**Need 30 Minutes for this Message**

**Introduction: Box of Lies** (335 Words)

When it comes to truth and lies I bet most of us could place ourselves somewhere on a continuum from **gullible** on the one hand (stand to the right of the stage) to **skeptical** on the other (stand to the left of the stage).

Quick show of hands - Who here would say you lean toward the **gulible** (right side of stage) side of the continuum – you are more likely to simply take people for their word? You are pretty quick to believe?

And on the other end of the spectrum, who here would say you tend to be more **skeptical**? (Left side of stage) You want lots of evidence and like ask lots of questions and maybe even poke holes in what people say befor you believe them?

~~And who here would say they are the~~ **~~perfect balance~~** ~~of believing the best, giving people the benefit of the doubt, but still asking questions in to make sure you aren’t taken advantage of or buying into something too quickly? Of course, you all are the most perfectly balanced people. ☺~~

This whole notion of believing or not believing made me think of Jimmy Fallon’s game “Box of Lies.” (Still from Jimmy Fallon, playing “Box of Lies”) Who here has seen Jimmy play “Box of Lies” with some of his celebrity guests. Bring the volunteer on stage here and just give instructions in the moment. He sits at a table facing his celebrity guest, but there is a barrier between him and his guest so that all they can see is each other’s faces. Then they take turns describing items they pull out of various boxes. And each person has to determine whether or not the other person is actually describing the item in the box or making something up that has nothing to do at all with what was in the box. Once the person decides what they think, they say, “Truth” or “Lie.”

I though it might be fun for us to play a quick variation of that game. So I need a volunteer . . .

***Instructions****: Have a desk or folding table on stage with a chair facing the congregation. Place a barrier or divider of some kind between the person and the congregatoion.*

*Have two shoe boxes with relatively strange items numbered 1 and 2. Then ask the audience: “Do you want our volunteer to describe the item in Box 1 or the item in Box 2?” Have the volunteer pull the item out of the box and describes it* ***OR*** *lie about it trying to make you and the audience think he or she is actually describing it. After the volunteer “describes” the object, keep the congregation engaged by asking: “What do you think? Lie or Truth? Do you believe him/her or not? Who thinks he/she is telling the truth? Who thinks he/she is lying?”*

*Give the volunteer a Starbucks gift card and ask everyone to express their thanks to him or her for being so courageous this morning and playing along.*

**Series Recap** (267 Words)

Today we continue this great 7-Week series called **EXPLORE GOD**. For these seven weeks we are joining with hundreds of churches across Chicagoland as we address some super important questions about God, faith, and purpose. On the one hand, there are some truths we hope to **dis**cover, and on the other hand there are some lies we hope to **un**cover. But our true desire is not to convince anyone of anything, but to invite everyone to explore these questions together.

Today’s question: Is Jesus Really God?And here is something very Interesting, research would show that most people believe in the “historical” Jesus...that Jesus was a real person who lived in the 1st century. Would anyone like to take a guess as to what percentage of people would say they believe that Jesus was a historical figure?

* Who here would say 60% or more?
* Who would say more than 75% of people say they believe Jesus was a historical figure?
* Would anyone say that more than 90% of people would say they believe in a historical Jesus?

According to the Barna Research Group, 92% of Americans would say they believe in a historical Jesus. Reason…there is overwhelming historical evidence. No serious historian disputes he existed. (Cite: <https://www.barna.com/research/what-do-americans-believe-about-jesus-5-popular-beliefs/>)

**And while an overwhelming majority of people believe Jesus was a historical figure, when in comes to Jesus as God, we wrestle with is this a truth or a lie.** it’s a huge leap to jump from saying you believe that a man named Jesus walked the earth in the first century to believing that this same person was God come to earth!

But let’s start today where we seem to have common ground...the historical Jesus, and take a look at what this historical Jesus had to say?

**I Am**

**Visually need to emphasize I AM and I WILL**

When it comes to His humanity and divinity, how do you think Jesus might finish this statement?

I am ­­­­­\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Was he God, or just a man? Jesus certainly wasn’t silent on the subject. One of the clearest examples of this is found in John 10, where we find Jesus walking in the temple courts. He’s surrounded by Jews prodding him with loaded questions.

“How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly.”

John 10:24

To be clear, this is no friendly stroll. Jesus might as well be taking a dip into a pool of piranas. Their intent to incriminate Him into saying something they would deem crazy and blasphemous…*like that He is God.*

So Jesus responds: “I did tell you, but you do not believe. The works I do in my Father’s name testify about me, but you do not believe because you are not my sheep. My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father’s hand. I and the Father are one.”

John 10:25-30

Did you catch that at the end? (another slide with “I and the Father are one” in bold)

[Repeat with emphasis] “I and the Father are one.”

It’s the first time we hear of Jesus explicitely claiming oneness with God the Father. Subtle? Not hardly! This is a bombshell and it doesn’t go unnoticed. As soon as Jesus utters these words, His opponents pick up stones to kill Him on the spot. (John 10:31 on screen) They clearly regarded His words as blasphemy. Jesus claimed to be God.

The oneness that Jesus is pointing to here isn’t simply a facet of his *identity*. The language of the text reveals something far beyond a simple sentiment. Jesus is speaking of His very *function.* His mission and purpose is perfectly one with the Father. Like Father God, He protects the sheep. And as God, He gives them eternal life. People that aren’t God don’t get to give eternal life. Can you imagine that kind of doctor visit? Hey Sally, doc has some great news, your diet and exercise are working perfectly! You’re going to live forever! Clearly by His own words, Jesus thinks He’s qualified to give such a thing.

(John 10:36) Jesus goes on in this conversation to make it clear that He was sent by God. In other words, before He got here He was somewhere else! The Son shares in the eternal nature of the Father. There wasn’t some moment where the Son needed to be invented and made into existence. As if God 1.0 decided he needed to improve and become version 2.0 with an upgraded Jesus mode. Jesus is God forever, just like the Father.

Believing that a person who walked this planet, a person just like you and I no less, is fully God and came from Heaven is no small pill. In the verses that followed His claim, it’s evident that Jesus knew that too, so He pointed to the evidence of His work and miracles, and there are plenty of them. But there’s one miracle that far outweighs them all.

**I Will** (527)

Need a little more here about people predicting what they do… Few things can top calling your own shot. Babe Ruth did it in 1932 World series against some baseball team from Chicago. Legend has it that he pointed to the center field bleachers at Wrigley and the very next pitch sent one 500 feet to the very spot he pointed.

Jesus backed up his claims of “I am” with a massive “I will.” It’s the “I will” that sets Him apart from every other person and every other belief system in the history of humanity. Do we wait for this statement until the end of this section? ~~The “I will” that proves He truly is the Son of God.~~

In the second chapter of John, there is an incident in which Jesus drives out a bunch of merchants and money changers from the temple courts.

“Get these out of here! Stop turning my Father’s house into a market!” John 2:16

Understandably, it’s quite a scene, so the Jews that were present demanded that Jesus tell them what gave Him the authority to do this. Just imagine someone coming in here and throwing some chairs and communion cups around the room. Or even worse…hurts our drumset!

Jesus response to their demand for a sign is incredible.

He answered them. “Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days.” They replied, “It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and you are going to raise it in three days?” But the temple he had spoken of was his body. John 2:19-21

Not only had the work already taken 46 years, it wasn’t even complete. Jesus saying He would rebuild it in three days was beyond ridiculous to those that were standing right there in the temple. But John makes it clear. (same slide, bold highlight) But the temple he had spoken of was his body.

John points out in the next verse that when Jesus rose from the dead, it was this very conversation they recalled and finally understood. All the way back in John 2, Jesus was already pointing toward His resurrection. It’s the ultimate “I will.”

*Jesus predicted His own death and resurrection…and pulled it off!*

- The evidence supporting Jesus resurrection is staggering. There are four historical accounts of the resurrection, all written by eyewitnesses within a generation.

  Matthew was an eyewitness and he believed it.

  Mark got his information from Peter, an eyewitness, who believed it.

  Luke, who thoroughly researched his Gospel account, believed it.

  John was an eyewitness and he believed it too.

- (1 Corinthians 15:6 on screen) Paul describes a number of witnesses, including a time where Jesus appeared to over 500 people after His resurrection.

- There’s also the complete transformation of Jesus’ followers after His resurrection, going from hiding scared to boldly proclaiming what Jesus did.

Christianity exploded in growth. The message being preached was Jesus risen from the dead…not just his teachings. No other explanation for this explosive growth.

Not to mention the world changing faith that exploded from the time of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection. If this whole Jesus thing has been a lie, the results certainly don’t indicate it.

Thomas Aquinas who is he? put it this way:

 “If the incarnation did not really happen, then an even more unbelievable miracle happened: the conversion of the world by the biggest lie in history and the moral transformation of lives into unselfishness, detachment from worldly pleasures and radically new heights of holiness by a mere myth.”

**Our Longing for Resurrection** (271)

**Bring something personal in here… Who is jesus to me? I long for resurrection?**

2000 years later, even we today are evidence of His resurrection. There is something embedded in us that drives us to live. Jesus said, Verse? “Because I live, so also you shall live.” An oh do we long for that life. Endings just don’t fit us. We long for resurrection. We long to live!

As a kid, I still remember watching the last episode of Cheers. It hit me like a freight train. What I was doing watching Cheers at that age is another question entierly, but watching Sam Malone turn off the lights at the bar for the last time cut me deep. For crying out loud, I hadn’t even been to a bar yet! But all I could feel was the crushing finality of a last episode. No Netflix. No re-runs. No recordings. Just...the end.

We look at each other this way too. We’ve lost people knowing that there was more to say, and clinging to the hope that there’s more time, somewhere, somehow. The idea of this life ending and the lights going out just doesn’t make sense. Flip the switch and it’s over? It can’t be.

In our very core, we know that we weren’t built for good-byes. We weren’t made to end. God has planted within us this fantastic and impossibly REAL idea of eternity. We’re not a vapor that’s here today and gone tomorrow. No. God has set eternity upon our hearts. We long to live, and not for a little while.

The only person who can answer this longing…is Jesus.

And a Jesus that’s merely a person and nothing else can’t keep the lights on forever.

**Challenge: Believe Jesus** (578 Words)

So the question we’re asking is this: Is Jesus Really God? But maybe the real question we’re asking is “Do you believe Jesus is who *he* says he is?”

About this time last year, Liza from our Lincoln Square location was asking a similar question. Struggling through some tough life circumstances set her on a journey of looking for help and direction.Here is Liza’s story . . .

Video Testimony: Liza? (LSQ)

So, what will you decide about Jesus?

C.S. Lewis was one of the most brilliant minds of the 20th century; he’s the guy who wrote the Chronicles of Narnia and many other works. He didn’t believe in God. Said he couldn’t believe in God. So he set out to prove that there was no God. But when it came to Jesus, who claimed to be God he said “I had only three choices: Jesus is either a liar…or a lunatic…or Lord?”

Here at Community, we’ve seen hundreds even thousands of people on a similar search.

* For some -- like C. S. Lewis, it’s an **intellectual** search
* For others they began their search because their **children started asking questions** about God.
* Others began their journey seeking after God because like Liza, they were **banged up from life**

All of us, at some point will decide what we believe about Jesus. When Jesus walked this earth he asked his closest friends to decide what they believed about him. And Peter, who’s life was full of ups and downs, responded, ***“You are the Messiah,[***[***d***](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+16&version=NLT#fen-NLT-23665d)***] the Son of the living God.” (Matthew 16:16)***.

So, what about you? Jesus doesn’t expect us to check our brains at the door. He doesn’t want us to stop asking questions. He certainly doesn’t insist that we never doubt. He simply asks that we come and follow him. So, today will you choose to follow him?

In his classic work, ***Mere Christianity,*** CS Lewis wrote this: “You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse. 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. He did not intend to. . . . Now it seems to me obvious that He was neither a lunatic nor a fiend: and consequently, however strange or terrifying or unlikely it may seem, I have to accept the view that He was and is God.”

In a minute I’m going to pray . . .and while I pray, the band is going to come up and lead us in another song. And while they are leading us in that song, I want to ask you the same question Jesus asked of Peter*,* ***“Who do you say that I am?” Jesus is?”*** And if you would say he is your Lord, I want you to tell someone next to you. Just say to them, “Jesus is my Lord.” It may be the first time you’ve uttered those words. Or maybe you chose him as your Lord, months or even years ago, but haven’t followed him as closely as you know you want to. And that’s ok. Let today be a time where you re-up. You choose him once again as your Lord.

**Pray**

**After Prayer, Song . . . and Reflection Time . . .**

**Conclusion** (252 Words)

If you said “Jesus is my Lord,” then I want to ask you to take the very next step people have taken for centuries after choosing to follow Jesus. They were baptized. In just two weeks, on Sunday, February 24th we are going to give anyone who wants to, the opportunity to make a public declaration before family and friends that Jesus is their Lord.

There is a place in your program where you can sign up. (Could we use the 313131 text? Or do we want them to fill out the tear-off or make a separate card?).

(Romans 6:3-4 on screen). The Apostle Paul says that when we are baptized we reenact the death, burial, and resurrection of our Lord, Jesus. Just as Jesus died, was buried, and came back to life. We too die to our old self, our old way of living and following anything or anyone other than Jesus. And we instead we begin a new life – a life of love, and grace, and forgiveness. Coming up out of the water of baptism reflects the new life we have in Jesus.

Jesus doesn’t want us to just **watch** him, he wants us to **join** him in his death and resurrection.

* Jesus said **“I AM!”** and because of him… We **ARE**! -- We are his children, part of his forever family!
* Jesus said **“I WILL!”** and because he did… die and come back to life . . . We **WILL!** -- We will live with him forever!

**Communion Idea**

In baptism we reenact the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus, and in communion we also remember his death, burial, and resurrection. We are going to celebrate communion together.

The Apostle Paul said this: ***“For every time you eat this bread and drink this cup, you are announcing the Lord’s death until he comes again.”*** *(I Cor 11:26).* The bread represents his body that was broken for us. The juice represents his blood that was shed for us.

(We could have a processional for all locations on this Sunday, giving people the chance to come forward for communion and drop a response card in a basket indicating that they want to be baptized.)