**Explore God Week 5 – Is Jesus Really God?**

**Message Big Idea**: With intention or by default, every person answers the question, “Is Jesus really God?” The overwhelming evidence points to the truth of his divinity.

**Scripture:** John 1:1-4,14; John 2:13-22, John 10:22-30, 1 Corinthians 15:3-8, 1 Corinthians 15:12-19

**NOTE**: We have allowed 30 minutes for this talk.

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**Introduction: Box of Lies**

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

Quick show of hands - Who here would say you lean toward the *(stage right)* **gullible** 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, *(stage left)* who here would say you tend to be more **skeptical**? You want lots of evidence and will ask lots of questions trying to poke holes in what people say before you believe them?



This whole notion of gullible or skeptical, believing or not believing made me think of (PPT) **Jimmy Fallon’s game “Box of Lies.”** Who here has seen Jimmy play “Box of Lies” with some of his celebrity guests? I thought it might be fun for us to play it this morning. Are you ready for a game of Box of Lies?

*(Have a table on stage and three shoe boxes with relatively strange items numbered 1, 2, and 3.*

Alright, here’s how this is going to work. I have three boxes up here. Our creative team has put an object in each box. I’m going to let you pick the box, and then I’m going to look at the object and describe it for you. The only catch is… you won’t know if I’m telling you the truth about the object or if I’m lying. Normally, I make it a practice to always tell the truth on this stage, but for right now, I’m going to leave you guessing. Ready to play? Alright, pick a box…

*(Let the audience yell out which box and pick one. Look inside and decide whether you will describe the object “as-is” or make something up.)*

OK, what do you think? Am I telling the truth or am I lying? Let me see a show of hands that think it is the truth. Alright, let me see a show of hands that think it is a lie? Well, here it is…

*(Reveal the object.)*

**Series Recap**

*(Series Graphic)* Today we continue this great, 7-Week series called **EXPLORE GOD**. For these seven weeks we are joining with hundreds of churches across Chicagoland to 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 shows that most people believe in the “historical” Jesus...that Jesus was a real person who lived in the first century. Would anyone like to take a guess as to what percentage of people would say they believe that Jesus is a historical figure?

* Who here would say 60% or more?
* Who would say more than 75% of people 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 say they believe in a historical Jesus.[[1]](#endnote-1) 92%! And there is good reason for that. There is an overwhelming amount of historical evidence for Jesus. No serious historian disputes he existed.

**However, while an overwhelming majority of people believe Jesus was a historical figure, Jesus being God is another story.** Many people wonder if Jesus being God is 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**

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 his Jewish countrymen prodding him with loaded questions. They ask:

**“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 is to trick him into saying something everyone 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? *(highlight)* **“I and the Father are one.”**

It’s the first time we hear Jesus explicitly claiming oneness with God the Father. Subtle? Not hardly! This is a bombshell, and it doesn’t go unnoticed. *(John 10:31)* As soon as Jesus utters these words, his opponents pick up stones to kill him on the spot. They clearly regarded his words as blasphemy. By claiming to be one with the Father, they knew Jesus was saying, **I am…** *(pause)**(add)* **God.**

Jesus’ claim of oneness 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 the Father, 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! No! Human beings don’t have that authority. Clearly by his own words, Jesus thinks he’s qualified to give such a thing.

*(John 10:36a)* 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 brought 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 me no less, is fully God and came from heaven is no small pill. Jesus knew that…he knew that it would be hard for people to look at a person and accept his claim, **“I am God.”** And so he came with evidence. He challenged people to examine the evidence that was right before their eyes…his wonders and miracles. And there were plenty of them! But there’s one miracle that far outweighs them all.

**I Will**

Few things are more amazing than calling your own shot…in predicting what’s going to happen before it happens. In sports history, no one is a bigger legend than baseball player Babe Ruth, and one of the stories that makes Babe Ruth larger than life is that he supposedly called his own shot in the 1932 World Series…against a much-beloved team on the northside of Chicago, no less. He pointed his bat to the center field bleachers at Wrigley Field and then proceeded to send the very next pitch 500 feet over the wall to that very spot.

Understand, 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.

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. Jesus is angry as he exclaims:

**“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…turning over our drumset!

Jesus response to their demand for a sign is incredible. He answers:

**“’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! But John adds a little note to make sure we know what Jesus was talking about… *(highlight)* **But the temple he had spoken of was his body.**

*(John 2:22)* John points out in the next verse that when Jesus rose from the dead, his disciples recalled this conversation and finally understood. All the way back in John 2, Jesus was already pointing toward His resurrection. He was saying, **I will…** *(pause)* **rise!**

**Jesus predicted His own death and resurrection…and pulled it off! He called his own shot!**

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 Jesus rose from the dead.
* 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)* In his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul describes a number of witnesses, including a time where Jesus appeared to over 500 people after he rose from the dead!

Jesus’ followers went from hiding in terror after he died to boldly proclaiming he was alive. How else could you explain that transformation other than he rose from the dead?

Christianity exploded in growth after the resurrection. The message being preached was Jesus risen from the dead…not just “Jesus a good teacher” or “Jesus a good man.” If this whole Jesus thing has been a lie, world history certainly doesn’t explain it.

The philosopher, theologian, and priest, Thomas Aquinas, 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.” –Thomas Aquinas**

**Our Longing for Resurrection**

The truth is, even now, 2000 years later, I find evidence for the resurrection in my own heart. There is something embedded in each of us that drives us to live. We long for life. Endings just don’t fit us.

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.

Endings don’t feel natural to us. 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 goodbyes. We weren’t made to end. We were made for resurrection. 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 in our hearts. We long to live, and not for a little while.

And the only person who can answer this longing…is Jesus.

And a Jesus that’s merely a person and nothing else can’t help us. But a Jesus who is God can keep the lights on forever.

**Challenge: Believe Jesus**

So the question we’re asking is: “**Is Jesus Really God?”** But maybe the question we need to ask 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 for help and direction.Here is Liza’s story…

**Video Testimony: Liza**

*(“Do you believe…” question)* 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. At first 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 the more he studied the historical Jesus, he realized he only had three choices: Jesus is either a liar…a lunatic…or he is Lord.” In his classic work, ***Mere Christianity,*** Lewis wrote:

“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.” –C.S. Lewis

Here at Community, we’ve seen hundreds even thousands of people on a 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 because, like Liza, they were **beaten up from life.**

All of us, at some point will decide what we believe about Jesus. *(“Who do you say I am?” –Matthew 16:15)* 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: *(add)*

**“You are the Messiah, 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 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?”*** 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**

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.

If you are interested in taking that step, I want to encourage you to fill out this Communication Card in your program and drop it in the offering or bring it to our Next Steps table.

*(Romans 6:3-4)* 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 following anything or anyone other than Jesus. And 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. *(add these one at a time on the same slide)*

* 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!

Don’t miss this opportunity to declare your belief and faith in Jesus! We invite you to be baptized.

**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 Corinthians 11:26***

The bread represents his body that was broken for us. The juice represents his blood that was shed for us.

1. <https://www.barna.com/research/what-do-americans-believe-about-jesus-5-popular-beliefs/> [↑](#endnote-ref-1)