

# identity parade

"Well, officer, he was tall. Blond hair, blue eyes. Or was it dark hair? Come to think of it, he was pretty short. Medium build..." The trouble is, if you have no idea what a suspect to look like, you'll have trouble recognising him when he's staring you in the face.

In this study, we're going to look for clues to the identity of Jesus. It's the dominating question in Mark chapter 5 through to 8. Just who is this man? There are plenty of hints - if you know what to look for!

Target Passage: Mark 4:35-5:20

Background Briefing Papers: Psalm 107:23-30, Isaiah 51:11-16

## background investigation

Suspect Makes Waves...

Meet God. He's the one who makes the world and rules it. He's the one with absolute power over all creation. He's the LORD who chose Israel as his special people and watched over them. Read about THE LORD at work in Psalm 107 verse 22-30.

Who was it who spoke and stirred up the waves?

How do the sailors in the storm feel?

Who do they cry out to, and what is the result?

Take a look at Isaiah 51:11-16. This passage paints a big picture of God. "What have you got to be fearful of," says God, "if you trust me?" Why do you fear men, yet forget your creator? Don't cower in fear, for I am the \_\_\_\_\_ who \_\_\_\_\_ (v15). The \_\_\_\_\_ is his name.

Here is the one who speaks and stirs up the waves, who speaks again and stills them! Here is the one who is the shelter for his people Israel - so they need not fear!.

Who is this?

Read Mark 4:35-41. What three points of similarity do you notice between this passage and the passages you've just read from the Old Testament?

In the light of the Old Testament passages, why does Jesus seem surprised at the disciples' fear?

What is the answer to the question the disciples ask in verse 41?

We know this, but obviously, the disciples haven't figured it out. They're terrified - and it's easy to sympathise with them. However, what does their fear reveal about the progress of their faith?

What lessons about fear and faith can we learn from this?



Follow that thought...

As he writes, Mark is very concerned that we readers catch on to the importance of working out who Jesus is. As usual, the demons already know...

How does the demon possessed man describe Jesus in Mark 5:7?

In Mark 5:19, Jesus tells the man to go and tell his family how much the Lord (God) has done for him. What does he do instead? Who does HE think Jesus is?

According to Mark 6:14-16, who are people saying Jesus is?

Who does Herod think he is?

Are any of these definitions big enough?

Much later, in Mark 8:27-30, Jesus asks his disciples if they've finally figured things out. He asks two questions...

Who do PEOPLE say that I am? \_\_\_\_\_

Who do YOU say that I am? \_\_\_\_\_

"Christ" means "the one anointed to be God's King." David was a "christ" after he was anointed by Samuel to become Israel's king. He didn't take the throne for quite a while, and yet he was "God's anointed one." Peter has recognised that Jesus is heading for a glorious future - but Jesus has a surprise in store... this "Christ" must suffer and die! It's not the sort of glory Peter has in mind! So even at this point, Peter and the disciples haven't got the picture.

Figuring out who Jesus is...

Often, theological books - and Christian experts - spend a lot of time trying to "define" who Jesus is. How does the fact that he's "the Son of God" mean that he's also "fully man"? How does his "divine nature" combine with his "human nature." A number of the historic creeds try to define these things in useful ways. It's funny, though, that the gospel writers DON'T. They simply tell the story of the way Jesus gradually "disclosed himself." Often, it's only when we have the Old Testament clues in mind that we'll fully appreciate how very big the picture is that's being painted! Rather than giving a "definition" of Jesus as "God-in-the-flesh," we're confronted by someone doing the very things God is said to do... like speaking to waves. Even if you don't understand the creeds and definitions, even if the Jehovah's Witness at the door argues you into circles... try putting yourself in the shoes of the disciples, watching Jesus, and growing in amazement as you piece together who he is. Whatever definition you come up with, it just gets bigger and bigger and bigger!

Think it through...

How big is your own mental picture of Jesus? Is he GOD to you? (What's your mental checklist for measuring who your God is?)

# unchain my heart ...

It takes more than a new tax system to unchain a human heart! Our bondage runs far deeper than just the mortgage and the monthly bills. The demons who Jesus confronts are a spectacular example of the way he sets people free from bondage. But they're just the very visible front men for an enemy faced by all of Israel. The real wickedness can be seen in the hearts of those who seem very religious. We're going to backtrack a little to link a passage we skipped over back in Mark 3 with some dramatic events in Mark 5...

## Strong and Stronger ...

Seeing Jesus at work must have been unsettling. When you think about it for a moment, the fact that people who you knew were on the devil's side kept bowing at his feet would make it look very much like he was a very important demon! Either that, or someone demons found very scary!

Read Mark 3:20-30.

What two explanations are given for what Jesus is doing?

He's \_\_\_\_\_

He's \_\_\_\_\_

The name "Beelzebub" means "Lord of the House."  
What point is Jesus making about himself in the story of the strong man's house?

If the Devil is the strong man, what is needed to set people free from his rule?

## The Biggest Evil

Who has the most chance of being saved... someone possessed by an evil spirit, or a Jewish professor who accuses Jesus of being on the side of the devil? Find your answer in v28-30.

The danger of generalising...

Lots of Christians agonise over whether they've committed the "unforgivable sin." PLEASE NOTE that what Jesus says here is directed to a particular issue in a particular situation. Mark even emphasises this:- "He said this BECAUSE they were saying..."

What would it take to be "stronger" than the strong man? Turn the page and find out.

### Demons today

How much interest should Christians take in "demons" these days? It's one of those issues that seems to create a barrier between "those who do" and "those who don't." On the one hand, there are churches that specialise in "deliverance ministries," and want to blame demons for every sin, every illness and every problem. Exorcisms are often seen to be the answer... perhaps complex rituals, or simply set prayers to drive out the demonic influence.

At the other extreme, there are those who dismiss the idea of "evil spirits" completely, and say that people who seem to be under this sort of influence are simply mentally ill.

A more balanced, biblical view, would seem to be that the demonic influences Jesus met were very real. People were truly under the control of spirits that were agents of Satan. However, these demons clearly cowered at the presence of Jesus. The first demon Jesus encounters says, "What do you want with us... have you come to destroy us?" And the answer is, YES. That's exactly why Jesus came - to set people free from the power and influence of the devil. His victory was at the cross. So... here are some key principles...

1. Don't be afraid of the power of evil. Jesus has conquered it already.
2. Don't get involved in things like exorcism. There's no formula or instruction to be involved in this sort of thing in the bible! Jesus simply gave demons simple commands. Note, though, that was HIS authority, not ours.
3. DO pray and share the gospel! All we can do is what we usually do with people who are outside God's kingdom - that is, pray for them, tell them about the victory of the cross, and call on them to submit to Jesus.

## Binding the strong man...

Jesus says that no-one can steal the devil's possessions - those under his rule - unless he first "binds the strong man." But who is strong enough to do that? Read Mark 5: 1-20 and find out.

a. Here's a man who is obviously beyond human help... not just possessed by one demon, but a whole Roman legion of them! How does Mark get across the idea that this situation is beyond anyone's control?

b. Remember what Jesus said? "You can't enter the strong man's house and carry off his possessions unless you first tie up the strong man." What does Jesus demonstrate about himself and Satan in his confrontation with "the legion"?

c. What clues are there in this passage that demons and the devil are in the "death business"?

d. In the case of this man, notice the before-after contrast.

e. There are two reactions to Jesus when people see his authority at work. What are they? (v17,18)

f. These days, people often say, "If only I'd been able to see Jesus at work first hand, then I'd believe." What evidence is there that seeing the power of Jesus first hand is no guarantee of anything?

## ultimate conquest

Clearly, Satan is in the death business - his demons seem to love dwelling among the tombs in the cemetery, and the herd of pigs "self destructed" under their influence. Jesus, on the other hand, is the Lord of calm, of order, and of life. Much as it often looks like the forces of darkness are too strong for us to overcome, Jesus shows that HE is the one who can fight the strong man for us. All this is just a prelude to the final battle at the cross, where Jesus takes our guilt and sin on himself, faces death head on, and overcomes it.

What do you think we should be doing to "unchain hearts" today?

Even if we don't often encounter demons first hand, what other opposition to God's kingdom will there be?

How will this study help you to have a balanced view of this opposition?