

Jesus The King: Understanding The Life & Death Of The Son Of God

Discussion Guide

“My purpose here is to try to show, through [Jesus’] words and actions, how beautifully his life makes sense of ours.” – Tim Keller

Chapter 1: The Dance

Read Mark 1:1-4

“Mark calls Jesus in the very first verse “Christ” and “Son of God”.

“Mark roots Jesus as deeply as possible in the historic, ancient religion of Israel.”

“Son of God is an astonishingly bold term...It is a claim of outright divinity.”

What do we learn about Jesus here?

The Dance Of Reality

Read Mark 1:9-11

“Just as the original creation of the world was a project of the triune God...so the redemption of the world, the rescue and renewal of all things that is beginning now with the arrival of the king, is also a project of the triune God.”

“The Christian teaching of the Trinity is mysterious and cognitively challenging. The doctrine of the Trinity is that God is one God, eternally existent in three persons. That’s not tritheism, with three gods who work in harmony; neither is it unipersonalism, the notion that sometimes God takes one form and sometimes he takes another.”

“Mark is giving us a glimpse into the very heart of reality, the meaning of life, the essence of the universe. According to the Bible, the Father, the Son, and the Spirit glorify one another.”

“To glorify others means to unconditionally serve them, not because we're getting anything out of it, just because of our love and appreciation for who they truly are.”

“In Christianity God is not a static thing... but a dynamic, pulsating activity, a life, almost a kind of drama. Almost, if you will not think me irreverent, a kind of dance.” – C.S. Lewis

“A self-centered life is a stationary life; It's static, not dynamic. A self-centered person wants to be the center around which everything else orbits... The Trinity is utterly different. Instead of self centeredness, the Father, the Son and the Spirit are characterized in their very essence by mutually self giving love. No person in the Trinity insists that the others revolve around him; Rather each of them voluntarily circles and orbits around the others.”

Let's discuss Keller's efforts to define his understanding of the Trinity.

Entering Into The Dance

“What does it all matter? It matters more than anything else in the world. The whole dance, or drama, or pattern of this three-Personal life is to be played out in each one of us.” – C.S. Lewis

“If this is ultimate reality, if this is what the God who made the universe is like, then this truth bristles and explodes with life shaping, glorious implications for us. If this world was made by a triune God, relationships of love are what life is really all about.”

“God must have created us to invite us into the dance, to say: If you glorify me, if you center your entire life on me, if you find me beautiful for who I am and myself, then you will step into the dance, which is what you are made for. You are made not just to believe in me or to be spiritual in some general way, not just to pray and get a bit of inspiration when things are tough. You are made to center everything in your life on me, to think of everything in terms of your relationship to me...That's where you'll find your joy.”

What does this matter for you and me? How to we “enter the dance” of the Triune God.

Dancing Into Battle

Read Mark 1:12-13

“Mark is showing us in these two lines that even though ultimate reality is a dance, we're going to experience reality as a battle... The wilderness isn't just a random detour into trouble – it's a battleground. Temptation isn't impersonal – there is an actual enemy doing the tempting. Mark treats Satan as a reality, not a myth.”

“God was saying, ‘Because you love me, don't eat from the tree – just because I say so. Just to be in relationship with me. Obey me about the tree, and you will live.’”

Satan never stops testing us. He says, “This idea of self-giving love, where you make yourself totally vulnerable and you orbit around other people – that'll never work.”

“Satan tempts Jesus to step out of orbit around the Father and the Spirit, and around us. To make sure everyone else centers on him, and to protect himself.”

“God said to Jesus, ‘Obey me about the tree’ – only this time the tree was a cross – ‘and you will die.’ And Jesus did. He has gone before you into the heart of a very real battle, to draw you into the ultimate reality of the dance.”

In what way is Satan's temptation of Jesus in the wilderness similar to the first temptation of Adam and Eve?

How do you think we would have done in Adam and Eve's shoes? (But wait, they didn't have shoes!) Yet how did Jesus do in his temptation trial?

Chapter 2: The Call

Read Mark 1:14-15

“The first time we hear Jesus' voice in Mark's gospel, he says, ‘Repent and believe the good news!’”

“Gospel means news that brings joy. This word had currency when Mark used it, but it wasn't religious currency. It means history-making, life-shaping news, as opposed to just daily news... A gospel is an announcement of something that has happened in history, something that's been done for you that changes your status forever.”

How would you describe the terms “repent” and “gospel” to someone outside of Christianity?

To understand why Christianity is good news we must understand the bad news of what happened to us. What was that?

“Genesis chapter three tells us the next part of our story: that we have each chosen to be our own king. We have gone the way of self-centeredness. And self-centeredness destroys relationships. There's nothing that makes you more miserable (or less interesting) than self-absorption: how am I feeling, how am I doing, how are people treating me, am I proving myself, am I succeeding, am I failing, am I being treated justly? Self-absorption leaves us static; there's nothing more disintegrating...When we decide to be our own center, our own king, everything falls apart: physically, socially, spiritually, and psychologically. We have left the dance.

What then do we need and long for?

“But we all long to be brought back in. This longing is imbedded in the legends of many cultures...A true king will come back, slay the dragon, kiss us and wake us out of our sleep of death, rescue us from our imprisonment in the tower, lead us back into the dance. A true king will come back to put everything right and renew the entire world. The good news of the Kingdom of God is this: Jesus is that true king.”

With Keller’s thoughts in mind, how would you explain the difference of Christianity from other religions?

Following The King

Read Mark 1:16-20.

What was unique in the way Jesus called his first disciples?

“Jesus immediately calls people to follow him. This is unique in Jewish tradition. Pupils chose rabbis; Rabbis did not choose pupils...But Mark is showing us that Jesus has a different type of authority than a regular rabbis. You can't have a relationship with Jesus unless he calls you.”

“In traditional cultures you get your identity from your family. And so when Jesus says, “I want priority over your family,” that's drastic. In our individualistic culture, on the other hand, saying goodbye to our parents isn't a big deal, but for Jesus to say, “I want priority over your career” – that's drastic.”

Some people would call this fanaticism, and counsel you to take the path of moderation. Is that what Jesus does?

“What's the solution to fanaticism? Many would say, ‘Well, why can't we be in the middle? Moderation in all things. Not too zealous, and not too uncommitted, being right in the middle would be just right...But Jesus doesn't say to the crowd, ‘Look, most of you can be moderate, but I do need a few good men and women who really want to go all the way with this discipleship.’ He says, ‘Anyone.’”

Why does Jesus talk about hating others?

“Jesus is not calling us to hate actively; he's calling us to hate comparatively. He says, “I want you to follow me so fully, so intensely, so enduringly that all other attachments in your life look like hate by comparison.” if you say, “I'll obey you, Jesus, if my career thrives, if my health is good, if my family is together,” then the thing that's on the other side of that if is your real master, your real goal. But Jesus will not be a means to an end; He will not be used. If he calls you to follow him, he must be the goal.”

So why is this not fanaticism?

“Does that sound like fanaticism? Not if you understand the difference between religion and the gospel...The gospel isn't advice. It's the good news that you don't need to earn your way to God. Jesus has already done it for you. And it's a gift that you receive by sheer grace-through God's thoroughly unmerited favor. If you seize that gift and keep holding on to it, then Jesus call won't draw you into fanaticism or moderation. You will be passionate to make Jesus your absolute goal and priority, to orbit around him. Yet when you meet somebody with a different set of priorities, a different faith, you won't assume that they're inferior to you. You'll actually seek to serve them rather than oppress them. Why? Because the gospel is not about choosing to follow advice, it's about being called to follow a king.”

Following The Thread

Read then discuss the beautiful retelling of the George MacDonald story, *The Princess And The Goblin* on pp.24-26.

“Jesus says, “Follow me. I'm going to take you on a journey, and I don't want you to turn to the right or to the left. I want you to put me first; I want you to keep trusting me; To stick with me; not turn back; not give up; turn to me in all the disappointments and injustices that will happen to you. I'm going to take you places that will make you say, “Why in the world are you taking me there?” even then, I want you to trust me.”

“Jesus kingship will not crush you. He was crushed for you. He followed his thread to the cross so you can follow yours into his arms.”

Chapter 3: The Healing

Read Mark 2:1-15

“Jesus knows something the man doesn’t know – that he has a much bigger problem than his physical condition...The main problem in a person’s life is never his suffering; it’s his sin.”

Why is the main problem not our suffering, but our sin?

When the Bible talks about sin it is not just referring to the bad things we do...it’s ignoring God in the world he has made; it’s rebelling against him by living without reference to him. It’s saying, ‘I will decide exactly how I live my life.’”

“Jesus says, ‘When I heal your body, if that’s all I do, you’ll feel you’ll never be unhappy again. But wait two months, four months – the euphoria won’t last. The roots of the discontent of the human heart go deep.’”

Example: Story of struggling actors who then become famous. “When they actually got the fame they had been longing for...they became insufferable: unstable, angry, and manic. Not just arrogant, as you might expect – worse than that. They were now unhappier than they used to be.”

“When God wants to play a really rotten practical joke on you, he grants your deepest wish.”

The Bible says that our real problem is that every one of us is building our identity on something besides Jesus...You’re looking to that thing [success in your field, a relationship, healing] to save you from oblivion, from disillusionment, from mediocrity. You’ve made that wish into your savior.”

Most of us think we can save ourselves, and use religion as a boost to get us through serious problems. Why do we do this? And does this work?

“Many of us first start going to God, going to church, because we have problems, and we’re asking God to give us a little boost over the hump so that we can get back to saving ourselves, back to pursuing our deepest wish. The problem is that we’re looking to something besides Jesus as savior.”

Biblical Support For The Doctrine Of The Trinity

1. Scripture clearly teaches that there is one God. Deuteronomy 6:4, Isaiah 46:9
2. Old Testament passages suggest a "plurality" within God's nature (yet not a plurality of Gods.) Genesis 1:26, 11:6-7, all of chapter 18; Isaiah 6:8
3. Although the New Testament never uses the word "Trinity", nor is there an explicit statement of this teaching, there are two categories of evidence which support the doctrine.

- a. "Formula" verses making mention of the three persons of the Trinity.

1. Matthew 28:19
2. Mark 1:9-12
3. John 14:6-9, 16-18
4. Acts 20:28
5. Romans 15:12-13, 30
6. 1 Corinthians 12:4-6
7. 2 Corinthians 13:14
8. Hebrews 9:14
9. 1 Peter 1:2

- b. Scripture ascribing divinity to God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.