

Is Jesus the Son of God?

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Four Lakes Church of Christ
Madison, Wisconsin
October 28, 2018



This morning, we are back to our brief series of lessons with the goal of strengthening our faith, with the goal of helping us reach out. We noted that the world around us is much more similar to the crowd in Athens in Acts 17 than to the crowd in Jerusalem in Acts 2, and we noted that Paul's approach is somewhat different from Peter's approach. Peter appealed to the word of God, because those who heard his message believed in the word of God. Paul, though, in Athens, did not. The Athenian philosophers did not respect God's word, so Paul had to back it up a few steps. And so, instead of quoting scripture, Paul quoted one of their own poets, and he tried to reason with them. Following Paul's lead, then, we started several weeks ago with some reminders as to why we believe in God. We looked at the Law of Cause and Effect, we looked at the idea that Design Demands a Designer, and then we looked at the Existence of Morality, and the idea that morality itself could not have evolved on its own.

Two weeks ago, we moved along to the next logical step as we looked at some evidence that the Bible really is the word of God. We learned that the Bible is a supernaturally perfect book. The Bible is actually a collection of 66 books written by 40 different authors over a period of roughly 1500 years. And although the authors wrote from several different continents, in three different languages, many of them coming from vastly different social and economic backgrounds, we cannot find a single contradiction. There are no historical errors; but instead, over and over again, archaeologists have confirmed the Bible as being historically accurate. We also noted that the Bible contains a number of scientific and medical facts that are hundreds and even thousands of years ahead of their time. Two weeks ago, we closed by looking at the accuracy of prophecy in the Bible - another confirmation that this book we study comes from God.

Today we move forward. Once we've established that there is a God, and once we've established that the Bible is his word, the next logical step is that we come to understand that Jesus is the Son of God. This morning, then, I want us to briefly consider the question: Is Jesus the Son of God? And as we consider this question, I would invite you to turn with me to a passage in Matthew 16 where Jesus asks his own followers an interesting question. In a sense, Jesus takes a poll. Of course, with an election less than two weeks away, we know something about polls, don't we! Somebody came by our house yesterday wanting to know how we'd be voting. I just assured the young man, "I'm an election official. I'll be there." But in this passage in Matthew 16, Jesus is also looking for some input. If you will, please look with me, then, at Matthew 16:13-20 (p. 1530). As we consider this question, let's notice what happens - Matthew 16:13-20,

¹³ Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, He was asking His disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" ¹⁴ And they said, "Some say John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; but still others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets." ¹⁵ He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" ¹⁶ Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." ¹⁷ And Jesus said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. ¹⁸ I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of Hades will not overpower it. ¹⁹ I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven." ²⁰ Then He warned the disciples that they should tell no one that He was the Christ.

- I. **As we look at this question concerning who Jesus really is, I want us to notice, first of all, that there are MANY OPINIONS.**

I would just briefly note here at the beginning of this part of the discussion that no one suggested that Jesus didn't exist! Of course, today there are a few people who might suggest this. But even most skeptics today will admit that there really was a man named Jesus who lived and taught and had some followers around 30 AD in ancient Israel. Not only do we have the four gospel accounts, but we also have a number of secular references, many of them from Jesus' enemies, documents that verify his existence as an historical figure. We have a reference from Josephus, a Jewish historian who wrote in the First Century. In documenting the history of that time, Josephus documents the trial of James, and identifies him as "the brother of Jesus, the so-called Christ." Even Josephus refers to the "marvelous deeds" that were done by Jesus. Beyond this, we have some other Jewish writings by the rabbis and religious leaders, arguing about Jesus and what to do about him. They refer to his miracles as being "magic." They refer to how Jesus claimed to be God, and so on. So here are some of the Lord's own enemies who basically confirm his existence for us. We also have some writings from some Roman government officials early in the second century, a governor, for example, who wrote to the emperor, asking for advice on how he should deal with Christians who meet on an appointed day to sing songs of praise "to Christ as if to God." Another Roman historian refers to a movement started by "Chrestus," who "was executed at the hands of the procurator Pontius Pilate in the reign of Tiberius." Another Roman writer refers to how the Emperor Claudius expelled the Jews from Rome, because they "were continually making disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus." Luke refers to this in Acts 18:2. Beyond this, I have put an article in the cubbyholes today that was also sent out to most of you by email last night and also posted on the church's Facebook page, an article from Apologetics Press that gives quite a bit more information on the proof that is out there for the historical existence of Jesus.

So, since we cannot really get around the fact that Jesus was a real person, we get back to his question here: Who do people say that I am? And we find that even at that time, people had some widely varying opinions, ranging from John the Immerser, to Elijah, to Jeremiah, or one of the prophets. And what this tells us is: People's opinions can often be wrong! In fact, all of these are wrong! Jesus certainly had some similarities to these men, but what we feel about something is not the same as being right about something! Many years ago when I was in 4-H, we had some kind of annual meeting, and I remember a member of our club brought brownies to the event. But what we didn't know is that she had accidentally used white pepper instead of sugar in that recipe. There is apparently a difference between white pepper and sugar! She thought she was using sugar, after all, it looked very similar, but it was not sugar. This kid was mistaken. In the same way, many people will have opinions about Jesus that are wrong. That doesn't mean that they aren't sincere, decent,

genuine, law-abiding people, but many around us (even today), are wrong, just as many misunderstood Jesus 2000 years ago.

II. And this leads us to what happens next as Jesus presses further: Yes, this is what other people say, but what do YOU say? And at this point we have PETER'S CONFESSION, "YOU ARE THE CHRIST, THE SON OF THE LIVING GOD."

And what's amazing is: Jesus accepts this! Jesus does not argue with Peter's conclusion, but he goes further, and he praises Peter for coming to this conclusion. He praises Peter for reaching this conclusion, because the fact that Jesus is God's own Son is the kind of truth that is revealed. In other words, this isn't something Peter could have known just from looking at Jesus; but instead, this is a truth that came from God himself. And of course, for those of us who believe that the Bible is the word of God, we now have evidence - we have a written record, eyewitness accounts of Jesus' miracles, and his perfect life, and his supernaturally perfect teaching, we have eyewitness accounts of his resurrection, and so on. But, for those who might still have some level of doubt about this, and especially for those who might want to just think of Jesus as a good teacher, but not necessarily God, I want to remind us of a challenge that's been proposed through the years, probably most famously by C.S. Lewis in the early to mid-1900's. Jesus is the only leader of a major world religion who actually claimed to be God, so how do we handle that? It's either true or it's not. The challenge is: If he is not God as he claimed to be, then he is either a liar (a great deceiver), or he is insane (that is, he actually thought he was God, but he wasn't). Sometimes the argument has been summarized as, "Liar, Lunatic, or Lord?" And that might be a rather crude way of looking at it, but it does make sense. In other words, we really do need to choose. We can't just say that Jesus was a good, moral teacher. Because, if he really wasn't God as he claimed to be, then he's not a good teacher at all. He's either a deceiver or he was terribly mistaken, even deluded. If he knowingly lied, then he is the world's greatest hypocrite, the most famous deceiver of all time. He would also be the world's greatest fool, since he knowingly died for something he knew to be a lie. Or, if he truly believed that he was the son of God but wasn't, then he must have been suffering from some kind of serious mental illness. And yet when we look at the four gospel accounts, they don't read at all like someone who is either lying or mentally ill. So the conclusion must be that Jesus really is the Son of God. And I know this doesn't necessarily prove anything for some people, but it does give us something to think about. We can't just dismiss Jesus as a good person, or a nice guy, or a good moral teacher. Either he is the Son of God, or he isn't, and if he isn't, then he is either terribly mistaken (even to the point of being mentally ill) or he is a liar, he is no longer good. Obviously, though, we as Christians believe (like Peter) that Jesus is the Son of God.

III. And this leads us to the rest of this passage as we find that THE CHURCH IS BUILT ON THIS TRUTH.

Jesus blesses Simon Peter and makes a play on words based on his name (in verse 18), when he says (literally), ***"You are Peter (a little stone), and upon this rock (a boulder, or bedrock) I will build My church."*** Some people make the mistake of thinking that Jesus is promising to build his church on Peter. He doesn't say that. Instead, Jesus actually promises to build his church on the truth that He is the Son of God. And just as he promises, Jesus does build his church on this truth. He promises to give Peter the ***"keys of the kingdom of heaven."*** This is where people get the idea that Saint Peter is the gatekeeper of heaven, and so when you die, Peter is the one who gets to decide whether you are allowed in. But that's not what Jesus is saying here. The kingdom is the church, and it seems that Peter is the one who will have the privilege of opening the door into that kingdom. And that is what happens - first, to the Jews through Peter's sermon in Acts 2, and secondly, to the gentiles, as Peter explains the gospel to Cornelius in Acts 10.

There is so much more we could say about this, but the point for us this morning is: The church is built on this truth, that Jesus is the Son of God. And today, we enter the church the same way they did: Based on our belief in Jesus as the Son of God, we repent of our sins and we allow ourselves to be immersed in water for the forgiveness of our sins, just as Peter preached (and as he wrote) nearly 2000 years ago.

Conclusion:

Over the past few weeks, then, we have looked at some practical lessons that will hopefully help us reach out to the world around us. Today, it doesn't always make sense to quote scripture to people who don't believe the Bible is from God. So, we have looked at some reasons why we believe in God, we have looked at some reasons why we believe the Bible is the word of God, and today we've looked at some reasons why we believe Jesus is the Son of God.

We started this morning by thinking about opinion polls. Today, Jesus still wants to know, ***"Who do you say that I am?"*** It doesn't really matter what other people think, because he is asking each one of us. It is a very personal question. It's a question that nobody can answer for us. My wife can't answer it for me. I can't answer it for my children. Your parents can't answer it for you. There is a time coming when all of us in this room will stand before God all alone, and on that day, all of us will give an account for how we have answered this question in this life.

As the Son of God, Jesus came to this earth to give up his life for us. We respond with obedient faith. If you would like to study further, we hope you will get in touch. If you have something we need to pray about, we would invite you to write your concern down and bring it to the front. But if you are ready to obey the gospel right now, you can let us know as we sing this next song. Let's stand and sing...

To comment on this lesson: fourlakeschurch@gmail.com