

# Exalting Jesus Christ

## "Lord, Liar or Lunatic"

### INTRODUCTION:

- I. The book in our Bibles we call the gospel of John is truly unique because it is devoted to proving only one thing – the deity of Jesus Christ.
  - A. From the first chapter of his gospel record to the last, the apostle John boldly proclaims that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God.
    1. But more than that, John affirms that Jesus is God the Son – God incarnate; God the Son who came down to earth in human form; God wrapped in human flesh.
    2. So, it is no surprise that John made these two bold statements in his gospel:
      - a. **John 20:30-31** – *And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; 31 but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.*
      - b. **John 21:25** – *And there are also many other things that Jesus did, which if they were written one by one, I suppose that even*

*the world itself could not contain the books that would be written. Amen.*

3. And yet, despite all the evidence John provides, there are still those who refuse to believe in the deity of Christ.
  - a. They will admit Jesus was an exceptional man who went around doing good.
  - b. Or, they will admit Jesus was a great teacher and philosopher in light of the moral and ethical principles He taught.
  - c. But they deny Jesus was the Son of God – deny that Jesus was God incarnate.
  
- B. C.S. Lewis, who was a professor at Cambridge University and a former agnostic, wrote this wonderful defense for believing Jesus is the Son of God:
  1. "I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him (Jesus): 'I'm trying to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept His claim to be God.' That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic – on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg – or else he would be the devil of hell.

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 up with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to."

2. And so, to defend his faith in Jesus Christ, C.S. Lewis proposed what he called "The Great Trilemma."
    - a. A "dilemma" is a choice between two possibilities.
    - b. But Lewis coined the word "trilemma" because when it comes to the claims Jesus made, we're left with three possibilities.
    - c. He is the Lord, a liar, or a lunatic.
- II. This morning we come to the end of a long, but hopefully, a rich and rewarding journey through the gospel of John.
- A. We've called this series "Exalting Jesus Christ" because that's what we do as Christians.
    1. We exalt Jesus Christ – we proclaim and praise Jesus Christ as our Lord and our God.
      - a. We believe that the claims Jesus made of being the Son of God are true, and that those claims are backed up by many

infallible proofs – the greatest of which is His bodily resurrection from the dead.

2. And so, as we bring this series of lessons to a close I want to take one final look at those astonishing claims Jesus made, and see for ourselves whether they were made by the Lord, by a liar and deceiver, or by a raving lunatic.

### **BODY:**

- I. To begin, I want to remove any doubts some may have about Jesus claiming He was not only the Son of God, but that He was absolutely equal with God the Father in every way.
  - A. The gospel of John provides us with several instances where Jesus claimed equality with God – thus making Himself God.
    1. **John 10:30-33** – *"I and My Father are one." Then the Jews took up stones again to stone Him. Jesus answered them, "Many good works I have shown you from My Father. For which of those works do you stone Me?" The Jews answered Him, saying, "For a good work we do not stone You, but for blasphemy, and because You, being a Man, make Yourself God."*
      - a. When Jesus said, "I and My Father are one," He used a word that means "one in essence, or one in substance, and one in

nature" – meaning Jesus is "of the same divine essence, the same divine substance, and the same divine nature" as God the Father. Jesus is claiming His own deity.

- b. A.T. Robertson, a Greek scholar, writes, "This crisp statement is the climax of Christ's claims concerning the relationship between the Father and Himself (the Son). They stir the Pharisees to uncontrolled anger."
- c. It is clear to see from the reaction of His enemies, they had absolutely no doubts that Jesus was claiming equality with God the Father, thus making Himself God.
- d. To the enemies of Jesus, His words were nothing short of blasphemy – that's why they immediately took up stones to stone Him in keeping with the Law of Moses.
  - (1). **Leviticus 24:16** – *"And whoever blasphemes the name of the Lord shall surely be put to death. All the congregation shall certainly stone him, the stranger as well as him who is born in the land. When he blasphemes the name of the Lord, he shall be put to death."*
- e. These men were so outraged by Jesus claiming to be equal with God it seems they forgot that Rome had taken away their

authority to execute people for crimes against the Law of Moses. They were ready to kill Jesus on the spot.

- f. However, some say these Jews simply misunderstood what Jesus said. They say He wasn't claiming to be "one" in divine essence or substance with God the Father, but simply "one in purpose" or "one in agreement" with God.
  - g. The problem with that explanation is that it's not blasphemy to say you are "one in purpose" or "one in agreement" with God – everyone should be one in purpose and one in agreement with God.
  - h. No one misunderstood Jesus. The Lord claimed He and the Father were one in essence, one in substance, and one in nature – a holy and divine essence, substance and nature. Jesus was claiming to be God as well.
2. On another occasion Jesus healed a man on the Sabbath, which the enemies of Jesus said was a violation of the Sabbath law against doing work of any kind – including healing.
- a. **John 5:17-18** – *But Jesus answered them, "My Father has been working until now, and I have been working." Therefore the Jews sought all the more to kill Him, because He not only*

*broke the Sabbath, but also said that God was His Father, making Himself equal with God.*

- b. A.T. Robertson writes, "Jesus distinctly says, '*My Father*'... not '*our Father*,' a claim to a peculiar relation to the Father. '*Worketh even until now*'... Jesus put himself on a par with God's activity and thus justifies his healing on the Sabbath."
  - (1). The Jews would never think of addressing God as "My Father" unless they added the phrase "in heaven" – "My Father in heaven." They felt addressing God as "My Father" would be claiming equality with God.
  - (2). But, in the passage we just read (John 5:17-18) Jesus didn't say "My Father in heaven." He specifically called God "My Father," making Himself equal with God.
- c. Furthermore, the Jews clearly understood the implication of Jesus saying He works whenever God works.
  - (1). As we mentioned earlier, Jesus had just healed a man on the Sabbath by the power of God.
  - (2). Therefore, since God the Father had obviously performed this work of healing on the Sabbath, Jesus claimed to have the same authority to do His works on the Sabbath because He is God the Son.

- d. These are the reasons why the Jews sought to kill Him. They knew exactly what Jesus was claiming.
3. **John 8:58-59** – *Jesus said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM." Then they took up stones to throw at Him; but Jesus hid Himself and went out of the temple, going through the midst of them, and so passed by.*
- a. The term "I AM" (Greek "ego eimi") means "the Eternally Existent One," or "the Eternal One."
- (1). In the Old Testament, "I AM" was a name God reserved exclusively for Himself.
- (2). In fact, "I AM" is how God identified Himself when He addressed Moses from the burning bush. (**Exodus 3:14**).
- (3). God also used the words "I AM" when describing Himself as the one true God. (**Deuteronomy 32:39; Isaiah 43:10**).
- b. When Jesus said, "before Abraham was, I AM," He was also claiming to be the "I AM" of the Old Testament – "the Eternally Existent One," or the "Eternal One!"
- (1). Jesus didn't say, "before Abraham was, I was" – meaning He lived before Abraham lived.



(2). Instead, He said, "before Abraham was, I AM" – meaning He is just as eternal and self-existent, as the Father is eternal and self-existent.

- II. Now that there is no mistake about Jesus claiming equality with God the Father, let's apply C.S. Lewis' "Great Trilemma" and see where it leads us.
- A. When we consider the claims Jesus made of being the Son of God and therefore being equal to the Father, we are left with only two choices:
1. His claims were false.
  2. Or, His claims were true.
- B. If His claims were false, then there are only two possibilities:
1. He knew His claims were false.
  2. Or, He didn't know His claims were false.
- C. Let's assume for a moment that Jesus knew His claims were false – what would that say about Him?
1. First, we would have to say Jesus deliberately misrepresented Himself.
    - a. We could not say this was simply a mistake.
    - b. If Jesus knew His claims were false, then He deliberately misrepresented Himself as the Messiah.
  2. Second, we would also have to say Jesus is a liar.

- a. We could not say Jesus *accidentally* claimed to be the Son of God.
- b. Nor could we say it was the disciples who made these false claims about Jesus being the Son of God – implying that Jesus never made those claims Himself.
- c. Don't forget, the Sanhedrin convicted Jesus of blasphemy on the basis of His own testimony of being the Son of God, not on the testimony of His disciples or anyone else.
  - (1). **Mark 14:61-64** – *Again the high priest asked Him, saying to Him, "Are You the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?" Jesus said, "I am. And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven." Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, "What further need do we have of witnesses? You have heard the blasphemy! What do you think?" And they all condemned Him to be deserving of death.*
- d. So, there can be absolutely no mistake about it – Jesus not only openly and deliberately claimed to be the Son of God, He made those claims long before His disciples ever wrote a single word in the gospel records.

- e. And if He knew those claims were false, then that would make Him a liar.
3. Third, if Jesus knew He was not the Son of God, then we would have to conclude He is a hypocrite.
- a. The word *hypocrite* originated in the Greek theater.
    - (1). It referred to actors on a stage – actors who spoke their lines while wearing the ornate masks that were commonly used in ancient Greek plays.
    - (2). Eventually the term came to be applied to anyone who pretended to be something they are not – something that was completely different from their true character.
  - b. It's an established fact that Jesus repeatedly claimed to be the Son of God.
    - (1). So, if Jesus was nothing more than a mere mortal like everyone else, He was the world's greatest hypocrite – a man pretending to be something He was not.
4. Fourth, if Jesus knew He was not the Son of God, and yet tried to make everyone believe He was, we could also say Jesus was demonically influenced.

- a. Only someone who was unspeakably evil would mislead people into believing He could heal them, forgive them of their sins, and give them eternal life.
  - b. The Bible tells us the devil is a liar and the father of lies (**John 8:44**).
  - c. Therefore, if Jesus deliberately and intentionally lied about being the Son of God, the very least we could say about Him is that He was demonically influenced.
5. And finally, if Jesus knew He was not equal to God, and yet made that claim, we could also say Jesus died a fool.
- a. His claims of being the Son of God is what ultimately led to His crucifixion.
  - b. Therefore, if Jesus was only a man and deliberately tried to convince everyone He was the Son of God, He died a complete fool.
  - c. Only a complete fool would needlessly suffer the most cruel and agonizing form of death imaginable.
- D. But what if Jesus did not know His claims were false? What if He actually believed He was the Messiah when, in fact, He was not?

1. If Jesus was not the Son of God and yet believed He was, then the best we could say is that He was deluded – maybe sincerely deluded – but deluded nonetheless.
  - a. This would mean Jesus was weak and impressionable, and that someone – perhaps His followers – convinced Him that He was the Messiah.
  - b. In other words, Jesus was gullible and was simply deceived into believing He was the Son of God.
  - c. That's the best we could say about Jesus.
2. However, if Jesus was not the Son of God and yet truly believed He was, then the worst possible scenario would make Jesus a raving lunatic with delusions of grandeur.
  - a. In fact, that's how the brothers of Jesus saw Him – His own family believed He was insane.
  - b. When Jesus upset the Pharisees by performing miracles on the Sabbath day, word of this soon got back to His family.
    - (1). **Mark 3:21** – *But when His own people heard about this, they went out to lay hold of Him, for they said, "He is out of His mind."*
  - c. And then we read where the brothers of Jesus mocked Him by essentially saying, "If you want everyone to know you're the

Messiah, then why don't you go down to Judea and Jerusalem and show yourself there instead of hiding out up here in Galilee."

(2). **John 7:2-5** – *Now the Jews' Feast of Tabernacles was at hand. His brothers therefore said to Him, "Depart from here and go into Judea, that Your disciples also may see the works that You are doing. For no one does anything in secret while he himself seeks to be known openly. If You do these things, show Yourself to the world." For even His brothers did not believe in Him.*

- d. Therefore, if Jesus believed He was God when He was nothing more than a simple mortal man, we would have to place Jesus in the same category of every other lunatic who claimed to be God.
  - e. And don't forget, Jesus not only claimed to be God, He also claimed that He would be resurrected from the dead exactly three days after His crucifixion!
  - f. If none of those claims are true, then only a lunatic with delusions of grandeur would dare make claims like that.
- E. So, if the claims Jesus made of being the Son of God were all false, we are left with only the two choices – He was either a liar or a lunatic.

1. However, claiming Jesus was either a liar or a raving lunatic creates a huge problem for the skeptic or atheist.
  2. When we carefully examine the life and the teachings of Jesus, there is simply no way anyone could honestly say Jesus was a liar or a lunatic.
    - a. The life and teachings of Jesus are certainly not those of a liar and deceiver.
      - (1). His teachings raised the moral consciousness of mankind to the highest level imaginable.
      - (2). There are no other moral or ethical teachings that even begin to compare to those of Jesus.
    - b. And the character of Jesus certainly is not that of a lunatic with delusions of grandeur.
      - (1). He never acted irrationally or illogically, but was always in complete control of every situation.
      - (2). Even the way Jesus treated His most bitter enemies speaks of one who possessed great emotional strength and stability.
- III. So, if Jesus was neither a liar nor a lunatic, then we are left with only one conclusion.

- A. Jesus claimed to be the Son of God, and claimed equality with the Father, because those claims are true.
1. And if those claims are true, then we are left with only one choice.  
We must accept the fact that Jesus is Lord!
    - a. This means Jesus is the Son of God, and is equal to the Father, just as He claimed (**John 10:30-33; John 5:17-18; John 8:58-59**).
    - b. This also means Jesus is worthy of the same honor we give to God the Father.
      - (1). Jesus said: **John 5:21-23** – *For as the Father raises the dead and gives life to them, even so the Son gives life to whom He will. For the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son, that all should honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him.*
    - c. And if the claims of Jesus are true, this also means He is worthy of the same worship we give to God the Father.
      - (1). Perhaps this explains why Jesus accepted worship:  
**Matthew 8:2** – *And behold, a leper came and worshiped Him, saying, "Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean."*



- (2). There are other examples where Jesus openly accepted the worship and adoration of others. (**cf. John 9:35-39; Matthew 14:33**)

B. And finally, if Jesus truly is Lord, then that leaves us with only two choices:

1. We accept Him as our Lord and Savior by:
  - a. Believing that Jesus truly is the Son of God (**cf. John 3:16; Hebrews 11:6**).
  - b. Repenting of our sins (**cf. Luke 13:3**).
  - c. Confessing our faith in Him (**cf. Matthew 10:32; Romans 10:9-10**).
  - d. Being baptized in His name for the remission of sins (**cf. Acts 2:38; 22:16; Romans 6:1-4; 1 Peter 3:21**).
2. Or, we reject Him.
  - a. Sadly, some do reject Jesus as the Lord of their life despite all the evidence proving He is the Son of God.
  - b. It's sad because those who reject Jesus as Lord and Christ will eventually face serious consequences for that choice.
    - (1). **Luke 10:16** – *"He who hears you hears Me, he who rejects you rejects Me, and he who rejects Me rejects Him who sent Me."*

- (2). Jesus is saying if we reject Him we are also rejecting God who sent Him.
- (3). And if we reject God we cannot go to heaven when we die, but will have to face the terrible consequences of eternal torment.

## **CONCLUSION:**

- I. When you honestly examine the life and teachings of Jesus, and when you examine the irrefutable evidence of the resurrection, there is really only one conclusion you can reach about that man from Galilee.
  - A. Jesus truly is the Son of God.
    1. But it's not enough to simply reach the proper conclusion about the deity of Jesus, the Lord expects you to act on that understanding.
      - a. You need to believe and accept the truth about Jesus, and then surrender your life to Him in complete obedience – just as we mentioned earlier.
      - b. Have you done that? Have you accepted the truth about Jesus and come to Him in complete faith and obedience?
    2. And if you've done that, but have since wandered away from the Lord, you also need to act.

- a. You need to empty yourself of all pride, and humbly come back to the Lord in genuine repentance.
  - b. Come confessing your sins to God the Father, so that you can once again be cleansed by the blood of God the Son.
3. Whatever you do, don't leave here this morning until you have truly surrendered all to Jesus and made Him the Lord of your life.