

Big thanks to all the men who came out on Friday – Nearly 200 guys running hard after God. Always an open seat for more!

Mistaken Identity

- Story of Castle

The Impact of Jesus:

- History split in two
- Everybody dates everything according to his birthday
- It is by his name that millions curse and by his name that millions pray

Jesus Identity – maybe the most important question ever

- Backdrop of Caesarea Philippi
- **Temple of Pan**, Temple of Zeus, **Gates of Hell** – thought so because people would put their dead into this cave, it would sink and never return. Thought to be the very place where Hades could be accessed.
- Who do others say that I am
- **Who do you say that I am? Matthew 16:15**
- This is the theme of our message – who is this peasant carpenter from Nazareth who changed the world. He never wrote a book, or travelled far from home or held political office or led an army... He died at age 33 penniless...yet he is the most profound influence in the entire planet.

Three audiences today –

- seekers who are trying to figure out who Jesus is.
- Believers who want a stronger foundation on WHY they believe what they know is true.
- Firm followers of Jesus who would love a logical paradigm to explain to their friends.

Walk Down Logic Lane – Who is this man?

### Option 1 – Decent Fellow

Basic Idea: Most common view. Jesus was a good guy. Nice teacher. I'd like him as a next door neighbor or a guy to date my daughter. Good teachings and a good following, but bummer of a death. A decent fellow. They generally choose this seemingly respectful position because they don't want to insult Christians, but they don't buy the Christian faith either – so they won't dis Jesus or say he is God.

Problem: Jesus's claims – When he talked about himself, he didn't say decent fellow stuff. He also drove people out of the temple, overturned the tables of moneychangers and was critical of religion. But back to the claims about himself

Scripture: **"Before Abraham was born, I am!" John 8:58**

The Son of Man is the Lord of the Sabbath. Matthew 12:8

Daniel and Sabbath!

Forgive Sins – Not just against me, but all sins... Mark 2

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

Again his Jewish opponents picked up stones to stone him... John 10:31

Light of the World, Resurrection and Life – John 11:38 p. 349, Good Shepherd

Eat my flesh and drink my blood - These are crazy!

Lets just look at these claims in today's context

- Stepped up on the cafeteria table – I am the Lord of the Sabbath
- Judge in a courtroom – Me and God? One in the same...
- The janitor pulled you aside – Before Ceasar was around, I AM...
- Your daughter brings home a boy for a date who says “I am the resurrection and the life.”

So, lets just give up the notion that Jesus was a good prophet. A nice guy. A decent fellow. He could be a demon from hell. He might be a few crayons short of a mega pack. But he's not a Decent fellow.

## Option 2 – Deluded Fool

**Basic Idea:** Jesus thought that he was God and claimed he was God. He was a typical religious megalomaniac.

Boston University philosopher Peter Kreeft deftly shows how nuts Jesus would have had to be.

“A measure of your insanity is the size of the gap between what you think you are and what you really are. If I think I am the greatest philosopher in America, I am only an arrogant fool; if I think I am Napoleon, I am probably over the edge; if I think I am a butterfly, I am fully embarked from the sunny shores of sanity. But if I think I am God, I am even more insane because the gap between anything finite and the infinite God is even greater than the gap between any two finite things, even a man and a butterfly.

If Jesus was deluded, it was not just a little bit. He was a full out nut job. But how does that stand up to scrutiny

### Problems:

- Jesus ability to handle catch 22 questions was unparalleled – like when they asked whether they should pay taxes to an oppressive Roman government – Give to Caesar what is Caesars.
- He astonished the most brilliant teachers of his day with creativity, and unpredictability beginning at age twelve.
- His insight into humanity was profound

- He had a deep and winning love for the least of these, extending himself to the outcast, lepers, and prostitutes with no personal advantage to himself. People with massive egos – who think they are God, do not stoop to help the little guy.
- He was able to endure extreme conditions – like torture and death and continue to be other – centered, looking out for his mom and the criminal next to him.
- Skeptics were persuaded – Thomas, Paul, his brother James! If I ever begin claiming to be God, you know who the LAST people on the planet will be to bow? My brothers! Because they know too much. Yet James, who wrote the book of James, moved from skeptic of worshipper to his brother. He would not do that if his brother was certifiably loony!

He ushered in profound spiritual, psychological and personal health

Immediate followers left prostitution, extortion and a mercenary life to live his life of peace and justice.

Over 2000 years, nothing but profound health has followed him.

- In Jesus name, literacy moved from being available to elite males to universal as Jesus followers were passionate about everybody reading the Bible
- Further, most universities founded before 1860 were founded in Jesus name – Oxford, Cambridge, Harvard, Duke, Princeton, Yale and the like...
- In Jesus name, hospitals around the globe with names like Good Shepherd, Good Samaritan, Methodist, or St. Lukes have reflected his healing power
- By Jesus power, racial hatred has been reconciled, slaves were set free, women have been lifted and the poor have been cared for.

Jesus did miracles – a lot.

- If you are a liar or a lunatic, you just don't have the ability to make the blind see, the dead rise, and the lame walk. You could claim it, but Jesus did it!
- Jesus did miracles repeatedly, publicly and all over Israel. Multiple eyewitnesses wrote these down as credible evidence of his power and his credibility

Scriptures (Mt. 11:28) Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest.

(Lk. 9:24) For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it.

(Mk. 8:36-37) For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his soul? <sup>37</sup> “For what will a man give in exchange for his soul?

(Mt. 5:44) Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.

(Mk. 10:45) “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.

### Option 3 – Deceiving Fraud

**Basic Idea:** Jesus knew he was not God, but was lying to gain popularity or power.

**Problems:**

- If he was a liar, he was also a hypocrite because honesty was at the core of his teaching
- Unspeakably evil because he deliberately told others to forsake their religion to trust in him for their eternal destiny.
- He was able to inspire his followers and generations after to an unspeakably high moral code, Sermon on the Mount level – Could an evil deceiving monster teach and inspire these truths without living them?
- There are many cult leaders who claim to be God. But usually, they gain control over people for money or sex by doing so. Jesus did not gain power through his claims, but was rewarded with death. He did not gain financial position or sexual advantages. The more he claimed divinity, the more he was despised, threatened beaten and killed. This is a huge disincentive if you are lying.

John Stuart Mill, a philosopher, skeptic, and antagonist of Christianity, still admitted that Jesus was a first-rate ethicist supremely worthy of our attention and emulation:

“But about the life and sayings of Jesus there is a stamp of personal originality combined with profundity of insight....in the very first rank of men of sublime genius of whom our species can boast. When this pre-eminent genius is combined with the qualities of probably the greatest moral reformer, and martyr to that mission, who ever existed upon earth, religion cannot be said to have made a bad choice in pitching on this man as the ideal representative and guide of humanity;”

In other words, Mill says, Jesus was the perfect example of all that he taught.

Is there anyone who actually thinks that Jesus is both the greatest moralist of all time and the greatest liar of all time?

The people who knew him best made their decision clearly.

- Jesus’ followers also died for him because they believed in him that much. Nobody would go to their own death for someone they knew was a liar, but most of the disciples died as martyrs without ever recanting their faith. If they thought he was lying, they would never do this.

### Option 4 – Divine Friend

**Basic Idea:** What Jesus claimed was actually true.

**Key Problems:** None! Actually, all of the evidence supports it.

- He fulfilled dozens of prophecies
- Pictures, images, and foreshadowing from thousands of years before became clear in Jesus
- We’ve already mentioned the miracles and teachings and changed lives.

- The tomb of Jesus was empty and it still is empty
- The track record of Jesus' impact is unparalleled in this world.

If it is true, it demands a change...

- Who do you say that I am? Matthew 16:15

Peter got it right. "You are the Christ. The Son of the living God." In other words – you are not only the messiah, but you are God in the flesh. I am getting your identity right.

And friends, this is the first step. Get Jesus identity right. Who is he? God in the flesh.

And here is the deal – when you get Jesus' identity right, he will make your identity right.

Oh, that is so good! When you trust in Jesus as your lone Savior – the God of the universe, then he changes your identity. He did for Peter! Right after Peter said this, Jesus gave Simon a new name – The Rock – Peter. AND he said on THIS ROCK I will build my church. Now people have debated over the years. Is the "Rock" Peter? His statement of faith in Jesus? Is it an allusion to the cliff that stood behind them as they made this commentary? I say... I think its all three. Jesus would be the founder of the church. The identity of Jesus would be the foundation of our creed. And the backdrop of the huge cliff and altars to other Gods would remind us of the supremacy of Jesus – no matter what the competition. He is God and Pan/Zeus are not!

Jesus tells them "You are Peter and on this ROCK I will build my church and the gates of Hell will not prevail against it." Now doesn't that make sense in Cesarea Philippi? There are the gates of Hell – right there. It is the competition. At the time, if you were to place a bet on Jesus vs. Pan – you would take Pan. If you were to bet on the longevity of Jesus vs. Greek mythology and the gates of hell... you wouldn't pick the carpenter from the backwoods of Galilee.

And yet, Jesus words ring out! The gates of Hell will not prevail. It is Jesus' job to build his church – to prevail against the enemy in all of his forms. Your decision is simply – will you believe his identity and join him? It really only makes logical sense!

When you get Jesus identity right, he will make your identity right. He will make you a son or daughter of God. He will include you in his kingdom plan. He will move you from being 'unsaved' to 'saved'. He will make you into a new creation. He wants to. He even said it was his mission

For I did not come to judge the world but to save the world. John 3:18 P 366

So your big question is the same. Music Starts HERE

Who do you say that I am?

Who do YOU say that I am? Divine Friend? Decide now and tell him... I am going to give you a chance to confess Jesus name and to tell me that you did.

It starts with an acknowledgement. Out loud. I believe that Jesus is the Christ – the son of the living God. (Please keep this slide up) It is an acknowledgement of his identity. But if you really do believe this, then it is followed up by a humble following. If he is in fact God then that means everything is beneath him. If you acknowledge that it means that you are putting petty things aside. You call small

dreams small and buy into Jesus' big dreams for the kingdom. You release all the things that compete with Jesus in your life and put him in the drivers seat. Jesus only Jesus.

It is a big decision and I want to give you the opportunity to acknowledge Jesus as the Christ... the anointed king... the son of the living God.

So here is how we are going to do it. Stand with me if you will. I want a bold declaration of the words on the screen. Everybody declare this out loud if you believe it. If you are new. Or if you have been following Jesus for decades. Say the line out loud with enthusiasm. For most, this is a reminder of faith. For some, it is a bold act of courage – a step into the world of Jesus. An opportunity to affirm his identity and let him redefine yours!

Don't just say it to fit in. If you don't believe it, don't mess with Jesus. Satan wants you to either be insincere or silent. He wants the gates of hell to prevail in your life. He wants you to be impotent, insincere and not committal. He wants you to keep it all inside. That is how the gates of hell win. But in your confession, Jesus wins. He has said the gates of hell will not prevail!

Lets say it out loud together now. "I Believe that Jesus is the Christ, the son of the living God."

Jesus invites us into bold followership. If you are confessing Jesus for the first time, lets see a show of hands! Yes!

Awesome. I want to pray over each of you that God will seal it and assure that the gates of hell do not prevail in your life.