

A few years ago, a Christian youtube channel recorded a video in which the interviewer asked different people this question, "Who do you think Jesus was?" They recorded the answers of about 20 different people, and of course, they got about 20 different answers. Here are some of them:

"I think he is a fascinating historical figure." "I think he was one of the most morally insightful teachers of all time." "I think he serves as a symbol for forgiveness and hope." "I don't think he was the Son of God or anything, but we should follow his example." "I don't think he was God, but he was a marvelous teacher." "I think he was the Son of God, but so was Muhammed, Buddha, Gandhi, Moses, and all of us- we're all God's children." "Personally, I think he's my savior, but other people can have other saviors."

And there were many more, but you get the point. And I bet that if you went out and asked 100 different people in Whitewater, "who is Jesus," you would get 100 different answers. It's nothing new. It was happening while Jesus was on earth, and Peter answers that question, the most important question in history: "**Who is Jesus, and why does it matter?**"

Up to this point, Jesus has interacted with a great variety of people. Pharisees and Sadducees, Jewish crowds, Caananites, Samaritans, men, women, and they all seem to have their own opinion of him. Jesus wants to teach his disciples who he is, so starts this discussion with his disciples: "Who do people say I am?" The disciples answer and say, "Some say John the Baptist, others Elijah, others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." Here's what's interesting about those answers: they aren't necessarily wrong. Consider this: John the Baptist was known for preaching "Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is near" and proclaiming to people that their sins were forgiven. Jesus did that too. Elijah was known for big, powerful miracles and preaching God's word to people. Jesus did that too! Jeremiah was known as the weeping prophet, and his ministry consisted of criticizing the religious leaders of his day for their hypocrisy and greed and being rejected by many, many people. Jesus did that too! It seems like different people built their version of Jesus based on what they liked in him. Some people really liked that Jesus was calling out the Pharisees, some people liked the big miracles, some people liked that he condemned the greed of powerful people, and so they embraced the parts of Jesus that they liked. The problem wasn't that their personal version or opinion of Jesus was completely incorrect, just incomplete. In other words, **their Jesus was too small.**

Again, nothing's changed. Isn't it funny that both politically conservative people and liberal people claim that they are on Jesus' side? The liberal people say, "Jesus says that we are to love one another, and that we are not to judge, and to advocate for the poor and the marginalized." The Conservatives say, "No, Jesus clearly teaches that marriage is between one man and one woman, that family values matter." Well which one is right? Well, both, but both sides are making their own version of Jesus by embracing some of his teaching and ignoring teachings they don't like. We see this in Christianity. Some churches say, "Jesus calls us to love one another as he has loved us, we should focus on that rather than theology or doctrine." Other Christians say, "No, Jesus said that if you hold to my teachings, my doctrine, you are truly my disciples- what's what's important." Well, who's right? Both, but they are making their own

version of Jesus- their Jesus is too small. On a personal level, some Christians are often very self righteous and harsh toward people caught in sin because, "Jesus called out sin, often harshly, so I will too." Some people are very lax and permissive of sin, even their own, and they'll say "Well, Jesus was gentle and kind and hung out with prostitutes and tax collectors." Again, Both are saying correct things, but are creating their own version of Jesus- it's too small!

We do this too- we convince ourselves that Jesus doesn't really mind my sins, he cares more about others. He agrees with me. He's there when I need him. He's always on my side and would never challenge me to repent, or look honestly on my life and admit that I'm a sinner. I do this, and you probably do to. If your Jesus never offends you, never challenges you, always agrees with what you think, you aren't worshiping Jesus, just a Jesus-ified, Messianic version of yourself. **We need to embrace the real Jesus.** Who is that?

Peter answers: "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God." Think about what he's saying here. Jesus is the Son of the Living God. The Son of the Living God- as compared to dead Gods, Jesus is the true God, and there is none beside him. Peter is saying that every single deity and god that has ever existed is absolutely false, and there is only one God, and that is Jesus. And, he's the Christ, the Messiah. Literally, that means, the anointed one. In the Old Testament, kings and prophets were anointed with oil to appoint them for a specific task, and he's saying that Jesus is the one whom the Old Testament prophets talked about, the one who would come and make all things new, eradicate sin, conquer the enemies of God's people, and save all of his people from death. He is the answer to all of God's promises to his people, starting from Adam and Eve, to Abraham, to Moses, to David- that one would come and restore the relationship between God and his creation. That's the Messiah, and that's Jesus. This is the first time in the Gospels where someone is recorded as calling Jesus the "Messiah," and it's this that makes Jesus say, "Simon, you've been unthinkably blessed by God. The fact that you've said that means that the Father has revealed something to you that no one else could. So now your name is Peter, or "Rocky," because it's on THIS truth that you've said, this rock, that I am true God and the Messiah, on which my church will be built."

Do you see what this means? Jesus isn't simply an important historical figure, a good teacher, or a friendly guide. **He is the true God from all eternity.** But that's not enough. It's not enough to believe that Jesus is the true God. He can't only be your God, **he must be your messiah.** *He* must be the reason that you are good with God. *He* must be the reason that you are going to Heaven. *He* must be the reason that you can live with yourself, even though you are a depraved, lost sinner. If Jesus is your Messiah, then that means that it's *HIS* goodness, *HIS* perfect life, *HIS* sacrifice, *HIS* resurrection that gives you confidence, that gives you your identity, your hope, not yourself, not your moral record, not your money, not your relationships, only him. *That's* the foundation of his Church. To be a part of His Church, to be a Christian, doesn't mean that you see Jesus primarily as an example to follow- because if that's the case, I'm going to hell and so are you. To be a part of his Church means that Jesus is your Messiah- your substitute, your sacrifice, your Messiah and therefore your claim before God that you are acceptable. That's why the gates of Hell will never overcome it. If your claim before God is that you are a good person, Satan will show up and say, "oh really?" What about this, this and this?"

But if your claim is, “No, I’m not good, but Jesus was good, and he died in my place, that’s why you can accept me,” what could Satan possibly say?

Why is this important? Jesus shows us- because he is true God, because he is our Messiah, the keys of Heaven and Earth are in Peter’s, the apostles, and our hands. What does that mean?

If Jesus is true God and the Messiah who satisfied God’s wrath over the sins of the whole world, we, Christians who have experienced that forgiveness and the freedom of knowing that I’m accepted by God, **can boldly and confidently say, “God forgives you.”when I’m faced with a sinner who is weighed down by the guilt of their sin, their evil, their depravity.** And when you do that, it is just as valid and effective as if Christ were to come down and say it himself. When we proclaim Jesus’ message to each other and to people who need to hear about Jesus, we are unlocking Heaven for them. God is using us to save them. That’s why it matters. **Because Jesus is who he says he is, St. John’s isn’t a place to come get really good advice, even though you’ll get that too. It’s a place to find freedom from guilt, liberation from your past, and a real, legit hope for the future.**

Therefore **embrace all of Jesus**, all his teaching, even if it challenges or offends you. Because he is **not only true God, but he’s your messiah.** And a real Jesus, a real God, a real Messiah means a **real forgiveness, a real hope, a real peace, and a real joy.**

One application I’d like to make is this.

One impression I get as I talk to people, even Christians, about Jesus is that many think that to believe that Jesus is true God and a savior from sin is kind of extreme, a bit irrational, illogical, and that it’s much more reasonable to say that he was a good teacher- that’s more reasonable. It’s actually not. Here’s why.

Do you see what Jesus claims about himself? He declares himself to be the Son of God. He claims divine authority. He claims divine knowledge. People, like Peter, declare him to be true God, and Thomas later in John’s Gospel says, “My Lord and My God,” and Jesus never corrects them! If he weren’t true God, wouldn’t he make that more clear and say, “woah guys, no, I’m not God.” But he doesn’t. Jesus deliberately claims that he is God, the knower of all things, the creator of all things, and the only way to Heaven.

If that’s not true, then Jesus a liar, or a lunatic, and the biggest fraud in all history. And if that’s what he is, why on earth would you take his moral advice? It’s radically irrational and logically inconsistent to say, “Well, I think Jesus was either a complete fraud, a liar, or completely insane, but his moral advice is really good and we should model our lives after him.” Jesus is either a liar and lunatic, or he is the almighty eternal God of all creation, but the one thing he absolutely cannot be is, “just a good teacher.”

The reason I say this is because when you talk to your friends and neighbors about Jesus, which I hope you do, you’ll run into people who say that, “I don’t know about the Son of God, but

Jesus is a good teacher.” I encourage you to kindly and gently challenge that and say, “have you actually considered what Jesus says about himself? Take them to Matthew 16 and show them what Jesus says and let them come face to face with this reality: I must either consider Jesus criminally insane, or I must worship him. To do anything else is logically inconsistent. Do this, because as they wrestle, they’ll hopefully read more and more of Jesus’ words, and that is how God reveals his truth to his people, just like Peter, so that they can know his truth, his forgiveness, and enjoy Jesus, not a small or fractional Jesus, but the true Jesus. Our God, our Messiah, and our rock. Amen.