

Who does Jesus claim to be?

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[0 : 00] What would you do if I told you, in all seriousness, that I'm from another dimension? I'm billions of years old, and I have special powers.

I'm not the person you thought I was. What would you do? It would explain a lot. True. Because I am. No, I'm joking.

But if I seriously said that, I imagine Adrian would probably gently escort me off the stage, take me to my office, give me a glass of water, lock the door, and call for psychiatric help, right?

I mean, I would expect him to do that as the rector's warden. His job kind of is to protect you from me when I go crazy. Notice I said when I go crazy, not if I go crazy. It's going to happen sooner or later with you lot.

No, I'm kidding. But that's how we would expect someone to react if I said things like that. But if you think about it, Jesus makes claims that aren't that different, right?

[1 : 07] I mean, we've heard about it in the last few weeks. He's claimed that he came from another dimension, from heaven, from God. He claims that he has special powers, even to make dead people come alive again, and a whole lot more claims than that.

And later on in John, John chapter 8, he claims to have existed millions of years in the past. And yet, instead of writing him off as a madman, we form a religion around him.

Billions of people worship him and speak to him every day. But why? Why should we believe any of it? Why believe what he says when you wouldn't believe what anybody else says, if they're saying the same thing as that?

It's a good question to ask. Why do we believe him? Why do we believe what he says? It sounds insane. And if you're maybe not a Christian here this morning, or maybe you're listening to this recording, you might be saying, exactly.

You know, what are these Christians on about? Why do Christians believe all this stuff? How can we be so sure that Jesus is who he says he is? Well, that's the question I want us to look at this morning, because it's a question that Jesus himself answers in this morning's passage.

[2 : 16] See, last week, as I said, we looked at some of the claims that Jesus makes about himself. Some of these really big, seemingly crazy claims. But he doesn't stop there.

What's interesting is that, as you read on in John chapter 5, he goes on to present evidence to support all the claims that he's just made. Because look how it begins.

Verse 31. Have a look in your Bibles. John 5:31. This is a very important thing Jesus says. He says, if I testify about myself, my testimony is not true.

If I testify about myself, my testimony is not true. You see what he's saying? He's saying, all the things I've just said about myself, all the things I've been saying about myself so far, don't believe any of it just because I say so.

Because that would be stupid, wouldn't it? Jesus says to us that we shouldn't believe just because he says. That's what he's saying here in verse 31.

[3 : 13] And that alone, by the way, sets him apart from every other religious figure in history and every other religion in all the world. You see, all the others, every single other religion, will expect you to believe what they say just because they say it.

You don't ask questions. You don't ask for evidence. There's no evidence to support any of it. But you dare not ask for any, especially in some of the more militant religions. You've just got to believe it because the imam says so or because the priest says so.

You don't ask questions. But that's not the case with Christianity. Christianity and Jesus Christ stand apart. Christ himself encourages us to look for evidence and to find it before we believe that something is true, even when it comes to the words he says.

Evidence which he then, in this passage, goes on to give. Because the next few verses, it's very interesting, it plays out like a courtroom drama.

You've ever watched those courtroom dramas on TV and really tense and all the witnesses are coming forward and the evidence is being presented and the truth is slowly starting to come out. Well, this passage is a courtroom drama because these Jewish leaders have come and they've confronted Jesus.

[4 : 25] They want to kill Jesus because of all the things he's saying. And now he's defending himself. And he's responding to them and he's backing up his claims by calling up a bunch of witnesses.

He calls these witnesses to the stand to present evidence. And the evidence of this passage and the witnesses he presents are so compelling that by the end, no longer is Jesus the one in the dock defending himself, having to show reasons why to believe in him.

Rather, by the end of this passage, it's his opponents who are needing to show reasons why they don't believe in him. And so let's have a look at this courtroom drama. Let's see what is this evidence that Jesus presents.

Who are the witnesses that are so compelling? Well, there are three that Jesus mentions in this passage. I want us to see each of them in turn. First of all, the first witness Jesus calls to the stand is John the Baptist.

Have a look from verse 33. You have sent to John and he has testified to the truth. Not that I accept human testimony, but I mention it to you that you may be saved.

[5 : 31] John was a lamp that burned and gave light and you chose for a time to enjoy his light. Okay, so this is the first witness. Jesus is there in the courtroom and he calls up John.

John comes along and he sits in the stand. And he's about to be cross-examined. Now for the Jews of the day, this is a significant witness to call up.

You see, because John, he wasn't just a madman in the desert. People flocked to John because John was recognized, by and large, in Israel as a prophet.

Now as you probably know, Israel was no ordinary country in the Old Testament. It was the country that for that period in history, God had chosen to speak through to the world.

And he did this through men called prophets that he raised up in various times in the history of Israel. And he gave his spirit to, to speak his words to other people. It's the way God communicated.

[6 : 30] And then they wrote down what they spoke. And we have it in our Old Testaments today. Well, you see, John the Baptist was one of these prophets of Israel that God raised up to speak to the people. And people recognized him as a prophet because of the words he said, because of his teachings.

He spoke with authority, spoke the words of God. Jesus says here, his words were light in the darkness to them. And that's why people came to him. That's why people listened to him. Even though he, you know, dressed in weird clothes and ate locusts and things.

He, his words were what, what validated him as a prophet of God. And so people recognized him as a prophet. They came to listen to him until, of course, he started talking about Jesus.

Hinting that Jesus is Israel's long-awaited Messiah, which, of course, the Jews took exception to because Jesus wasn't the Messiah they wanted. And so they started to ignore John despite the fact that he was a prophet.

And this happened, this wasn't the first time it happened. Throughout Israel's history, the prophet would come, everybody would go, yeah, another prophet. And then he would start speaking God's words and they'd go, oh no, that's quite uncomfortable.

[7 : 41] Let's ignore the prophet or stone him or chop him in half or whatever, which sadly they did often. But nobody disputed that they were God's prophets, speaking God's words.

They were recognized as legitimate prophets. All they did was ended up choosing to ignore them because they didn't like what these prophets said.

John was one of these. John was one of the prophets they chose to ignore, not because they didn't think he was from God, but because they didn't like what he was saying. You see, people can know that what they're hearing is from God and still choose to ignore it, as they were in this case.

But this is the first witness to present evidence. It's not the only witness to Jesus' identity. Next up to the stand, Jesus calls his own works.

Have a look from verse 36. I have testimony weightier than that of John. Okay, so if you thought John was a good witness, wait for this one. For the works that the Father has given me to finish, the very works that I am doing testify that the Father has sent me.

[8 : 48] Okay, so we saw last week an example of one of Jesus' great miraculous works in healing this cripple. And we learned that that actually is a sign of the real work that Jesus came to earth to do, which is to restore what was broken.

Remember that? To restore broken humanity back to what it should be, back into relationship with God. And of course he did that. We ultimately see as we go on in John.

Jesus restored us, not by healing us physically, but by healing us spiritually, by taking our sin on the cross, by taking all our punishment on himself so that we can come back to God in an open and free relationship with no guilt, no sin, because Jesus has taken that.

For all who trust in him, that is the way he has ultimately healed us. That is the way Jesus is restoring people today back to God and to eternal life by dealing with their sin through people coming to trust in what he did for them on the cross.

But of course, as we've seen in John, he's represented that work through visible signs. These signs like healing this cripple man. But that wasn't the only sign he did.

[10 : 01] He's performed a number of things that only God can do. And the purpose of these miraculous signs wasn't just to show us the work that he's doing and coming to restore us.

It was also to prove his authority to say the things he's saying. You see, these signs that he did, most of them, contradicted science. They went against the rules of physics and nature.

And that was the purpose of a miracle. If a miracle obeyed the rules of science, it wouldn't be a miracle and no one would pay attention to it. So Jesus deliberately did things, because he can, because he's the son of God, that broke the rules of science so that people see that he's no ordinary man and people listen to what he's saying.

So his works gave authority to his words. And that was the purpose of miracles wherever you find them in scripture. Miracles happened to give authority to the words of the one who was speaking. Because the truth is, I mean, anybody can come and say the things Jesus came to earth and said. I could come and say it. But nobody except Jesus can do the things that Jesus did.

[11 : 11] These weren't just magic tricks. They were signs to prove that what he said was true. And they should have silenced Jesus' opponents. The opponents and the critics who were there and they saw them, they should have had no further argument.

And yet, did they know? If you were at Growth Group this week, studying this miracle, you would have seen that even miracles weren't enough for people who have already made their decisions about Jesus.

Even seeing these miraculous signs in front of them are not going to convince people who have already decided what to believe. See, rather than fall at his feet and admit that this is the Messiah that we've been waiting for, the Pharisees chose to ignore the miracle and rather talk about how Jesus was breaking the Sabbath.

It was a blatant denial of the truth that is right in front of their eyes. But they don't want to admit that it's what they see. And so, because even Jesus' works weren't enough to convince these people, what Jesus does is he brings one more witness to the stand and this is his star witness.

This is the one he's been saving for last. This is the witness that puts all other arguments to bed because the next witness he calls to the stand is God himself. And all the words that God has ever spoken in history up until this point.

[12 : 39] Have a look from verse 37. And the Father who sent me has testified himself concerning me. You have never heard his voice nor seen his form nor does his word dwell in you for you do not believe the one he sent.

You study the scriptures diligently because you think that in them you have eternal life. These are the very scriptures that testify about me and yet you refuse to come to me to have life. Okay, so Jesus is telling these Jews, this is the final nail in the coffin of his argument.

He's telling the Jews that their very own scriptures that they study day in and day out their very own scriptures that they recognize come from God are all talking about Jesus.

They've actually had the evidence right in front of them for centuries and they haven't seen it. In our evening service we've been reading through the first books of the Old Testament.

And as I mentioned when we looked at them last week, what strikes me about these books in the Old Testament is how obscure and boring they are until you realize how they all point to Jesus.

[13:56] It's then that they come alive. If you don't realize that, if you read them without seeing how they point to Jesus, they are really boring. and they're really tough to read.

But when you realize that everything that happens in the Old Testament, all those narratives, all those sacrifices, all those temples, the dimensions for the temples, everything in some way points to Jesus and teaches us about how he comes to save us, then the Old Testament is unlocked and it comes alive.

Jesus is the key that unlocks the meaning of the rest of Scripture for us. But you see, that's what the Jews didn't get. They didn't realize that he was fulfilling their very own Scriptures.

They didn't want to realize it. But, you know, if you read the Old Testament in light of Jesus, you read like Isaiah 53, you read the passage Adrian read for us earlier, you read tons of passages that point to Jesus.

It's undeniable. You can't miss it. It's so obvious. Even just the first five books written by Moses should have been enough. So much so, Jesus says, look, verse 45, he says, but do not think that I will accuse you before your father.

[15:08] Your accuser is Moses on whom your hopes are set. If you believe Moses, you would believe me for he wrote about me. So this is kind of Jesus' surprise supporting witness that suddenly comes hobbling in from the back of a courtroom on his walking stick.

Moses himself is coming to testify against the Jews. See, because Moses, even Moses, in the first few books of the Bible, gave all the necessary directions that people needed to recognize Jesus when he came, but they didn't recognize him.

They completely missed him. I don't know if you've ever given someone directions to your home, right? And you tell them in quite a lot of detail how to get to your house and where your house is. You know, you take this street, you turn on this corner, and then when you go up that road, my house is the one with the cream wall and the white gate and the bush next to it. And then you're waiting for them to arrive and you just see their car driving right past.

Have you? You know what I'm talking about. You've been in that experience and you actually have to go and phone them and say, no, you just drove right past the house, the one that I directed. You just totally missed it. Well, you see, if Moses could phone these Jewish leaders from the grave, he would have said, he's right in front of you.

[16:27] You know, this is the one that I've been directing. You've completely missed him though. Everything I wrote, it's about him. All the laws that I wrote were to point you to your need for him.

You know, all the stories that I recorded were to show you the way that God is going to save you through him. Everything is pointing to Jesus.

But they totally missed it. to the point. They became legalists. They thought that the laws were all a way to get saved. But actually, nothing could be further from the truth.

And so, that was the third and the fourth secret star witness, Moses, coming in. So, Jesus has presented all of these witnesses, these indisputable witnesses to validate to those people that what he said to them was true.

What he told them about himself was true. The prophet, John the Baptist, his miraculous works and God's very own words in the Jewish scriptures. But that was then. What about now, today, in 2017?

[17:36] How can people today know that what Jesus says is true? Because, okay, great, they had the evidence then, but what about us? Well, the same way, actually.

We can know from the same witnesses that they knew from then. Firstly, the prophets who speak God's words with God's authority. We actually have prophets today.

Don't know if you know that. But, of course, prophets today are not like they were then because God's revelation is complete. God has said everything he wants to say.

So, prophets today aren't people who bring new words from God, but they are those who preach and teach the words that he's already said. Preachers of the word.

God speaks today primarily through the preached word. Sunday after Sunday as you sit under it, God is speaking. That is the way that he has chosen primarily to speak to you.

[18:37] And as long as that preaching is faithful to the Bible, we recognize the authority of God in the preached word. you don't all come here to listen to me, Nick, talk to you.

Because if you are, then really I'm going to disappoint you. You come here to listen to God, don't you? Because you recognize in the preached word, God's voice is heard. And how often have we sat under the word being preached and it's as if God is speaking directly to us, isn't it? It's as if God is speaking directly into a life situation that the preacher himself could know nothing about. Have you experienced that? Because God speaks through the preached words today. Paul wrote to the Thessalonians, we thank God because when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as a human word, but as it actually is the word of God. See, that's what happens when his word is preached today. That's what's happening right now. when we listen to it, somehow we know these are not just the words of men.

[19 : 50] They are God's words to us. And I say again, that doesn't apply to all preachers. It doesn't apply to all the wackos you hear on TBN or whatever other, you know, Bible preaching channel is popular today.

No, it's only when God's word is expounded, opened up, and taught, faithful to what it's saying in its context. It's when the preacher does the hard work of getting to the heart of what Scripture is saying and then preaching that, not just teaching it, not just giving you a lecture, but applying it into our lives.

It's when we do that that we hear God speaking. That is the primary way God has chosen to speak to us today. We know when we sit under the preached word, God is speaking. And yet, like with John the Baptist, people can know that what they are hearing is from God and still go out and ignore it.

It happens Sunday after Sunday. But that's not all. That's not the only witness we have. That's not the only way we hear the truth of God's word today.

Jesus' words are verified by his miracles today as well. sure, we don't get to see his miracles in front of us, but we've already learned seeing is not necessarily believing, is it?

[21 : 16] And the truth is, we don't need to see his miracles in front of us because we've got eyewitness accounts of them historically. In fact, most of what you believe about the world and world events, you believe not because you were there and you saw it with your own eyes, but you believe because of the testimony of eyewitnesses, don't you?

And you take it to be true because the eyewitnesses are verified and they're trustworthy. Well, it's the same with the events of Jesus' day. We have reliable, trustworthy eyewitness testimony, which has been verified, even independent historians of the day, Roman and Jewish historians who weren't Christians, even they can't deny, they talk about, they record the miraculous works of Jesus.

the amazing events that happened during the life of Jesus in this nation of Israel, the greatest of course of which is his resurrection. People have been trying to disprove the resurrection of Jesus for 2,000 years and they have failed every time they've tried to disprove that.

We have ample historical evidence, if you look into it, to absolutely without a doubt prove the resurrection of Jesus. I don't have time to go into all the evidence, but it's there.

I can give you books. We have the testimony of history to prove the miraculous works that happened. And today we've got the voice of God in the preached word, we've got historical eyewitness testimony, but lastly and perhaps most convincing, we've got the testimony of the Bible itself.

[23 : 00] See, the Bible is an amazing book. We take it for granted. But think about it. The Bible is a book who is written by more than 30 different people who lived in completely different times and places from all walks of life.

There was a king, a herdsman, a physician, a fisherman, a warrior, a priest, most of whom never met each other, and yet, when we all put it together, everything they wrote, it tells one big unified story that all points to one man, Jesus Christ.

And none of what all those varied people wrote contradicts itself. It's amazing. And all of these prophecies as well, all of these prophecies that come true to the letter.

I mean, prophecies written centuries before Jesus about specific details of his life. I mean, the small things as well, like soldiers gambling for his clothes, a small detail, and yet it was prophesied centuries before and so many more.

When you see the fulfillment of all these prophecies, you can't deny who Jesus is when you really read the Bible. And yet, people still do, don't they? I mean, surely, if we've got all this indisputable evidence, why do people still not believe?

[24 : 23] Why do people still refuse to admit who Jesus is? Well, that's really the big question, isn't it? And Jesus goes on to tell us why in this passage as well.

So not only does he present the evidence, he tells us why people still reject him. The first reason, of course, is just they don't listen to God. They don't listen. People who reject Jesus actually haven't read the Bible, and if they have, they haven't read it properly.

That's what he says. Look at verse 37. And the Father who sent me has himself testified concerning me. You have never heard his voice nor seen his form, nor does his word dwell in you, for you do not believe the one he sent.

So Jesus is saying, if you don't see him as the fulfillment of scripture, then you don't understand scripture. You're not reading it properly. Reading the Bible doesn't point you to Jesus, then you're not reading the Bible properly.

You're not listening to God, to what God is saying. But there are so many people like that, aren't there? So many people who read the Bible out of context, pick and choose what to hear, but not really listening to the coherent message of the Bible.

[25 : 35] Many, many people read it that way. But imagine for a second that you wrote me a letter. You had something really important to tell me, right? And you wrote me a letter with this really important message that you've, you know, spent three or four pages explaining.

But when I got it, instead of actually reading it, what I do is I keep it next to my bedside table, and every now and again, I just pick it up and read one or two sentences and find out and think about meditate on what they mean for me.

And that, we don't do that when reading letters, do we? We read the whole thing to get the whole message. So why, why do we read the Bible like that? Sadly, though, one of the reasons people don't believe in who Jesus is, is simply because they don't listen to what God has plainly said in Scripture.

They don't read the Bible. Maybe they're not given opportunities to read the Bible because their Christian friends at work don't offer to read the Bible with them. But it is surprising, isn't it, when you do offer to read the Bible with someone who hasn't ever read it for themselves, how keen they are to do that.

I, last week, asked someone who's not a Christian, doesn't go to church, if they want to read the Bible, and he was really keen. He's never had the opportunity to read it for himself. He's never had the impetus, he's never had someone offer, and I'm meeting with him tomorrow to read it.

[26 : 59] Because people need to hear it, people need to hear the message of God, but many people aren't given the opportunity, aren't given the push they need, or many people are just too lazy to pick it up and read it for themselves.

And that's the first reason people reject Jesus, they just, they don't listen to God. But there's an even deeper and sadder reason that people reject Jesus. It's not just because they don't listen to God, but it's ultimately because they don't love God.

Look from verse 42, look what Jesus says, these are some sobering words, he says, but I know you, I know that you do not have the love of God in your hearts. I have come in my Father's name and you do not accept me.

You see what Jesus is saying here? He's saying that the main reason people don't accept him is because they don't love God. They don't have the love of God in their hearts.

You see, if they truly loved God, they would love Jesus because Jesus is God. It's quite simple, isn't it? I mean, if you can't say that you love, I don't know, jazz music, for example, but then you want it turned off every time you hear it, then you don't really love it, do you?

[28 : 17] Well, you can't say that you love God, but then when he actually comes in Jesus and starts revealing himself, you turn him off. You don't listen to him. You don't love Jesus.

See, if you say you love God, but you don't love Jesus, then it's some other God you love, some imaginary God, not the real God who has revealed himself perfectly in Jesus.

And so really, let me ask you this morning, do you love Jesus? Do you love Jesus? It's easy to say in some kind of distant withdrawn way, I love God, but God has revealed himself in Jesus perfectly. If you look at Jesus and you don't love him, well then you don't really love God. That's what he's saying here. And it's quite sobering and it's quite convicting.

We've all got to ask ourselves this really deep question, do we love Jesus? Do we seek to know him?

[29 : 26] Whether or not you love Jesus shows whether or not you truly love God. And of course your love of Jesus is shown in how you live day to day. How much you let Jesus into your life.

How much you want to know more about him. How much you seek to listen to what Jesus says in scripture. How much you sacrifice to him.

Love is shown in sacrifice, isn't it? How much you seek to do what pleases him. How much you let him into your ordinary conversation rather than being ashamed of him.

All of these things will show whether you truly love Jesus or not. And so that is the question we've got to ask ourselves this morning. You see the question is not can I believe what Jesus says is true?

No. Jesus has given ample evidence that we can believe it. The real question is do I want to hear it? do I want to do what he says do I want to live my life for Jesus because I love him because he saved me from eternal condemnation and I love him because of it and he is the center of my life and I want to live for him or do I want to live for myself?

[30 : 39] that is what the question boils down to and it's a question that each of us need to ask as we go into this week and it's a question that I will ask of myself and I pray and hope that you will soberly ask of yourself.

Well let's do that now let's pray that God would help us. Yes God we thank you that you haven't called us to believe blindly. We thank you that you have throughout history sent reliable testimony through witnesses and not just one but many prophets your word the works of your son Jesus on earth Lord we know after reading this that we cannot deny who Jesus is.

We do pray Lord that you would help us to examine our own hearts help us each to go away and truly ask ourselves whether we love Jesus and if not to repent of that help us Lord to look to Jesus and in loving him to love you and help us Lord to live our lives in accordance with that love and to glorify you in the coming weeks and months we pray this all through Jesus Christ our Lord Amen