

THE STORY

FINDING YOUR STORY IN GOD'S STORY.

Synopsis & Context – Session #24: No Ordinary Man

“Who do *you* say that I am?” This simple sounding question is very much at the heart of the entire New Testament, asking who is Jesus for you? Fearless and non-anxious, even in the face of direct danger, Jesus never shirks from his identity and purpose. Each of the four evangelists will portray him differently, allowing a different perspective of as to what it means that Jesus is the Christ.

One thing about this Jesus: He never invited neutrality. His followers will call him the Christ. His contenders called Him a blasphemer. Some were drawn to Him, while others simply looked upon him with contempt. His teachings were revolutionary and His miracles undeniable. How he proclaims his identity is different with each version of the Gospel except to say that his testimony was far beyond simply words.

Jesus attracted a following everywhere he went...along with detractors and antagonists, which were almost always the religious authority of the day. He often taught the people in parables, pithy stories that drew spiritual lessons from everyday life to reveal aspects of the Kingdom of God that is announced with Jesus. With simple illustrations, Jesus's teachings revealed that God's kingdom has come, while exposing the religious leaders' misguided view of religion. Jesus' trilogy on being lost and then found told of a lost sheep, a lost coin and a lost son and demonstrated the value God places on a repentant heart. In the story of the lost son, Jesus exposed the hard-heartedness of the older brother's self-righteousness, angered by his father's compassion. The audience is left to make a connection to the characters in the parable and those found in the world. As his popularity increased and so did his opposition. Yet Jesus' teaching ministry to the masses continued.

Jesus was a great teacher, but even his closest disciples struggled to grasp his true identity and purpose. He authenticated his words with miracles that should have made his authority irrefutable, but they too struggled to get out of themselves and their own limited view of themselves and the world. The disciples were awestruck when Jesus calmed a raging storm at sea. The people were confounded when he expelled demons from a possessed man into a herd of pigs, who promptly drowned themselves. Who was this man? He certainly wasn't looking or sounding like a Messiah should. The desperate came to Jesus for healing, and weren't found wanting. Jesus healed a woman with a bleeding condition, while pausing to restore her dignity and commend her faith. Meanwhile, the daughter of a synagogue leader named Jairus died, and yet Jesus revives her back to life. He heals two blind men, and the authorities cannot explain.

News about Jesus spread through villages and cities, homes and institutions. Even King Herod grew interested. He was haunted by the fear that John the Baptist might have returned from the dead, for he had ordered John's execution. Wherever He went, people gathered around Jesus. After one especially long day, Jesus feeds more than 5,000 with five loaves of bread and a couple of fish. The miracle was meant for more than filling empty stomachs. And yet as a result of his teachings, the people were divided. Many turned away, but those who truly believed remained. In one of his finest moments, Peter declares, “*You have the words of eternal life...you are the Holy One of God.*”

Many came to Jesus with Lower Story needs, but Jesus' mission was greater than any had imagined. He came to offer a life of faith – faith in unseen realities, faith in who he is, and what he could mean in their lives. The offer still stands.



Chapter #24: *No Ordinary Man* is 'woven' from selections from *Matthew, Mark, Luke and John*

Matthew 5—7, 14; Mark 4—6; Luke 10, 15; John 6

Plot Points for Chapter #24: No Ordinary Man

Jesus, preaching in parables, calls out those who have ears to hear. Jesus confronts the religious leaders, calling their external expression of obedience to account for their internal lack of compassion. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus announces the “constitution” of his kingdom. Jesus demonstrates his power over the forces of chaos—stormy seas, sickness, and even death.

Jesus’ ministry was composed of several different but complementary elements. He was always preaching, and his messages were often communicated through parables. These stories were more than simple illustrations designed to make his teaching more understandable to his listeners. In fact, the parables that Jesus told were often designed to conceal the truth they carried from those who were not seeking the truth. In addition to his parables, Jesus also communicated in more straightforward, easily understood ways, as we see in his Sermon on the Mount. Regardless of his style and method, his messages were always in some way about the kingdom of God.

Jesus’ ministry was also infused with miracles. The miracles of Jesus were a confirmation of his message, and each miracle was also a message in itself. His miracles were signposts directing the attention of those watching to the great day when all things will be made new. The miracles were also testimonies to Jesus’ identity. For instance, when Jesus sat on a hillside and fed a multitude with five loaves and two fish, he demonstrated the kind of King he was and challenged people to seek the true bread that would satisfy their spiritual hunger, himself.

As observed in the preceding chapter, Jesus’ relationship with his disciples was at the heart of his ministry. In particular, the twelve apostles were a central focus for his work. Jesus took time out from his public ministry to explain his more difficult sayings to his disciples. He traveled and spent time with these disciples, and he devoted his three years of earthly ministry to sharing his day-to-day life with them. Ultimately, he was preparing them to “catch” his life and pass it on to others.

Cf. Barr, Adam Exploring the Story: A Reference Companion (Story, The). Zondervan.

God’s Story – YOUR story!

- **What is the image you carry of Jesus? How would you describe him from that image?**
- **Has that image changed over time? Is our reading affirming that pre-existing that image or evolving it? (How so?)**
- **In what ways is the message of Jesus easy to understand? (What makes it so?)**
- **In what ways is the message of Jesus difficult to understand? (What makes it so?)**
- **Do you find “The Parable of the Sower” helpful to your faith?**
- **What lessons do you feel we glean from “Peter Walking on the Water” for your own life?**