

Jesus
“The Tipping Point”
John 8:48-59

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Who Did Jesus Claim to Be?

We learned last week that the content of the four Gospels is historically reliable. When we read these, we have access to what Jesus said and did. It’s not the kind of history a modern person would write but it is reliable history as those of the time understood it. What this means is that we must pay careful attention to what Jesus said about himself. It will do little good to try to understand what others thought about Jesus.

What did he claim about himself?

Jesus claimed to be God. Many people are unaware of this but it’s clear in the Gospels. In fact, Jesus made two kinds of claims to divinity: direct claims, and indirect claims. His most direct claim was when he took the name of God as his own in the Gospel of John.

“I Am”

In this long, running debate with the Jewish religious leadership – a debate that goes on throughout the whole of the Gospel of John, Jesus reaches the tipping point. He takes authority over Abraham saying that Abraham rejoiced to see Jesus’ day. This is significant. Do you remember what God said to Abraham? One day, through your descendants, I will bless every family on the earth! Finally that promise has come true—in Jesus! The long awaited Messiah. All the nations and people of the entire world will be blessed through this man. That’s what Jesus was affirming. He was saying, “I’m the fulfillment of the promises made to Abraham.” Then he said something that shocked the religious leaders. They said, “How can you be greater than Abraham! Jesus replied, “Before Abraham was, I AM. This says two things – before Abraham existed, Christ existed and he’s also using the name of God for himself.

In Exodus 3:13 God reveals himself to Moses in the burning bush. God has commissioned Moses to set the people of Israel free from slavery in Egypt. Moses doesn't want to go, so he stalls, saying, "Well... who should I say sent me?" God answers by giving his name – I AM" or Yahweh, which means "I am who I am", or I will be what I will be. Therefore, Jesus wasn't just saying he existed before Abraham, he was using God's name for himself – a name so sacred that the Jewish people at that time didn't even pronounce it out loud. They would say "The LORD", but they would never say Yahweh! Here Jesus not only says it out loud, but uses it for himself. This could not be more clear – Jesus made a direct claim to be the God who created everything and everyone. The religious leaders reached the tipping Point and they turned against him.

Jesus also made indirect claims to divinity

To forgive sins – In Mark 2:1-12. Jesus healed the paralytic by saying, "Your sins are forgiven..." The religious leaders criticized him angrily saying "Who can forgive sins but God alone?" Well, that's the point Jesus was trying to make – he was God in the flesh! With the authority to forgive sins.

To judge the world – Matthew 25:31-32. Jesus claimed to have the authority to judge the world. This is a whopper if not true. He claimed that one day he would sit on a throne and all the people of the world would come to him and he would pronounce what they did as right or wrong. He also made it clear that what happens then depends on how we respond to him in this life.

The power to heal – Mark 3:1-6. Jesus healed a man with a withered hand on the Sabbath. So Many times Jesus healed people. I know these miracles are challenges to our scientific mind-set, but clearly, it was a sign of his divine nature.

Power over nature – as when he calmed the storm.

His words were the words of God. To see him was to see God, to believe in him was to believe in God. Let's be clear – this is what Jesus claimed and the disciples of Jesus came to believe – he was and is God. But anybody can make the claim to be God. Through the years there have been a few who have made this claim, though none of the founders of other religions made it – not the Buddha, not Mohammed, not Confucius. A few Hindu gurus have made the claim – but where are they today? What the gurus meant by that is not at all what Jesus meant. They meant they were one with the cosmic nothingness that pervades the universe.

Jesus meant that he was the second person of the personal God, who made all things and is distinct from the universe, but who made it. A few deluded people totally out of touch with reality have thought they were God, but they are never listened to, for obvious reasons.

Anybody can CLAIM divinity – Jesus proved his claims: He proved them in his life – even Jesus’ enemies couldn’t get around the beauty of his life – the friend of sinners, the one who welcomed the lepers, the one who forgave even those who killed him. He proved them in his character – He was love incarnate, and grace undisguised. He was brave, he was fearless, he took on the powers and walked with the powerless. In his words – his teachings – no one spoke as this man – ever. His words have the ring of truth and we know it. He proved it in the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies – over 300 hundred specific prophecies about the Messiah were fulfilled in Jesus’ life. On the day of his death, he fulfilled more than 29 of the prophecies, and it won’t do to claim that he planned them all – many had to do with his birth – which he couldn’t have manipulated if he tried! And above all he proved it in his resurrection from the dead – one of best attested events of human history, though we can’t explain it, it is clearly historical.

Jesus was also fully human – he wasn’t one who couldn’t accept or understand our humanness, though he was without sin. This means everything depends upon our response to him!

C.S. Lewis famously put it this way:

I am trying here to prevent anyone from saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him (Jesus): “I’m ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don’t accept his claim to be God.” That is the one sort of thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic – on the level with the man who says he is a poached egg—or else he would be the devil of hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon; or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about him being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.

We are faced, then, with a frightening alternative. This man we are talking about either was (and is) just what he said or else a lunatic, or something worse.

Now it seems to me obvious that he was neither a lunatic or a fiend: and consequently, however strange or terrifying or unlikely it may seem, I have to accept the view that he was and is God. God landed on this enemy-occupied world in human form.¹

The Tipping Point

So here we are: We have covered the utter uniqueness of Jesus Christ in human history, we have established that the Gospel accounts about him are historically reliable and can be trusted to convey his actual words and deeds, we know that the Bible texts are amazingly accurate and have not lost their meaning through the years or translation.

And Jesus claims to be God, as well as fully human in every way except sin. This is the tipping point: What will you do about all this? What will you do about Jesus?

The religious leaders of his day reached the tipping point and turned away – they rejected him. Many today don't so much reject – though a growing number do—as they discount his claims and ignore him. It's a tipping point. Which way will people go?

And where will we go? Setting Jesus aside as an ancient and distant figure, no more or less important than any other religious teacher? Or will we bow before him and surrender our lives to him as Lord and God?

¹ C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Touchstone, 1980). pp. 56-57.