cancer ward or the children's hospital or whatever they do but they tell all the

[18 : 25] TV cameras that's how we know because they want us to know that they're really decent people and they might be filthy rich but they're giving a little bit of their wealth away and we should be feeling very excited that they're such noble and generous people I don't mean to be too sarcastic but Jesus tells this man not to say a thing don't tell the TV cameras I don't want people to know that I've cleansed you a leper not because Jesus is ashamed of it but because he's trying to dampen down the rumours to stall the opposition that will inevitably fly at him and to give himself time I think to do the ministry he wants to before he dies well the next miracle is a well known one most of us if we ever went to Sunday school or probably taught it ad infinitum because it's got a Palestinian house flat roof stairs on the outside too big a crowd to get into the house so four men carry their sick friend a paralysed friend unable to walk on a stretcher bed up the steps of the outside across the flat roof of the Palestinian house they work out where Jesus is underneath and then they begin to dig through the dried up mud and twigs and no doubt

Jesus standing underneath is wondering what on earth is happening when it's all falling down on top of him while he's teaching the crowds inside and then they lower the man down on a stretcher in front of him and he heals him another healing but this one has a different sting in the tail this time Jesus says to the man who is paralysed not get up your well well he does say that but the key thing he says to him is your sins are forgiven and that's where the opposition begins in earnest against Jesus because in claiming to forgive him his sins is claiming divine prerogative only God can forgive sins every Jew knew that it was there in the Old Testament it is God's right and God's right alone to forgive sins and Jesus is saying your sins are forgiven now if I were to say to you your sins are forgiven you might say oh thank you very much it's very kind of you have a nice day how would you know you wouldn't really even if God were to say to us your sins are forgiven how would we know it's not as though some part of our body has suddenly become perfect but Jesus says to the man to prove that your sins are forgiven I heal you get up and walk and he did and the people were astounded but not everybody was astounded because there in the midst were the scribes of the

Pharisees and they began to mutter this man is blasphemous he's claiming to be God and therein is the seed of the charge that will ultimately lead him to the cross Jesus dies in the Jewish eyes for being a blasphemer for claiming to be God here just at the beginning of the second chapter of the gospel we've already seen the seeds that lead to its culmination on the cross the wrath of the Jewish authorities but also the astonishment of the crowds at the same time but of course another seed is found there as well because the whole point of this Messiah coming to town is exactly to provide forgiveness not by healing paralyzed people but providing forgiveness through dying on a cross here again we find a glimpse of what this Messiah is on about who indeed is this man now from this point on the opposition steadily increases in the next little section he calls

Levi firstly as one of to add to his disciples band and Levi was a tax collector and he sat down with tax collectors and sinners for a meal in verses 15 to 17 of chapter 2 and there are scribes around and they object to what he's doing and they ask a question why why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners and in the next paragraph Jesus disciples are not fasting when the Jews are fasting and again there is an objection in verse 18 this time people came and said to him why do John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees fast but your disciples do not fast and in the next little section verses 23 onwards this time Jesus disciples are plucking grain on the Sabbath and in verse 24 there's another objection this time from the Pharisees who say to him why are they doing what is not lawful on the Sabbath three paragraphs three objections why is this happening and three times Jesus responds by giving another clue to his mission when he eats with sinners and tax collectors he says this is what my mission's about I've not come to call the righteous but rather sinners and then when he is his disciples are plucking grain on our disciples are not fasting in verse 18 to 22

Jesus response indicates that he is the Messiah the bridegroom of the marriage feast of God and heaven that's why they're not fasting because Jesus is so important and then when the Pharisees object to the fact that the disciples are plucking grain on the Sabbath and breaking the Sabbath laws of Old Testament but more importantly also Jewish tradition from the Old Testament again Jesus gives a clue to who he is and he says about being the Lord of the Sabbath and then the next paragraph chapter three verses one to six Jesus this time heals a man with a withered hand on the Sabbath day and this time his opponents are watching and waiting for him to do something wrong there's no objection his opponents here are more or less silenced by Jesus events and him looking around steadily around the congregation in this synagogue Jesus heals and they plot to destroy him but the added intensity now of this opposition is seen in verse six when it's the

[24 : 43] Pharisees who conspire with the Herodians to kill him the Pharisees and the Herodians did not normally get on it's like saying Collingwood and Carlton supporters conspired to do something together not often that that will happen that's a trivial example I know but these are people from the opposite ends of the political and religious spectrum on in Israel in Jesus day those who are in favor of King Herod those who are fundamentally against him because he was semi-Jewish and because he did some bad things against the Jews and disobeyed the Old Testament and conspired with the Romans the opposite ends of the spectrum are combining to plot how to destroy Jesus here we see an escalation of the opposition Jesus now is really beginning to be in danger and we're only in chapter three this Jesus Jesus you see was not meeting the expectations he wasn't gracing the tables of the rich and famous he wasn't keeping the

Pharisees laws he was blaspheming and claiming to be God he was ruffling the ecclesiastical feathers on both ends of the spectrum but he was amazing the crowds and he was wowing them and wooing them they were growing and they came bringing all their sick and they loved to hear what he taught and to see the miracles that he performed who is this man surely he's mad well some people thought that they thought he was a religious nutcase chapter 3 verse 20 gives us that some of the people were saying he's gone out of his mind his family were trying to restrain him they seem to agree that he was mad the scribes from Jerusalem sort of agreed they didn't think he was just mad they thought he was actually bad so they said the scribes who'd come down from Jerusalem in chapter 3 verse 22 said he has Beelzebul and by the ruler of the demons he casts out demons Beelzebul is another sort of name alluding to

Satan or perhaps the lord of the flies he's worse than mad he's an agent of the devil he's bad and Jesus words in response to these accusations is he mad is he bad in verses 24 and 25 are very important if a kingdom is divided against itself that kingdom cannot stand and if a house is divided against itself that house will not be able to stand what Jesus is saying there is if I'm of Satan then the things that I've done my healings and so on are actually opposed to Satan so Satan would be opposed to Satan and would fall and it'd be nonsense what Jesus is saying is that my works my healing and my teaching is not Satan's work it's opposed to Satan's work in fact Jesus is alluding to the fact here that he's come to oppose Satan and evil that's why he's there that's why his words here are so important because they're giving us a very clear indication of what his mission is about to defeat the evil one to defeat

Satan but this is not a contest that has just begun if you go all the way back to almost the beginning of this gospel immediately after Jesus is baptized he goes into the wilderness the desert for 40 days tempted by Satan here we find Jesus and Satan in conflict right from the very beginning of Jesus ministry here we find it again in his words in chapter 3 and throughout this gospel time and again Jesus will be in conflict with Satan get behind me Satan those sorts of ideas and it is a conflict that Satan is trying to deflect Jesus from getting to the cross that's his job it's like playing a board game like risk when you're trying to stop one of your opponents from getting their pieces into Europe or into Asia or something like that you'll do anything to stop them Satan is doing anything he can in the in Jesus life to stop Jesus getting to the cross because there he knows Jesus will win the victory and at every point he's trying to deflect Jesus from that goal and at every point Jesus succeeds in resisting that opposition and here in these words to these Pharisees and other people who think he's mad or bad Jesus is making it very clear that he's actually opposed to Satan and evil that's what he's on about and it's on the cross in the end the climax in effect of this gospel that Jesus wins the final victory over Satan and evil now we should not be surprised at the opposition Jesus was facing here sometimes we think if he really is the son of God why is it that people opposed him why didn't they all like the crowds think he was wonderful and do what they said why is it that people were so opposed to him well as I news limited 750 years earlier had predicted just this Isaiah chapter 6 says that they may indeed look but not perceive they may indeed listen but not understand so that they may not turn again and be forgiven their words that

Jesus quotes in chapter 4 when he explains why he teaches in parables chapter 4 verses of verse 12 he's quoting from Isaiah chapter 6 and in that context of Isaiah chapter 6 750 BC Isaiah is being told by God that his words of gospel in effect will actually be met with deaf ears because God is judging sinful people who refuse to repent of their sins so what I what I was true for Isaiah is true for Jesus and it eventuates in Jesus life some people respond and follow him but many don't and many refuse to hear and in the end they oppose him even to the point of killing him on a cross the gospel produces no faith for them as God had predicted would be the case so many years before to Isaiah and throughout Mark's gospel we see those two groups the crowds full of adulation for Jesus but by and large the authorities and many others opposed to him to the point of killing him on a cross from time to time Jesus flees the crowd and he does so at the end of chapter 4 he gets in a boat and crosses to the other side of the lake he's asleep on the boat I guess we shouldn't be surprised given what he's been doing and the crowds that have been following him the Sea of Galilee is about the size of Lake Ilden except the

[31 : 45] Lake Ilden sort of like a cow's udder with sort of tentacles or pokey bits going all over the place but the Sea of Galilee is much more concise it's the shape of an oval in effect or or a teardrop it's surrounded by hills by and large but there are valleys going up some of the hills which mean that geographically all of a sudden wind can pick up that can be very strong it can go from being still to being very windy very quickly on the one side on the west on the east are the Golan Heights part of the territory that's hotly disputed between Syria and Israel today and it sort of provides I suppose a buffer for the wind that comes from the west through the Jezreel Valley and so on and stirs up the storms on the Sea of Galilee in this case even experienced fishermen Peter and James and John and Andrew for example are scared of this storm they must have experienced many storms on the Sea of Galilee this one scares them it is some storm and yet Jesus is asleep at the back of the boat they wake him up and say don't you care that we're going to die and Jesus just simply says chapter 4 verse 39 peace be still there's nothing surprising in his words but what's surprising is the reaction because it happened immediately just like Peter's mother-in-law was healed immediately without any long recuperation period this Sea of Galilee was instantaneously flat when I lived in

England each year I'd go for holidays to Wales where friends had a house and I'd go with a friend whom some of you have met and he's a keen photographer and just by this house we stayed in was a very beautiful little lake and some days the reflections in the lake were exquisite and one day well often many days I should say Ian would want to stop and take numerous photographs the first year away he realized having got home from holidays that there was no film in the camera and the second year I think he'd used old film so he had part of his youth group superimposed on this lake the third year we made a pointed effort to make sure we got the photos right and we were just about to take photos when a little speedboat went across the lake all the reflections disturbed we waited well over half an hour before that lake was calm so that we could take a photo with reflections in it well over half an hour and we probably could have waited longer except yours truly was rather impatient by this time for this lake for Jesus it was instantaneously flat a storm like that would have taken well well over half an hour before it died down so that the water was flat this is truly a miracle this is control over the weather that Rob gel never has they can't even predict it right but

Jesus controls it exactly and perfectly and the raw power of those words peace be still it's the power of God nobody else could do this only the creator God can control the creation the Old Testament made that clear so here to his disciples is a veiled claim to be divine to be exercising the power of God that no one else can ever do and the disciples on the boat who've seen his miracles and heard his teaching and been with him for some time by now who then is this that even the wind and the sea obey him who then is this that's what Mark is wanting us to ask and wanting us to answer in writing this gospel is he mad as some people in his family thought is he bad as the scribes from Jerusalem thought no Mark is wanting us to answer who is this man truly this man is the son of God God said it in chapter 1 the centurion says it at the end of the gospel when Jesus dies on a cross but more than that more than just saying who is this man there is also the implicit invitation to follow this man Jesus opening words repent and believe and then we see examples of disciples who leave their all to follow him we're meant to be like them but also we get a picture that evil spirits unclean spirits even obey Jesus if they obey him how much more us and now finally the wind and the sea obey him if the elements of creation obey this man how how much more us