

The Story / The Heart of the Story
Sermon 4: Jesus: The Son of God
March 22, 2015

“Jesus Is” video ...

... Do you buy that?

- ... I know he has sense of humor (we looked at it last week), but do you think he finds that funny?
- ... Do you think God is good with that?
- ... Do you think that’s good enough?
- What would you write?
- Do you think it matters what you would write?

I was digging around the internet, looking for “life’s biggest questions.” Here are a few of the “big questions” I found. These are questions that some of you lay awake at night pondering:

- When a cow laughs, does milk come out its nose? You ever lay awake wondering that?
- Or, Is it okay to shoot tourists during tourist season? There’s a logic there, isn’t there?
- Or, Can a vegetarian eat animal crackers? You ever wondered?
- Or, If you throw a cat out a car window, does it become kitty litter? I think it would.
- Or, If a synchronized swimmer drowns, do the rest have to drown too?
... Big questions.

I actually found a few of the “big questions” a bit more serious. You’ve probably pondered these:

- Mac or PC? How many Mac? How many PC?
- Dogs or cats? We’ll have to have a special elders meeting to determine whether cat people are welcome here.
- Can Kentucky go 40-0? How many of you have them winning it all?

But seriously, I was really thinking more in terms of questions like these:

- How’d we get here? I don’t mean, how’d you get to church. I mean how did all this happen? How’d any of this get here?
- Is it on purpose? I’m talking about God’s purposes. Are we here on purpose, or are we just accidents?
- Are we free? Are we genuinely free to choose our own path? Or are we actually kind of like robots – just cause and effect.

- Is there really a right and a wrong – are there things that are right and wrong for all of us? And who gets to decide?
- And what happens after we die? Is that it? Or is it just starting?

Actually, all of the biggest questions can be distilled down to these three:

- Is there a God?
- Is he the God of the Bible?
- And, Is Jesus him? Or part of him?

Those are the biggest questions of all, guys. Answer those -- in fact, all you really need to do is answer just the last one -- and you've got answers to most of the rest. Not whether Kentucky can go 40-0, but the rest of the really big ones. Which is why the turning point of the stories of Jesus in the Bible happens at a place called Caesarea Philippi, a town to the northeast of Galilee.

Now this is near the end of his public ministry. Jesus has been teaching, and doing miracles, and preparing his disciples for almost three years, when he asks them two questions. Here's the first: "Who do people say that I am?" (Matthew 16.13) "You know they are talking about me. You have heard what they're saying about me. Who do they think I am?" And the public opinion was split, on Jesus. Always has been, always will be. So they said, (Matthew 16.14) Well, "Some of them say you are John the Baptist, back from the dead." Which is a little weird, since John baptized Jesus? "And others say Elijah, or Jeremiah, or one of the other prophets ... back from the dead." Which I guess that makes a little more sense, if you believe God can do that kind of thing.

But that's kind of an easy question: "What do others think about Jesus," "Who do they think he is." There's no pressure on me when I just report what someone else thinks. Here's the big one, here's the one that settles everything else: Jesus says, (Matthew 16.15) "Who do you think I am?" Well ... Who do you think he is? Seriously. And here's what you have to get. Who you think he is will not be measured by what you say about him. It will be measured by what you do with him. Because actions speak way louder than words.

John Fyffe recommended an interesting book to me. It's called, Spy the Lie. It was written by some ex-CIA dudes, whose job it was to detect lies. These guys are polygraph, and interrogation experts. Well, they talk about that oath

you've seen on TV in one of the courtroom scenes on Law and Order. Or, maybe you've actually been in court and you've taken this oath: "Do you solemnly swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God." The guys in the book argue that this oath is simple and brilliant, because it covers every kind of lie we tell.

- I swear to tell the truth: that covers lies of commission – when I just flat out lie; straightforward, bald-faced lies.
- I swear to tell the whole truth: that covers lies of omission. You see, sometimes we are deceptive, not because of what we say, but because of what we leave out. We don't speak the whole truth.
- I swear to tell nothing but the truth: they call those "lies of influence." That's when we avoid the truth by changing the subject. I ask, "Are you cheating on your wife?" He answers, "You realize my wife and I have been happily married for 14 years!" That's deception.

Well, we didn't exactly lie to you last week. Everything we said about Jesus was true. Jesus was an extraordinary teacher: because he taught with authority. And Jesus worked extraordinary miracles. But more than that – he did them with such authority ... because he was no ordinary man. That's all true. But we didn't tell you the whole truth, because we left the most important part out. Intentionally ... because that's what this week is for. You see, you can admit that Jesus was an extraordinary teacher, you can even admit that he performed some amazing miracles – but if that is as far as you go with Jesus, you are in trouble.

- Mohammad thought Jesus was an extraordinary teacher, and probably worked miracles. Mohammad thought Jesus was a prophet of God. Which is the truth ... it's just not the whole truth.
- Gandhi said, "I like your Christ... A man who was completely innocent, offered himself as a sacrifice for the good of others, including his enemies, and became the ransom of the world." Which is the truth ... but it's not the whole truth. Gandhi was no Jesus follower.
- Einstein said, "I am a Jew, but I am enthralled by the luminous figure of the Nazarene. Jesus is too colossal for the pen of phrase-mongers, however artful." He admired Jesus, he acknowledge how amazing he is. Which is the truth, and an excellent way to blow him off ... which Einstein did.

You see, it is not enough to call Jesus an extraordinary man, a great teacher, a genius moralist, a protector of the marginalized, the supreme picture of

love, incredibly courageous, maybe the greatest spiritual leader ever. That's all true, but it is not the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.

So, who do you say he is? Not with your words, but with your actions. Well, here's what Peter said, there at Caesarea Philippi. Peter said, (Matthew 16.16) "I think you are the messiah. Not only that, I think you are the Son of the Living God." And do you know what Jesus said to him? Jesus said, "That's it! That is the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth – so helped you God... Because he's the one who gave that to you." (Matthew 16.18) "And on that truth," Jesus said, "I will build my church, and not even the powers of hell will not be able to overcome it."

And Peter wasn't the only one to come to that conclusion. One of his disciples was a dude named Nathanael. Jesus just blew his mind. Nathanael said, "Rabbi (Jesus) ... you are the Son of God; you are the messiah, you are the king of Israel." (John 1.49) He got it.

John was another of Jesus' disciples. Jesus blew his mind. At the end of his book about Jesus, here's what he says. He says, "I have written all this stuff down so that you may believe, so that you can have faith, so that you can trust that this Jesus really is the messiah; and not only that, that this Jesus is actually the Son of God." That's the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. All his disciples got it!

But those are just guys. And we are pretty free to dismiss the opinions of other men. Maybe the disciples were just gullible. Maybe they weren't careful thinkers like some other people are ...

- Like ... Deepak Chopra. Ever heard of him? He's a spirituality guru made famous by Oprah. He says, "I like Muhammad a lot, because he's like us more than anybody else. Jesus is just so exalted, and Buddha is just so exalted, it's almost beyond our reach. Muhammad is more human, more self-doubting, even self-tortured at times." Really?! Muhammad is more human; so I like him more, than Jesus ... Do you think God will accept that, if Jesus really is his son?
- Or maybe like a Marilyn Manson (he's quite a character). He says, "Jesus is a half-naked guy, hanging, nailed to a cross, and then people wear that around their neck." Do you think God is good with that, if Jesus really is his son?
- Or maybe like a Kathy Griffin. She was getting some award when she said, "A lot of people come up here and they thank Jesus for this

award. I want you to know that no one had less to do with this award than Jesus. He didn't help me a bit... So all I can say is, 'suck it, Jesus! This award is my God now!'"

So you have the opinions of Peter, and Nathanael, and John; and you have the opinions of people like Deepak Chopra, and Marilyn Manson, and Kathy Griffin. How do you decide? Flip a coin? But listen: there is a much bigger question than "Who do you think he is?" That's important, but this one is infinitely more important: Who does God say that Jesus is? God's opinion kind of trumps my opinion, or your opinion, don't you think? Who does the "in the beginning God" say that Jesus is? Believe it or not, we have the direct words of God about Jesus twice.

Two weeks ago I preached the first part of the sermon standing over there, next to the baptistery. How many of you guys were here last week? Wasn't that incredible? Last week 15 people followed the example and the instructions of Jesus last week and were baptized right there in that baptistery! It was incredible – one of the most amazing experiences I have had here in 20 years! Isn't God amazing!

Anyway two weeks ago, right over there, we dug into that famous incident in the life of Jesus when a guy named John the Baptist baptizes Jesus. It's a weird scene. (Matthew 3.13-14) It says that Jesus went down from Galilee to the Jordan River to be baptized, to be dunked under the water by John. And John is freaked out! "This isn't right." John says. "You should be baptizing me, Jesus; I have no business baptizing you. This is wrong!" (Matthew 3.15) You see, John was out there baptizing people who were repenting, for the forgiveness of their sins. And Jesus was the only one ever who didn't need any repenting. He had no sins to forgive. I need to repent, I've got sins to forgive; you need to repent, you've got sins to forgive. But Jesus was the only one ever to walk on this earth flawlessly. So John pushes back. But Jesus says to John, "It's not about what you think is right; it's about what God wants. So, just get it done!"

And John did; he plunked him. (Matthew 3.16) And here's the part we need to focus on this morning. When Jesus came up out of the water, John and others saw something, and they heard something that blew their minds. They saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and landing on Jesus. And they heard a voice from heaven say, "This one, this one is my Son; this one is the Son I love." Now I don't know how they knew that that dove was

God's Holy Spirit; and I don't know how they knew that that voice was God's voice. But God has a way of making these things crystal clear when he wants to. And listen -- God says: "This is not just a great man; this is my Son!"

And if you read chapter 25 of The Story last week you will have read about a similar scene. (Matthew 17.2) Jesus takes three of his disciples with him, they go up on a mountain, and Jesus is transformed right before their eyes. Jesus actually gives them a peek at who he really is. His face begins to shine like the sun itself; his clothes become this radiant white. The Message says, "Sunlight poured from his face (I love that), and clothes were filled with light." (Matthew 17.6) And then, it says, this bright cloud appears overhead. You see, sometimes, in the Bible, strange clouds were a sign of God's presence. And then they hear a voice from the cloud. It says ... God says ... because this is way before remote speaker systems and surround sound. God says, "This is my son. This is not just a great man, this is my son. This is not just the greatest man ever, this is my son. Listen to him!" And guys, if that's God's opinion of Jesus, that pretty much closes the case, doesn't it?

So ... who do you think he is? Seriously. And remember, who you think he is will not be measured by what you say about him. It will be measured by what you do with him. Because actions speak way louder than words. So ... who is Jesus, to you?

You see, Jesus didn't permit them to avoid the question. And he won't permit us to avoid the question. We answer it by what we do with him in this world, and some day how we have answered that question in this world will dictate what God does with us in the next. It's all about Jesus, guys. It's not about being good people. It's not about doing more good than bad. It's not about being spiritual, whatever that means. It's not even about giving Jesus some props, calling him a great man, a great spiritual leader. Jesus kind of bodies up to them, and says, "Who do you think I am?" Either bend your knees, or go to war.

There is this amazing scene in the apostle John's story of Jesus. You see, some of you guys picture Jesus as simple, and sweet. Well, sometimes he's not. Sometimes he was way over the top, and right in their face. (John 8.48) So much so that some of them began to think that Jesus was possessed, by a demon. You see, Jesus was saying, "Find one sin in me! Just tell me one thing I have said wrong; just tell me I thing I have done wrong!" Could any of

you say that? I can't! He says, "The reason you guys aren't listening to me is that you don't belong to God." You blow me off, because you blow God off. You ever hear a man say that? You might have, but you'd be tempted to think he was possessed, by a demon. I would.

Then Jesus says, (John 8.51) "I'm telling you the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth: Whoever follows me will never die. If you stay on my path, you will never die." And that pretty much cinched it for them. (John 8.52-53) "Now we know you are insane, or you are possessed... Do you actually think you are greater than Abraham, you fool? Do you think you are greater than our prophets, you jerk? Who do you think you are, Jesus?" They are mad, now.

(John 8.58) And then Jesus said something that blows their minds. He says, "Listen guys, I'm going to tell you the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth: Before Abraham was even born, I AM. Before Abraham was even born ... 2000 years ago ... I already AM." Do you know who Jesus was claiming to be? ... The Son of God. In fact, he was claiming to be God himself. (John 8.59) And they knew it, because they began picking up stones to kill him. That's what they did to people who claimed to be God. But it says Jesus slipped away.

Now, if that's really who Jesus is, guys, do you think he's satisfied with being admired as an extraordinary man, a great teacher, a genius moralist, a supreme picture of love, incredibly courageous, maybe the greatest spiritual leader ever. That's all true, but it's not the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. It is not enough.

There's another place in John's story of Jesus where he does it again. (John 10.27-28) Jesus says, "My sheep listen to me, and they follow me. And I give them eternal life." Are you serious? Do you think any extraordinary man can say something like that? Do you think a great teacher, a great religious leader would say something like that? "I give eternal life." (John 10.30) Then he says, "The father and I – God the father, the in the beginning God the father -- and I ... are one." Say what? Did you hear who he said he was? They did. It says, (John 10.31, 33) Once again they picked up stones to kill him. Do you know why? Because he was a mere man – they thought – and he was claiming to be God. And that's blasphemy. In their thinking, that deserved a brutal death.

You see, the real Jesus doesn't permit us to be neutral. Is he the Son of God or not? Well is he? Your answer to that question will shape God's response to you. And listen, guys: your answer to that question will not be measured by what you say, about him; it's measured by what you do with him. Because actions speak way louder than words.

This is so big, guys, this changes everything. Let me show you. If Jesus is really the Son of God, then he is unlike any other person who has ever lived. He's not just "an extraordinary man." He is different. One guy said, "The incarnation (the Son of God becoming a man) is (even) more of a miracle than the resurrection; because in it somehow the holy God and sinful humanity are joined; yet without the presence of sin." A God-Man! And as a man, the Son of God was tempted in every way we are, and yet be without sin – unbelievable! He could walk through the mess (like we do) without getting any of it on him. He could hang out with sinners – like we all do, every day -- without ever once caving in to sin.

But Jesus didn't only experience the temptation of sin ... because he is the Son of God he has the authority to forgive our sin. But here's the deal. Even as the Son of God, forgiveness is costly. There are consequences to sin, and somebody has to pay those consequences. So he does it for us. The Son of God took our place, he suffered the penalties we deserve. The Bible says, By his stripes – by the stripes accepted by the Son of God – we are healed. And if that doesn't blow your mind, you are brain dead. You see, Jesus was way more than a martyr dying for a good cause. He is the Son of God, giving his life for my sin, and for yours. The Son of God did that for us.

(John 14.6) And that's why, as the Son of God, Jesus has the right to say, "I am the way (the only way) and I am the truth (the whole truth, and nothing but the truth) and I am the life (both in this world, and in the next); no one comes to the Father except through me." Only the Son of God can say something like that; and no one else can challenge it. You see, as Son of God, all authority that really matters is his. Some day we are going to stand before God, and only his judgment will count.

So, do you believe that Jesus is the Son of God? Do you believe it with more than your words? Do you believe it by bending your knees and surrendering your life to him? Guys, if you are going through The Story with us in one of our Life Groups, I'd love for you to ponder that question this week. Do you

believe that Jesus is the Son of God with your words, or your actions – and what's the difference?

One more thing, guys. If Jesus is the Son of God, that tells us a whole lot about the Father. It is indisputable evidence of how highly God values you. Think about it: if you are a parent you know how hard it is to watch your child suffer. If you are a good parent, you would suffer a hundred times over rather than watch your child hurt. Some of you have sent your sons or your daughters off to war. Do you remember the terror you felt when you said your good-byes? I wept. You are so proud that your child is willing to stand in harm's way for others, but you know intensely what it might cost.

Well, can you imagine what God felt when he sent his Son into our world. Knowing there was more than just a risk of pain, and death; in fact, knowing that pain and death was his mission. The Father knew it all, in advance. He watched as his Son was rejected, and humiliated, and mocked, and cursed, and spit on, and slapped around, and whipped, and nailed to a cross. He watched as his Son drew his last breath ... sort of. For you.

So let me ask you: How much does God love you? How far would God go to give you the chance to do life with him forever? You see, the only thing that can prevent you from experiencing the relentless grace of God, is you. So, who do you think Jesus is? Is he the Son of the Living God? More than that, Is he the Lord of your life?