

Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

Info: (651) 283-0568 Discipleship Training Ministries, Inc. www.dtmwebsite.org

Did Jesus Claim To Be God?

by Dan Trygg

“Jesus said to them, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham came to be, I am.’⁵⁹ Therefore they picked up stones to throw at Him; but Jesus hid Himself, and went out of the temple.” John 8:58-59

“I and the Father are one.”³¹ The Jews took up stones again to stone Him.³² Jesus answered them, ‘I showed you many good works from the Father; for which of them are you stoning Me?’³³ The Jews answered Him, ‘For a good work we do not stone You, but for blasphemy; and because You, being a man, make Yourself out to be God.’” John 10:30-33

Apologetics is making a reasoned defense for our faith. At the very center of Christian belief is the claim that Jesus of Nazareth is God come in human flesh. No other major world religion claims that its founder is God. Other religions claim that their “founders” are inspired prophets, teachers, or enlightened people, ...but *not* God incarnate. Now, there *have been* other people who have claimed to be divine, but they have not had credibility. They were either shown to be fraudulent, or they died. After their death, their followers have generally disbanded. Christianity is unique in that Jesus Christ Himself claimed to be God, and this is central to the teaching of those who follow Him.

This mystery of the Incarnation is plainly stated in the first chapters of Matthew and Luke, where it is said that the power of the Holy Spirit would come upon Mary, and she who was a virgin would conceive. Therefore, the Holy One being begotten would be called the Son of God (Lk. 1:35). Matthew wrote, “...this took place to fulfill what was spoken by the Lord through the prophet:²³ **See, the virgin will become pregnant and give birth to a son, and they will name Him Immanuel, which is translated ‘God with us.’**” (Matt. 1:22,23).

The gospel of John gives us a bit more background. He introduces us to “the Word”. “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was *with* (Gk., *-pros* = “to, towards, with”, ...almost like “attached to”, or “part of”) **God, ...and the Word was God.**” The Word *was-ongoingly-being* God. John goes on to say, “All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him not even one thing came into being, which has come into being” (Jn. 1:1-3). Then, he tells us that **this Word became flesh, and dwelt among us.** (Lit., “he tented among us”.) We beheld His glory, full of grace and truth (1:14). He came to “make the Father known” (1:18). He was Immanuel, “God with us”, ...to reveal the Father.

These are the stated beliefs of some of Jesus’ followers, ...but did Jesus Himself actually claim to be God? Some say that He never made such a claim. Is there any evidence that He thought He was God, or that He stated that He was? **What did He say about Himself?** We have demonstrated that the gospels are early, eye-witness accounts of Jesus’ words and actions. They have been shown to be historically accurate in areas where they can be tested. If we accept their record of what He said and did as reliable, what can we discover about His claims about His identity?

The apostle John had to deal with this issue. In his gospel account, he stated that he chose to record things that would enable us to know that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, so that, believing, we might have life in His name (20:30,31). As you can imagine, there are many, many things Jesus said and did during His three and a half year ministry. Often, he was so busy engaging with the crowds of people, teaching and healing those who came to Him, that it was difficult to find time for a meal. John says that there were so many miracles that Jesus did, that if each were recounted in detail, the whole world could not contain the books that could be written (21:25). That helps us see that the gospel accounts were selected samples of Jesus’ life that were chosen to communicate certain truths about Him, His character, His teachings and miracles, and the growing opposition He faced, as He moved closer to the cross. A key component of this material is the record of what Jesus said about Himself. **John selected three separate threads of content that would help to convince us of who Jesus was, so that we could believe in Him.**

There are fourteen **“I am sayings”** that Jesus used to make claims about Himself. **Seven of these have predicates,** “I am *something*...”, which He used in conjunction with His teachings or miraculous signs. First, He said, **“I am the Bread of Life”** (Jn. 6:35,48,51). He will satisfy the spiritual hunger of people’s hearts, and feed their souls. Those who believe *in Him* will have eternal life. Twice, He says, **“I will raise him up on the last day”** (6:40,44). Second, standing under the towering lamps in the temple, that were lit to commemorate the pillar of fire of God’s glory in the wilderness, Jesus declared, **“I am the Light of the world.** The one following *Me* will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of the life” (8:12). In the context of that moment, Jesus was comparing Himself with the pillar of fire that led Israel in the wilderness. While the pillar of God’s glory illuminated their physical eyes, He said that He is the true spiritual light, so that those who follow Him would have life. Then, in the next chapter, He repeated this claim, as He healed a man born blind (9:5). Truly, as the blind man, who could now see, concluded, “If this man were not from God, He could do nothing” (9:33). In 10:7, He said, **“I am the Door of the sheep.”** Those who do not *come by way of Him* are thieves and robbers (rebuking the religious leaders who were opposing Him). The true

shepherd knows his sheep, and they know him. They will come to him when he calls. Furthermore, He said, **“I am the Good Shepherd”**. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. He repeated, “I am the Good Shepherd; and I know My own, and My own know Me, even as the Father knows Me and I know the Father (10:11-14). Of course, in the Hebrew scriptures, *Yahweh* is the Shepherd (Psa. 23:1; 80:1; Isa. 40:11). In the next chapter, Jesus said, **“I am the Resurrection and the Life**; the one believing *in Me* will live, even if he dies.” And then He demonstrated that by raising Lazarus from the dead! Next, He declared, **“I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life**. No one comes to the Father, except *through Me*” (14:6). Finally, **“I am the True Vine... Abide in Me**, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you, unless you abide *in Me*” (15:4). **Jesus is claiming God-like characteristics**, and even claiming that HE is the one who gives eternal life, ...He is the one people should seek, and receive life from. He instructed the disciples to pray to Him, and He will answer them (14:14;15:7). **He also combined some of these claims with miraculous signs**, ...multiplying bread and fish, ...healing the blind, ...raising Lazarus from the dead.

Then there are **the other “I am” sayings**. **These do not have a predicate, ...they are just “I AM”**. They are a reference to the Divine name, where Moses asked God who He was, and He responded, “I AM who I AM. Tell them ‘I AM’ has sent you” (Ex. 3:14). There are seven of these in the Greek NT text, but they are not all translated that way. Often the translators add the pronoun “He”, but it is not actually there. **I call these “I AM” absolutes. They all occur in strategic places, where the Divine nature of Jesus is manifested or claimed.** In Jn. 4:26, for example, Jesus told the Samaritan woman things about her life that He could not otherwise have known. She thought He must be a prophet. She said, “I know that Messiah is coming...” Jesus said, “I AM, the one speaking to you.” In 6:20, when the disciples saw Jesus walking on the waves, they were afraid. Jesus said, “I AM, do not fear.” In 8:24, He declares to the crowd, “Unless you believe that I AM, you will die in your sins,” and in 8:28, He stated, “When you lift up the Son of Man, you will know that I AM, and I do nothing from Myself, but I say only what the Father has taught Me.” In 8:58, He declared “Before Abraham came to be, I AM.” This was a claim to be pre-existent. The Jews understood this as a claim to be God, because they picked up stones to throw at Him. In 13:19, at the last supper, Jesus told His disciples, “I am telling you this beforehand, so that when it comes to be, you may believe that ‘I AM’.” The final example is in the Garden of Gethsemane, when the crowd comes to arrest Him (18:4-8). He said, “Whom do you seek?” They responded, “Jesus the Nazarene.” He said to them, “I AM”, ...and they all fell backwards to the ground! Talk about a display of Divinity! But, of course, they blew past what should have been an obvious sign of who Jesus was, and arrested Him.

So, **John’s evidence for Jesus’ identity was the 7 “I am” sayings with predicates, ...the 7 “I AM” absolutes, ...and the 7 miraculous signs He performed**, ...turning water into wine (2); healing the official’s son (4); healing the man by the pool of Bethesda (5); feeding the 5,000 and walking on water (6); healing the man born blind (9), and raising Lazarus from the dead (11). Of course, the greatest sign of all was Jesus’ own resurrection from the dead!

If this were not enough, **John recorded three unequivocal claims made by Jesus**. These are “unequivocal” because **we can see by the reaction of His listeners that He was claiming to be God**, ...and He did not deny it. His listeners knew the language, and the cultural context. Their understanding of His statements would likely be accurate. (1.) In Jn. 5, after being confronted by the Jewish leaders about healing the man by the pool on a Sabbath day, **Jesus called God His Father. The Jews were seeking to kill Him over this, because to call God your own Father was to make yourself equal to God** (5:18). Did Jesus back down from this, or apologize, or in any way try to step back from such a claim? No. In fact, He said that He was going to do greater miracles (20), and the Father was even going to appoint Him to be the ultimate judge of humankind, “...so that all will honor the Son *even* as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son, does not honor the Father who sent Him” (22,23). The one who would hear and believe Jesus’ word, will receive eternal life, ...and at the cry of Jesus’ voice, the dead will come to life (24-29). (2.) We already mentioned where **Jesus claimed that before Abraham came to be, “I AM”** (8:58). **Again, it is clear from the reaction of the Jews that they saw this as a claim to be God.** (3.) In 10:30, Jesus said, “I and the Father are one (thing).” **The Jews picked up stones to throw at Him. They said, “Because You, being a man, make Yourself to be God”** (vs. 33).

Jesus did, in fact, claim to be God, ...not just once, but repeatedly, and in many ways. **To those who lived in that time and culture, Jesus’ references of parallels to titles, characteristics, and functions that were otherwise ascribed only to God were unmistakable claims to Divinity.** He did not just present Himself as a teacher who would direct them to God. His message was that HE was central to their redemption. **While He directed people to worship His Father, He also encouraged people to believe in Him, to pray to Him, and even accepted their worship** (Matt. 28:9,17; Jn. 20:28). From the earliest days of the Christian movement, Jesus’ disciples acknowledged Him as Lord and God, and offered Him honor and worship alongside the Father. **It is the Father’s good pleasure to exalt Him, at this time** (Phil 2:5-11; Heb. 1:6; Rev. 5:1-14; 1 Cor. 15:20-28). **He was God with us, now ascended to heaven, and we wait for His return**, “...the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus” (Tit. 2:13 NASB).