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

**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)*.

So quick show of hands - Who here would say you lean toward the *(stage right)* **gullible** side of the continuum –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 before you believe?



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 a celebrity guest? I thought it might be fun for us to play this morning. Are you ready for a game of Box of Lies? Yea? Ok!

*(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. BUT here is the catch … you won’t know if I’m **telling you the truth** or if I’m **lying**. Normally, I make it a practice to tell the truth, 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**? Show of hands:

* Who thinks I’m **telling the truth**.
* Alright, and who thinks I’m **telling 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 life and faith. There are some truths we hope to **dis**cover, and some lies we hope to **un**cover. But our true desire isn’t so much 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 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’s good reason for that. There is an **overwhelming** amount of historical evidence for Jesus. No serious historian disputes that Jesus existed.

**However, while an overwhelming majority of people believe a man named Jesus lived in the 1st century, the idea of Jesus being GOD is another story altogether.** It’s a significant leap to jump from believing that a man named Jesus walked the earth centuries ago 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 about himself.

**I Am**

How do you think Jesus might have finished this statement during his time on earth?

**I am…** (fill in the blank)

Jesus wasn’t silent on the subject. One of the clearest examples of this is found in the writings of his friend and folower, John. John writes about Jesus walking in the temple courts one time and he’s surrounded by Jewish religious leaders prodding him with loaded questions. And at one point they ask him:

***“How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah*** *(the One sent from God to save his people),* ***tell us plainly.”*** *(John 10:24)*

Now 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 to say 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? Especially what Jesus said at the very end? *(highlight)* **“I and the Father are one.”**

It’s the first time we hear Jesus claiming he and the Father are one. And this is a bombshell! *(John 10:31)* As soon as Jesus utters these words, his adversaries pick up stones to kill him. They clearly regarded his words as blasphemy and an afront to all they bellieved to be true. By claiming to be one with the Father, they knew Jesus was saying, **I…AM…** *(pause)**(add)* **GOD.**

And when Jesus says, ***“I and the Father are one”*** he is not only talking about who he **is**, he is speaking about what he **does***.* His mission and purpose is perfectly one with the Father. **Like** the Father, he protects the sheep – his followers. And he **gives** them eternal life. – And **people who aren’t God don’t get to give eternal life.**

Can you imagine? It would be like going to the doctor for a check up and hearing him say, “Hey Sally, I’ve got some great news, your diet and exercise is working perfectly! As a matter of fact, you’re going to live forever!” Human beings don’t have that authority. And clearly by his own words, Jesus thinks he is qualified.

*(John 10:36a)* Jesus goes on in this conversation to make it clear that he not only had the authority and mission of God, he was **sent by God**. Think about that! -- If he was **sent** by God, then that means before he arrived he was somewhere **else**! There wasn’t some moment where Jesus, the Son, needed to be invented and brought into existence…as if God 1.0 decided he needed a new and improved version. No, Jesus is God forever, just like the Father. That’s what the apostle John meant when he said, ***“In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God.”*** *(John 1:1 on scren)* Jesus, being referred to as the “Word” always was!.

I know that believing a person who walked this planet just like you and me -- is fully God is no small pill, I realize that. And Jesus **knew** that…he **knew** that it would be hard for people to look at him - a **person** and accept his claim, **“I AM God!”** And so what does he do? He comes with **evidence**. He challenged people to consider what they saw with their very own eyes…his **miracles** and **wonders**. And there were plenty of them! He healed the sick, gave sight to the blind, and made the lame to walk. But there’s one miracle that far outweighs them all.

**I Will**

Think about it this way; there are few things are more amazing than calling your own shot… predicting what’s **going** to happen **before** it actually happens. In sports history, no one is a bigger than baseball’s Babe Ruth. And one of the stories that makes Ruth larger than life is that he is believed to have called his own shot in the 1932 World Series…against the Cubs. He pointed to the right field wall and sent the very next pitch 500 feet to that very spot. He **called** it, and then it **happened**. It was like he said, “**I AM** the Babe, and **I WILL** hit the next pitch over the fence!”

And Jesus backed up his claims of “**I AM**” with a massive **I WILL…** And it’s the “I WILL” that sets Him apart from every other person and every other belief system in the history of the world.

In John’s wriitngs there is another incident in which Jesus drives out a bunch of people for using the temple as a place to make money for themselves. *(John 2:16 on screen)*

It’s quite a scene and the Jewish people demand that Jesus tell them what gave him the authority to do this. And then he answers with these words:

***“’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?’*** Then John adds this clarifying comment: ***But the temple he had spoken of was his body.”*** *(John 2:19-21)*

The temple had already taken 46 years to buld, it wasn’t even complete, and here Jesus says he could rebuild it in three days!? But John adds a little note to make sure we know what Jesus was really talking about. He says, *(highlight)* ***But the temple he had spoken of was his body*.** Stay with me here.

*(John 2:22)* Then John points out that when Jesus came back from the dead, his disciples recalled this conversation and finally understood that Jesus was pointing to His resurrection. He was saying, **I AM GOD AND I WILL RISE!**

**Jesus predicted His own death and resurrection…and pulled it off! He called his own shot! He said, “I WILL” and HE DID!**

(Pause)

And the evidence supporting Jesus resurrection is staggering. Four historical accounts of the resurrection, are all written by eyewitnesses…

* **Matthew,** a tax collector and eyewitness believed Jesus rose from the dead.
* **Mark** got his information from Peter who was an eyewitness, and he believed.
* **Luke**, a doctor and historian thoroughly researched his account, and believed.
* **John** was an eyewitness and he too believed.

*(1 Corinthians 15:6)* In his first letter to Chist-followers in Corinth, Paul describes a time where Jesus appeared to over 500 people following his resurrection!

Jesus’ followers went **from hiding in terror** to risking their lives as they boldly **proclaimed he was alive**. How else do we explain this other than Jesus actually came back to life? Yes, he said, “**I AM**” and “**I WILL**.” And **HE DID!**

This new movement exploded after the resurrection. The number of Jesus followers grew from just a handful to 6 million people -- 10% of the world’s population by the year 300. And the core message was Jesus risen from the dead…not just “Jesus a good teacher” or “Jesus a good man” but Jesus, the risen Savior -- The one who said, “**I AM**”, and “**I WILL**.” And **HE** **DID**!

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**

But you know something, I think we find evidence for the resurrection in every one of us even today. Doesn’t it feel like there something in each of us that resists endings and death. We **long** for life. – Now, we know there are two things we can always count on: death and taxes. But the truth is, we resist them – **BOTH** of them!

Who here remembers the last episode of the tv show **Cheers**? Over 84 million people viewed that final episode. Watching Sam Malone turn off the lights at the bar for the last time - it was strangely painful, wasn’t it? It actually felt like we were **losing** something. Yes, that was a different era . . . No Netflix. No re-runs. No TiVo. Just...the end.

I don’t think endings feel natural to us. We’ve all lost loved ones when there was more we wanted to say or do: one more “I love you” or just one more chance to hold that person’s hand. We long for it. And so we cling to the hope that there **is** something more. The idea of this life ending and the lights going out with nothing else, just doesn’t feel right.

I think at our core, we know we weren’t really made for goodbyes or final endings. .Scripture says ***“He (God) has planted eternity in the human heart.”*** *(Ecclesiastes 3:11).* We long to live, and not for a little while, but forever.

And the only person who can ruly answer that longing…is Jesus. The one who who said, “**I AM**” and “**I WILL**” and **HE DID**.

**Challenge: Believe Jesus**

So the question we’re asking is this: “**Is Jesus Really God?”**

About this time last year, Liza was struggling through some tough life circumstances that led her to ask this same question.Here is her 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. 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 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.
* And yet others began their journey because, like Liza, **life was just getting the best of them.**

But all of us, at some point 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 what **they** believed about him. And Peter, who’s life was full of ups and downs, frought with failure, responded: *(add)* ***“You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.”*** *(Matthew 16:16)* Yes, I believe you are who you say you are. The one who says “**I AM**” and “**I WILL!**”

So, what about you?

Jesus doesn’t expect us to **check our brains** at the door, stop **asking questions**, and **never doubt**. He simply asks that we come and follow him. So, today will you choose to follow him, the one who said, “**I AM**” and “**I WILL**? . . . Because **HE DID!**

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 Jesus is your Lord, would you 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 you to fill out the Communication Card in your program and drop it in the offering bag or bring it to our Welcome Table.

*(Romans 6:3-4)* The Apostle Paul says that when we are baptized we reenact the death, burial, and resurrection of our 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 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**

Like I said, 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. When you walk forward you are saying, “Yes, I believe you are who you say you are.”

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