

Sermon preached by Pastor Ben on Luke 22:66-71 on July 20, 2014 at Victory of the Lamb.

Series: Good Questions – Honest Answers
Today's Focus: Why Do You Think Jesus Is God?

“Son of Man + Son of God = Savior I Need”

I figured I might as well be consistent and start off today by sharing another conversation I once had with someone standing in their driveway here in Franklin. There was this woman just coming out of her garage to walk her three Dobermans...which made me a little nervous because it was just me with my little girls in the double stroller. But we had a very open conversation that eventually centered on the question, Who is Jesus? And this woman had a point of view I'd never heard before at the time. She expressed her opinion that Jesus was a life form just like us except that he had a higher spirit level in him. When I asked her to help me understand what she meant it was her opinion that Jesus, me, my girls and her dogs are all life forms that have various levels of divine spirit energy in them and so she considered Jesus divine in that he had a uniquely high level of spirit energy in him. This made him, in her own words, a “higher spirit being.”

Have you ever heard anything like that before? It's actually a view of Jesus that's growing in popularity believe it or not. This woman professed her belief in a religion called Eckankar. I said, “Where'd you find this religion, the internet?” And she said, “Actually, yes.” She said, “I think the founder of it is from Minnesota.” Now because I've got some connections to people that I love from Minnesota, I refrained from saying, “Well that should've been your first clue! ☺” But actually the guy who founded Eckankar was born on a farm in WI...

But here's what I think this conversation illustrates, ok? Lots of different people have lots of different opinions about who Jesus is. In fact I think never before has Jesus been more popular of a person. Yet at the same time I think as never before have more people tried to fashion Jesus into whatever it is that they want him to be...or don't want him to be. It's like today everybody wants a piece of Jesus. They want Jesus on their side of the debate or in their corner when it comes to their way of life. So who is Jesus anyway? Is he just a man? Is he a higher spirit being? Is he God? Does it even matter?

We actually see that in our sermon text from the Bible this morning that while people today have questions or opinions about Jesus, so did people in Jesus' day. In fact just like people today, people in Jesus' day had some pretty serious questions and pretty strong opinions about Jesus. We see this today in the account recorded by a doctor named Luke who tells us of what happened to Jesus in the hours leading up to Jesus' death on the cross.

Let me help you picture the context before I read from the gospel of St Luke, ok? It's Thursday evening. Jesus celebrates the Passover meal with his disciples. During the meal Judas leaves to sell out Jesus and hand him over to his enemies. Also during this time Jesus institutes the sacramental meal of Holy Communion as a replacement for the Passover. Later that evening Jesus and his disciples walk to a familiar gathering place on the Mount of Olives. Jesus prays fervently to his Father in Heaven. His disciples fall asleep. This is when Judas, under the cover of darkness, leads a gang of people sent by the

Jewish chief priests to arrest Jesus. Jesus is taken to the house of Caiaphas, the Jewish High Priest. Here Jesus is interrogated and put on trial illegally at night. Jesus is then mocked. He is beaten. He is kept awake all night. Early on Friday morning Jesus is brought before a hastily called meeting of the Sanhedrin—the Jewish ruling council—to try and give a semblance of jurisprudence to the illegal activities of the past night.

And so here's where we pick up the story. ⁶⁶ *At daybreak the council of the elders of the people, both the chief priests and the teachers of the law, met together, and Jesus was led before them.* ⁶⁷ *"If you are the Messiah," they said, "tell us."* Jesus answered, *"If I tell you, you will not believe me,* ⁶⁸ *and if I asked you, you would not answer.*

So you get what they're asking Jesus, right? "Who are you, Jesus? Are you the Messiah who is prophesied in the Scriptures?" And of course Jesus then immediately told them how it is, right? Well not quite. Did you notice that? It's kind of curious, isn't it? Instead, Jesus says, *"If I tell you, you will not believe me,* ⁶⁸ *and if I asked you, you would not answer.* Now why does he say this? Because he knows that they were not looking for an honest answer to an otherwise good question. They already had the answer they were looking for. They weren't going to accept an answer on his terms. They'd just interpret it on their own terms anyway. They weren't going to have a discussion of Jesus as Messiah. Their minds were closed. Their hearts were hard.

But before you come down too hard on them in judgment, let me ask you... If Jesus is truly God, are you willing to come under the authority of Jesus or are unwilling to accept any higher authority than your own? You see here's what I'm getting at. I think it's pretty clear that the Jewish leaders didn't want to accept Jesus and come under his authority because they wanted to be their own authority. After all, ever for those of you who self-identity as a Christian, and I certainly do, isn't there a part of you also deep down that wants to have Jesus as your Lord and Savior, but only on your terms, as long as it's convenient or it's easy or it makes sense to you?

Think about this. The Jewish leaders were very religious. They had their traditions. They had their rituals. They had their own standards of behavior which they tried really hard to keep which allowed them to feel pretty good about themselves—when they kept to their own standards compared to other people who didn't do as well at keeping their standards. But if they were to believe everything Jesus taught and everything Jesus said about himself, then they would've been forced to admit that they weren't better off than other people. That they too were law breakers and sinners like everyone else. That their whole religion system was based on self-made human works. That they couldn't actually save themselves on the basis of their outward behavior. That they couldn't actually get to heaven without a Savior, without Jesus, without trusting entirely and exclusively in him. What about you, friends? It's never been easy to admit you need a Savior. And so Jesus goes on to say...

⁶⁹ *But from now on, the Son of Man will be seated at the right hand of the mighty God."*

Say what Jesus? “The Son of Man.” This might strike you and me at first as a strange way of talking about oneself, but this was actually Jesus’ favorite way of referring to himself. The Son of Man. It certainly makes you think about the fact that Jesus was a man, doesn’t it? Flesh and blood. Human. Mortal. From the time he first entered into this world as a tiny, helpless baby born of a human mother. What could be more human than that—being born? That much anybody could see as Jesus was beaten and his blood ran red. As Jesus was flogged and his flesh tore like anyone’s would. As Jesus was crucified and he slowly suffocated on the cross and died.

But there was another reason Jesus used the phrase “The Son of Man” to refer to himself. It was because it was actually a way to say, “Hey, I’m God.” You see the phrase “The Son of Man” goes back to an Old Testament prophecy in the book of Daniel about the Messiah. Let me read it to you: *13 “In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. 14 He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed (Daniel 7:13-14).*

So here in Daniel, Daniel sees this vision where the son of man is someone who is led into the presence of God and is worshiped as God and as such who rules with eternal, divine, invincible authority. So when Jesus calls himself “The Son of Man” as he does frequently, it’s a way of saying to these religious people who knew the Scriptures, “You better understand who I am...that I have authority because I’m not just Mary’s son, I’m God’s Son.” Here it’s a way Jesus is saying, “Go ahead and reject me. Go ahead and crucify me. But when it’s all said and done every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that I am the Lord God Almighty.” Now did they understand the implications of what Jesus was saying? You be the judge...

⁷⁰They all asked, “Are you then the Son of God?” He replied, “You say that I am.” ⁷¹Then they said, “Why do we need any more testimony? We have heard it from his own lips.” The next thing you know the Jewish leaders had Jesus brought before the Roman Governor Pontius Pilate to have him sentenced to death. On what basis? On the charge of blasphemy. “He makes himself equal with God!” (cf. John 10:33) Now it’s popular today to hear people say, “Well Jesus never claimed to be God. That’s just something that his followers years later decided to make up and foist upon Jesus.” Or people will say, “Since Jesus never directly said, “I am God” he never meant for people to actually think he’s God.”

But did the Jewish leaders in Jesus’ day understand exactly what Jesus was claiming? Absolutely yes. They knew when Jesus called himself the Son of Man that he was referring to a prophecy from Daniel about the Messiah. They knew that when Jesus called himself the Son of God he wasn’t saying that he’s somehow less than God, or a sub-par God, of some sort of higher spirit being but very God of very God. In fact it’s even a little clearer in the Greek language of the New Testament. When the religious leaders asked Jesus, “Are you the Son of God,” what Jesus said is, “Yes, I AM.”

Ring a bell? In the Old Testament when God appeared to Moses in the burning bush and Moses said, “What’s your name?” remember how God answered, “I AM WHO I AM.” (cf. Ex. 3:14) And now when

the religious leaders essentially ask Jesus, Who are you? how does he actually answer? By echoing that sacred name for God, "I AM." The one who was, who is, and who is to come, the LORD Almighty. Jesus said, "That's me." Now to the council, this was blasphemy, worthy of death. Jesus was convicted and crucified.

What about for you? The world today would still like to put Jesus on trial over his claims. The problem is that if Jesus' claims are true, they have a problem. They will have to face Jesus someday about their sin and their behavior, and they don't want to deal with that. They will have to face his judgment. In the other gospels, Jesus tells the high priest Caiaphas to his face: "*In the future you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven*" (Matthew 26:64). So it's easier to deny Jesus altogether. The world puts Jesus on trial in the court of their minds and they've decided that they have a right to decide whether he is telling the truth or lying.

But make no mistake. Jesus is not on trial any more. We are. No matter what people think, Jesus is who he is. People's opinions can't change the fact that Jesus is the Lord God who came to this earth to be our Savior. What will you do with Jesus? What will you do with his claims? Believe in him and you will have eternal life. Condemn him and you will be condemned.

And here's why. When Jesus calls himself the Son of Man who is the Son of God he wants us to understand something. He is the only one uniquely qualified to be our Savior. He tells us this because he loves us. The Bible says, *For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him* (John 3:17). You see Jesus is uniquely qualified to be the Savior that I need, the Savior that you need, the Savior that the world needs. Only he is fully human and at the same time fully divine. True man and true God. This is what Christians believe about Jesus. *In Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form* (Colossians 2:9).

How can I explain this? Look, I can't. It's a wonderful mystery. The only answer I can give you is that through the miracle of the virgin birth, Jesus, God from eternity, took on human flesh and blood just like ours. We call this the incarnation. This means that as Jesus grew up and lived his life under the law of God, he too was tempted, in every way, just as we are, yet he was without sin. This means that as Jesus suffered and died on the cross, his sacrifice could actually pay for sin. When he rose from the dead this means his victory could actually count for all. Now through faith in Jesus Christ his victory can become yours.

You see for the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross to count for all the world, Jesus had to be God. If Jesus were just a man, a good man, even a perfect man, he would have died and gone to heaven himself, but it would not have done us any good. But the fact that God himself took our place on the cross means that his sacrifice is sufficient for every single person who has ever lived. If God was going to take care of our sin problem, it meant that he had to do it himself. Why do I believe that Jesus is God? There's more that could be said today. If you've still got some questions you might want to check out a book like *The Case of Christ* or *The Case for Easter* by author Lee Strobel. But the bottom line is this today. **The Son of Man + the Son of God = the Savior that I need.** Wouldn't you agree? Amen

My Next Steps

Connect: There are many people who have great respect for Jesus. They see him as an amazing moral leader. But they don't see him as anything more than a man. Maybe you feel that way yourself. How do we know that Jesus was more than a man?

Aha: The key conundrum. If Jesus is not both God and man, he cannot be our Savior and we are still lost in our sin.

Treasure: *"For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form"* (Colossians 2:9)

Challenge: Read through John's gospel and take note of all the highlighted passages which underscore Jesus' divinity. (Hint: We've been doing this over the past year in our Sunday morning Bible class. You're welcome to join us next week at 8:09 in theater #6 across the hall!)