

New Year's Series: "Jesus: Myth, Madman or Messiah"

Sermon #4: "Who Do You Say that I Am?"

Scriptures: Matthew 16:13-17 (to be read during the sermon)

Source: Rev. Adam Hamilton at the Church of the Resurrection in Kansas City, MO

<http://www.cor.org/worship/sermon-archives/show/sermons/Will-the-Real-Jesus-Please-Stand-Up/>

Opening Video Clip

PP#1: "Jesus: Myth, Madman or Messiah"

"Who Do You Say that I Am?"

"Jesus said, 'And what about you? Who do you say that I am?'" - Matthew 16:15 (CEB)

"Jesus: Myth, Madman or Messiah" Matthew 16:15 "Jesus said, 'And what about you? Who Do You Say that I Am?'"

We claimed at Christmas that this Jesus born at Christmas is the unique Son of God, the Savior of the world, and Lord of all. But we claimed that because this is what we see Jesus claiming in the Bible. So, the past number of weeks we've been trying to unpack that claim. Why should anyone believe it? What evidence is there? How do we understand what He said and did, and how are we to make sense of how what He did makes Him the Savior?

One time Jesus asked His disciples, "Who does everyone else say I am?" and then He also asked them, "But who do you say that I am?" It was a very important question. And, actually, you could say that this is still the most important question. How about you? Who do you say Jesus is?

PP#2: *Image of C.S. Lewis, subtitled, "Lewis' Trilemma: Jesus is either a liar, a lunatic, or Lord."*

C.S. Lewis reasoned that, if you take the Scriptures seriously—and two Sundays ago I argued that we must—but if you take the Scriptures seriously, said Lewis, there are really three responses. Jesus either lied, was insane, or was who He claimed to be. This is often phrased, Jesus is either liar, lunatic, or Lord. Over the past few weeks, I've also tackled a fourth idea that the whole Jesus idea may be a myth that someone or somehow was made up or embellished.

And I've tried hard the last couple of weeks to argue, I hope, in a convincing way, that the Jesus portrayed in the Bible is the real deal, that it actually happened this way. It's hard to argue, I think, if you look at the history of the Bible, that the Bible lacks credibility, that these stories are tampered with or made to say something that didn't actually happen.

PP#3: *Image of the typical tomb and round stone we saw along the Jericho road in Israel.*

Yet I think that the clinching argument comes not from the credibility of Scripture, or in Jesus life, teaching, healings, or even His death. It comes at Jesus' resurrection. His resurrection dispels any idea of Jesus being either a liar or a lunatic. He did what He promised He would do.

There were a lot of people who claimed to be the messiah, both in Bible times, and since then. Most of these self-proclaimed messiahs were killed. All stayed dead, except one. There is something different about Jesus.

PP#4: Jesus: Myth, Madman, or Messiah?

1. Is there any rational reason to believe Jesus rose from the grave?

So, this Sunday, as the last sermon in this series, we're going to tackle three questions around Jesus' resurrection. The first is, is there any basis a rational, logical person would believe Jesus died and rose again from the grave? I mean, this claim is hard to believe because we've never seen it happen, and there have been no historically verifiable reports of it happening with anyone else.

PP#5: Biblical proofs for Jesus resurrection:

1. The empty tomb

Well, the Bible offers four main proofs to back up this claim. The first is that His tomb was empty. How could this be explained? Some people today suggest that He might not have really died, but only swooned. Well, the guards were also wary about this, and so they stuck a spear into His heart to make sure He was really dead. So, there are really three possibilities. One is that Jesus' followers stole the body to make it look like He was raised from the dead. In fact, this is the story that the Jewish leaders claimed happened. Yet, the remaining 11 apostles, each to their dying day, claimed He was raised. All of them were tortured, and all but one killed for saying this, and not one of them recanted. We'll say more about this in a minute.

Another possibility is that the Jewish leaders, or even the Romans, stole the body in order to desecrate it. Yet, if so, then, when the disciples claimed He was raised from the dead, the easiest thing to disprove them and shut down this new movement, would be to produce the body. But they didn't.

So, that leaves the possibility that His tomb was empty because He was raised from the dead.

PP#6: Biblical proofs for Jesus resurrection:

1. The empty tomb
2. The sightings of Jesus

The second biblical proof was the testimonies by all the people who claimed to have seen Him. It's interesting that the first sightings of Jesus were not believed. If you struggle with believing that Jesus was raised from the dead, you have good company. All the first followers of Jesus had this struggle. Mary went early in the morning and saw the tomb empty. She first assumes not that He was raised, but that the leaders had stolen the body. When she meets Jesus, she believes Him to be the gardener. When she tells the other disciples, they don't believe her. It says they think she is out of her mind in grief. When He appears to them, they are shocked, and think He's a ghost. Thomas missed that time, and when they tell him, he says he won't believe it until he actually touches His body for Himself. Wow, major skepticism all over the place! This from those who knew Him best, and from those who heard Jesus say over and over again that He was going to be killed, but then be raised from the dead. They didn't believe it, and they were hard to convince!

PP#7: 1 Corinthians 15:3-8 (CEB)

Christ died for our sins in line with the scriptures. He was buried, and He rose on the third day in line with the scriptures. He appeared to Cephas, then to the Twelve, and then He appeared to more than five hundred brothers and sisters at once—most of them are still alive to this day, though some have died. Then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all He appeared to me.”

Paul at first also thought the Christians were lying, and he arrested them. But then He claims to have seen the risen Jesus. He then claims in 1 Corinthians 15:3-8 that many of the hundreds who saw Him were still alive. “Ask them! If you don’t believe me,” says Paul, “ask around!”

PP#8: Biblical proofs for Jesus resurrection:

1. The empty tomb
2. The sightings of Jesus
3. The impact on the disciples

The third biblical proof for Jesus’ resurrection is the startling change in the disciples. Like I just said, they were hard to convince! They were scared of the authorities, hid behind closed doors, and kept their mouths shut. Yet, all of a sudden they come bursting out of hiding claiming to have seen the risen Jesus. And they no longer are worried about the authorities, or being arrested, or being killed. Something happened to change them. They were bold and fearless.

Paul, too. He was beaten and left for dead three times. But he would not stop. Why? Because he knew Jesus was alive. Something happened to give birth to the early church. It didn’t die out like it should have, like all the other movements did.

PP#9: Biblical proofs for Jesus resurrection:

1. The empty tomb
2. The sightings of Jesus
3. The impact on the disciples
4. The fulfillment of salvation

One more. If you read the Gospel accounts, you like Jesus, and you want Him to live forever. But if you end the story, like Thomas Jefferson did, without the resurrection, the whole claim of Jesus falls apart. If Jesus came to be the Savior, and then ends up staying dead, what good is that? Evil and hate and death all win. There is no victory. All that we fear—that we grow sick, old, and die—is still all there is. There is no salvation. It only has meaning if Jesus is raised from the dead. Only then is death, and sickness, and evil, and all that is bad in us, defeated. Only then it doesn’t have the final word.

PP#10: John 14:19 “Because I live, you shall live also!”

1 Thess. 4:13-14 “Brothers and sisters, we want you to know about people who have died so that you won’t mourn like others who don’t have any hope. Since we believe that Jesus died and rose, so we also believe that God will bring with Him those who have died in Jesus.”

But the resurrected Jesus comes to us and says, “Because I live, you shall live also!”

Christians die well. We face the same things everyone else does, but we die differently. It’s because we have a hope that is in a resurrected Jesus. We have a trust amid fear. This life is not all there is. We live with clear future hope.

Paul says this to the people in 1 Thessalonians. “We want you to know about people who have died so that you won’t mourn like others who don’t have any hope. Since we believe that Jesus died and rose, so we also believe that God will bring with Him those who have died in Jesus.” Christians have a hope, a special hope, that carries them during times of death.

The Bible offers other proofs of Jesus' resurrection, too. But at some point you just need to make a leap of faith. At some point you need to stop the "what ifs" and give Him a try. If He is alive, then you will experience Him. And when you do, it changes every thing else in your life. I don't just think it's true, I know it's true. I just don't believe it, I'm *counting on it!*

PP#11: Jesus: Myth, Madman, or Messiah?

1. Is there any rational reason to believe Jesus rose from the grave?

2. Was Jesus really divine?

Colossians 2:9 "In Him the whole being of the deity dwells bodily."

OK, second major question about Jesus' resurrection. Was Jesus really divine? Many have claimed that Jesus never thought He was divine, but that these parts were added later. Yet we really have no credible evidence that there was a tampering with the texts, and it also seems very unlikely.

PP#12: Philippians 2:5-7 (CEB)

Adopt the attitude that was in Christ Jesus:

Though He was in the form of God,

He did not consider being equal with God something to exploit.

But He emptied Himself

by taking the form of a slave

and by becoming like human beings.

He found Himself in the form of a human,

Dating from about 25 years after Jesus' death, Paul writes in Philippians 2 that Jesus was God but then took on a human form. And, most scholars claim Paul was quoting a hymn from much earlier. The earliest Christians professed that Jesus was divine.

PP#13:

John 1:1, 14 "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God." "The Word became flesh and made His home among us. We have seen His glory."

John 14: 9 "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father."

John 10:30 "I and the Father are one."

John 20:28 "Thomas responded to Jesus, "My Lord and my God!"

Jesus also claims to be fully God. John's gospel says it many ways.

And for me, in Jesus I see the nature, the character, the heart, the will God. As I get to know Jesus throughout these stories, I see God. He is so different and amazing! He touches the diseased. He loves sinners. He has mercy and compassion on those who sinned. He visits the outcasts. He has concern and love for broken people. He hates hypocrites.

He does miracles. Doesn't that make sense? If God showed up, shouldn't miracles happen? God has mercy and compassion for those who did sin.

He suffers for us. He is victorious. Jesus is the clearest picture of God there is, anywhere! Not as a book, but as a person.

Jesus is fully human, and fully God. Does this make sense? No. Can I prove this? I can't. But I can say that trusting in this Jesus has the power to change your life. At some point you have to give it a try. It's a decision of faith, of trust.

PP#14: Jesus: Myth, Madman, or Messiah?

1. Is there any rational reason to believe Jesus rose from the grave?
2. Was Jesus really divine?
3. "Who do you say that I am?"

Last question about the resurrection. Who do you say Jesus is? If He is alive, what are you going to do with Him? It comes down to this. How you answer it changes everything.

PP#15: Matthew 16:13-17 (CEB)

When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, "Who do people say the Son of Man is?"

They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets."

"But what about you?" He asked. "Who do you say I am?"

Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God."

Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven."

Reader: Matthew 16:13-17

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Peter answered Him, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." Messiah means Christ in Greek. In English it means "anointed one." It usually was used to refer to kings. To call Jesus "king" means to give Him your primary allegiance. He is a crucified king, who died for His people.

Savior in Hebrew is pronounced Ye-shew-a. This is translated as "Jesus" or "Joshua." The name of Jesus literally means "God saves." Jesus saves us from sins, from death, from hopelessness, from guilt, from the acts of sinning. Jesus changes us, changes who we are. Jesus has made me a different person. I thank God I'm not the selfish jerk I was when I started following Jesus 30 years ago. I still have a long ways to go, but I'm not the same person I was. I'm very different!

Because of Jesus, I'm a better husband, a better father, a better friend, than I would have been. And, I'm very different than who I used to want to be. I thought I knew what I wanted, but now when I look back, I call my earlier self a fool. I like myself a lot better!

So, after hearing about all the arguments and explanations, it ends up being a leap of faith. What are you going to do about Jesus? Who do you say Jesus is?

PP#16: Romans 10:9 “If you confess with your mouth ‘Jesus is Lord’ and in your heart you have faith that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.

In the Bible, perhaps the earliest Christian confession is “Jesus is Lord.” It’s so simple, but it means so much. To be Lord means to be your ruler, the one you seek to please in everything you do. It means you live for Him, and not for yourself, or any other master. Confessing “Jesus is Lord” means telling Jesus every day, “I’m yours today. I belong to you. Use me for whatever you want.”

No matter what story defines you right now, Jesus’ story can become your defining story. Jesus has the power to change who you are, your identity, what drives you, your life, your future.

I invite you to put your trust in Jesus.

It’s a leap of faith. It comes down to this. “Who do you say that I am?”

If you want to give this Jesus a try, make this simple confession in your heart: “Jesus is Lord.”

We’re going to sing our closing song together, and if you want to give Jesus a try, at some point as we’re singing, just say it loud enough for you to hear yourself, “Jesus is Lord.” Make this confession your prayer. Say it. Sing it. Confess it in your heart. Answer the question.