

A Spiritual Spring for the Week

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Sermon Text: Mark 6:1-6

Sermon Title: "We Know Who He Is without Credentials" (Traveling through Mark's Gospel)

Morrow Presbyterian Church, Morrow, GA

June 10, 2012

Whenever a person goes for a job interview, he or she must show his or her credentials to the interviewer. The person looking for employment has to put together a resume of all the education, all the positions, and all the experience he or she has accumulated over the years. Credentials are essential, since they give employers a better idea of who the person is.

Of course, those credentials must be true. A person cannot make up credentials on his or her resumes. Several weeks ago, Yahoo had to let go their new CEO, because he said on his resume that he had a computer science degree from some university. The man never earned such a degree from any university. Yahoo was embarrassed by the embellishment, the former CEO tried to cover up the mess but still was out of a job, and the news was on that story like brown on toast.¹ Credentials are important to us. That's why doctors, dentists, and lawyers nail their diplomas to their walls. That's why certain people have letters

¹ The Week, May 25, 2012, "Business: The news at a glance."

after their names such as MD or CPA.²

Jesus returns to his hometown, and we would think he doesn't need any credentials. We would think that people know who he is. They should trust him because he is one of their own, and because he gets along with everybody. Those are credentials enough.

However, it seems that the people in Jesus' hometown have a picture of who he is supposed to be. They have images of the Jesus they grew up with: the Jesus who used to be a little boy, and then a teenager, and then a young man. Jesus doesn't come back to his hometown and fit those pictures. He is altogether different from how they used to imagine him, and they do not like what they see.

Jesus returns home, and people are disappointed. His credentials as healer and teacher don't matter. They will not accept him as God's Son or even honor him as a Prophet.

One of my Bible commentaries notices a pattern in Mark up until now, when it comes to people questioning Jesus' credentials.³ The commentary looks at four different occasions when people asked about Jesus. For example, in Mark 1:27, they ask,

² Medical Doctor and Certified Public Accountant.

³ David E. Garland, *The NIV Application Commentary: Mark*, cf. 234.

“What is this? A new teaching and with authority!” This question surfaced when Jesus first preached in the synagogues. The next occasion is in Mark 2:7: “Why does this fellow talk like that? He’s blaspheming! Who can forgive sins but God alone?” The next is found in Mark 4:41: “Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him?” That particular question came from the disciples, after Jesus calms the storm on the Lake. And lastly, Mark 6:3, what we read today: “Isn’t this the carpenter? Isn’t this Mary’s son and the brother of James, Joseph, Judas, and Simon? Aren’t his sisters here with us?”

There are at least four different times in which people question who Jesus is. They want to see his credentials. They want proof of who he claims to be. And even then, they don’t want to believe it. They cannot accept who Jesus is. Even the disciples in the boat that one dark and stormy night are nervous around Jesus. Mark says they were exceedingly terrified, to the point of wanting to flee from the boat and leave Jesus behind.⁴

Now, my Bible commentary takes this questioning of Jesus a bit further. It places beside these four human question four statements from the demons.

⁴ The two Greek words that are placed next to each other in Mark 4:41 seem to mean that the disciples had fear upon fear with the desire to flee quickly.

The demons also comment on who Jesus is in Mark's Gospel up to this point. In Mark 1:24, just before the people ask, "What is this? A new teaching and with authority!" the demon in the man with leprosy says, "I know who you are – the Holy One of God!" In Mark 1:34, Mark simply states that Jesus would not let the demons speak, for they knew who he was. They knew his credentials. In Mark 3:11, the unclean spirits cry out, "You are the Son of God." And lastly, Mark 5:7, the demons called Legion say, "What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God?"

Four occasions when people question Jesus, and don't really care to know who he is. Four occasions when the demons know who Jesus is, and don't really care to have him around. What is striking is that the demons bear testimony to Jesus' credentials. They are witnesses to who Jesus is: the Son of the Most High God, the Holy One of God. They know what he is capable of doing: dragging them out of people's bodies, and even throwing them into pigs who drown themselves.

It's a wonder why God didn't use demons to preach the good news of God – they seemed to have done a better job of it, especially in Mark's gospel. People could have listened to these testimonies, even from demons, and might have tested the claims. They could

have given Jesus a chance to touch their lives, to make a difference in the ways they lived. But people did not hear. We do not understand why they could not see, and we wonder if they ever saw. What does it take for them to recognize Jesus? What does it take for us to see?⁵

Why do we follow Jesus? We can assume that we aren't here this morning, because we have nothing else better to do. Sure, we could be in bed sleeping right now. We could be on the golf course, losing our golf ball in the woods or the lakes. We could be at the grocery store right now, because apparently WalMart, Kroger, and Publix are the other churches open on Sunday morning that people love to visit. But we aren't doing those things with all those other people. We are in church, in the presence of God, worshipping our God and wanting to know more about God.

Why? What is it about Jesus' credentials that make us trust him?

Jesus never visited a major university to receive his masters or even his doctorate, so it isn't for a lack of diplomas that we follow or not follow him. Jesus never went through the same formal training that the Rabbis had to endure, so he could rightly be called

⁵ Garland, *Mark*, cf. 234.

Teacher; and yet we call him Teacher, Rabbi, as well as Savior.

Is it Jesus' experience in ministry that makes us follow him? When we visit a surgeon, we want to know how long he has been in the business. When we call a plumber or an electrician, we want to know how many jobs he has completed successfully. Jesus was in ministry only three years. When I was in ordained ministry for three years, I was still wet behind the ears. I've been a minister now for over 17 years, and I can definite point back to moments in my history in which I gained much-needed experience. Jesus was in ministry for only three solid years, but we don't consider that he had lack of experience. His time in ministry isn't even a factor for us, when considering his credentials.

When was the first time we followed Jesus? Chances are we started following him when we were at a low point in our lives. Chances are nothing else was working out for us, and we needed help badly. Jesus came along, and we listened, and we knew he could help. For me, it was when my parents separated, and my dad no longer lived in the house with us. For one person, it was when he lost himself in a bottle, and couldn't get himself out. For another person, it was

when she lost her job and couldn't find another one for quite a long time. For yet another person, it was when everything was going well for her, partying all night, sleeping around with different people, traveling from one city to another, making good money, and yet she still felt an empty pit in the middle of her heart that she could not fill. Most likely we were at some low point in our lives, so low that we didn't think we could get any lower. And then Jesus showed up. He didn't flash a diploma in our faces. He didn't impress us with his long history of accomplishments. He didn't even command us at first to call him Lord or Master, before he helped us. He simply stretched out his hand and said, "Take it. Let me help you up." And we took his hand. We let him lift us up. We haven't let go since.

Sadly, none of those people in Jesus' hometown who questioned Jesus seemed to have ever touched the hand of the one they mocked. It seems they never saw his compassion and felt his warmth, and allowed him to open their hearts. "Who, what, how" is all they could say. Those people just didn't shut up, and allow Jesus to lift them from their low moments.

And chances are that, after Jesus lifted us up from our lowest moments, nothing else seemed to make

sense. The ways of the world, as we call them, felt uncomfortable, irrational, and we definitely did not want to keep them. “My life is my life” – that statement is one of the great foundations of society. “My life is my life, and I can do with it as I please. Life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.” And yet, when Jesus lifted us up, that essential foundation that was taught to us for so many years doesn’t make sense. My life isn’t my life – it is God’s life. We are not here to pursue liberty and happiness – we are here to pursue God, and let him set us from sin, from whence comes eternal happiness. It always has been this way. We do whatever at the pleasure of our Lord. That makes sense.

“Live for the moment” is another essential tenet of our society. That isn’t right. Live for God, today, tomorrow, and forever. I am my own truth, nobody tells me what to do, and I should love things and use people. Our society espouses such claims. The belief in our world is to put self first, and everything and everybody in second place. God might not even factor in – sadly he doesn’t for many people.

Chuck Colson passed away not too long ago at the age of 80. We know him as a top-notch preacher who founded a ministry in prisons, so inmates may hear about Christ. Before he became a preacher, in the

1970s he was a top aide to President Nixon, and one of the cronies who used political power for the sake of the president. Colson himself was known as the President's Hatchet Man, who compiled an Enemies List of political opponents to go after, and who once said that he would run over his own grandmother to keep President Nixon in the White House. Power, prestige, take advantage of the situation, take advantage of people: these are all Chuck Colson knew for a time in the 1970s.

But then he heard about Jesus Christ. The Gospel came to him from a friend, Thomas L. Philips, at the time the chairman of the board of the Raytheon Company, the company that invented the microwave oven in 1945. Thomas L. Philips approached Colson with C.S. Lewis' book, *Mere Christianity*, and it changed his life. Christ lifted up Colson from his grave of selfishness. Although he went to prison for the Watergate cover-up, Chuck Colson never forgot what Philips had once told him, "All the material things in life are meaningless if a man hasn't discovered what's underneath them," namely God.⁶ Everything is meaningless without Christ. We are God's truth, God tells me what to do, and thus we have the ability to love people and use things for the glory of God. When

⁶ Charles W. Colson, *Born Again*, pictorial section of book.

Christ lifts us up, we know this instantly.

We don't need credentials with Jesus. When he touches us, we know who he is. When we hear his words, we know they are true. He won't lead us astray.

Maybe this is why Mark wrote his Gospel the way he did.⁷ He didn't begin it with the birth of Christ, like Matthew and Luke, because it is possible that Mark didn't need to prove who Jesus is with historical evidence. Mark didn't need to quote all sorts of Old Testament passages to prove Jesus' religious significance and to make him credible in the eyes of faithful people. Mark presents Jesus with the witness of one person (not two), with a baptism in the Jordan, and then with these words, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe the good news of God." Apparently for the people of Jesus' hometown, that wasn't enough. They needed more. However, for us, who have heard and want to keep on hearing, it is enough. Christ is enough for us to accept and believe and follow all the days of our lives.

⁷ Garland, *Mark*, cf. 235.