

## *“Tell Us Plainly”*

*John 10:22-33*

First Presbyterian Church, Corpus Christi, TX

Rev. Charles S. Blackshear • April 12, 2015

Who is Jesus? That’s the question we have been dealing with in this sermon series for the past few weeks. We have talked about Jesus’ work as prophet, priest and king. We have learned about Jesus as servant. He said, “The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve.” Last week we talked about Jesus as our savior. But there’s one question that we have not addressed yet and it’s a question that has been around for as long as the Christian faith. Is Jesus God?

In the year 312, Constantine was in a battle to take over the Roman Empire as the next emperor. The day before he was to attack the city of Rome, he claimed to have had a vision where he was told that he would be victorious if he put a symbol of Christ on the soldier’s shields. He did and he subsequently won the battle and became the emperor. Shortly after that, Constantine converted to Christianity and the next year, in 313, he issued his Edict of Milan, making Christianity the official religion of the Roman Empire.

But it wasn’t long before Constantine discovered that there was fierce disagreement over whether Jesus was God or merely human. So he called for the first ever church-wide council, which took place in 325 in Nicea, which is in modern day Turkey. More than 300 bishops came from all over the known world and they did what you always do at a church council, they argued. One side, led by Arius, a priest from Alexandria, argued that Jesus was not divine but was actually the first and most perfect of all God’s creations and so he didn’t share in the “being of God or the essence of God, only the agenda of God.” This is basically what Mormons and Jehovah’s Witnesses believe today about Jesus.

The other side, which eventually prevailed, argued that Jesus was co-equal and co-eternal with God the Father. In other words, they claimed that Jesus is fully God as well as fully human. As a result, the council created a creed,

a basic statement of faith that expressed this idea. This was the beginning of the Nicene Creed, which was further expanded in 381. The way the Nicene Creed puts it, “I believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible. And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds; God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God; begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father, by whom all things were made. Who, for us for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary, and was made man.”

One of the key passages that they used to justify the claim that Jesus is God is the one we’re looking at today, John 10. Jesus is in Jerusalem for a festival, this time it’s the Feast of Dedication, also called the Festival of Lights. You may have heard it referred to as Hanukkah. As he’s walking in the Temple, a group of Jewish leaders surround him and say, “How long are you going to keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly.” Of course they don’t really want to know. They want to trap Jesus into saying something that they can use against him. Jesus says, “I already told you, and you don’t believe me.” They don’t really want the answer but they are asking the same question asked at the Council of Nicea and the same question we are asking today: “Is Jesus God?”

To answer that question let’s look at the evidence. Many people who want to deny that Jesus is God will say that Jesus never claimed to be God but that the church made up the idea some years later. But as we study the Gospels we discover that Jesus did in fact claim to be God. In today’s passage Jesus makes several clear claims to deity. Maybe the most clear is verse 30 where He says, “I and the Father are one.” But he also said, “I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will

snatch them out of my hand.” Then he says, “no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand.” He is clearly equating himself with God the Father.

In John 14 Jesus is with his disciples and he makes it clear that He and the Father are one. He says, “Whoever has seen me has seen the Father.” There are also places in the Gospels where Jesus is clearly worshiped and he accepts the worship. In John 20, Jesus appears to the disciples a second time after his resurrection. The first time Thomas had not been there and he said he wouldn’t believe unless he touched Jesus himself. When Jesus shows up he tells Thomas to touch his hands and his side. Thomas falls down and says, “My Lord and my God!” Jesus doesn’t try to correct him. Instead he says, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.” And in Matthew 16 Jesus says, “Who do men say that I am?” The disciples give him some of the answers they have heard. But then Jesus asks them, “Who do y’all say that I am?” and Peter says, “You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God.”

It’s not just Jesus claiming to be God. The other New Testament writers claimed the same thing. The beginning of John’s Gospel calls Jesus the Word, the Logos, and says that “in the beginning the Word was with God and the Word *was* God.” He goes on to say, “the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.” God became human. In Romans 9 Paul says that Jesus is “God over all.” We find clear statements about the deity of Jesus all throughout the Bible. Paul’s letter to the Colossians is all about the divinity of Jesus. “He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible.”

The third way we know Jesus is truly God is by the miracles he performs. Jesus does things that only God can do. He heals people of incurable diseases. He makes the blind see, the deaf hear, and the lame walk. He feeds 5000 people with only a few small rolls and a couple of tiny fish, he walks on water, and he raises

people from the dead. Ultimately he was crucified, dead and buried but on the third day he rose again from the dead. Jesus tells the people who are questioning him, “The works that I do in my Father’s name bear witness about me.”

Those Jewish leaders certainly understood what Jesus was claiming. They began to pick up rocks to stone him. Jesus says, “I have shown you many good works from my Father; for which of them are you going to stone me?” They say, “We’re not going to stone you for doing good works. We’re going to stone you for blasphemy. You claim to be God.”

So you and I are faced with the same question that everyone who encounters Jesus must answer: Is Jesus God? Who do you say that he is? The way you answer that question is critical. The belief that Jesus is God is the foundation of the Christian faith. C.S. Lewis explained it this way: “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.” Lewis goes on, “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 His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us.”

If Jesus is in fact fully God as well as fully human, how does that affect you and me today? It seems to me there are three ways we are impacted. First, we can know what God is like. Jesus said, “If you have seen me you have seen the Father.” Rick Phillips writes, “If we want to know God, we can see him revealed in the person and work of Jesus as recorded in the Bible.” In other words, if you want to know what God is like, look at Jesus. Second, because Jesus is God we can be assured that our sins are forgiven by his death on the cross. We can trust his promises of eternal life with him. Jesus says, “I give them eternal life and they will never

perish.” If you are in Christ you can never lose your salvation. R.C. Sproul says, “We are secure, not because we hold tightly to Jesus, but because He holds tightly to us.”

Third, if Jesus is God His words have authority over our lives as the very Word of God. We must submit our entire life to following Him. “Jesus has the right to demand our faith and obedience.” But notice that it’s not a burden. He says, “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.” As we get to know him better, obeying Jesus becomes a joy and not a duty.

It’s possible to accept Jesus as a prophet, priest or king without recognizing Him as God. It’s even possible in a sense to see Jesus as a savior, showing the best way to live, while rejecting his divinity. But what we discover from the Bible is that it is because Jesus is truly God in person that He is able to serve as the perfect prophet who reveals God to us, the perfect priest who mediates between us and God, the perfect king who rules perfectly and fairly, and the only savior who can take away our sins. He has told you plainly. Do you believe it?

*Amen*