

Introduction

Some years ago, a Jehovah's Witness came to the door of a Christian I know, and they soon began talking about Jesus. The Jehovah's Witness contended that God made Him and that He is the highest of all created beings. The Christian of course countered that He wasn't made by God because He Himself is God, the second person of the Trinity, God the Son. The Jehovah's Witness then said, **"The early church didn't believe that Jesus is God. So, why do you?"** To which the Christian replied, **"Let me ask my pastor and I'll get back to you."**

How many of you believe that Jesus is God? Let me ask you a critical question in that regard, the same one that Jehovah's Witness asked. Why do you believe that He is? If you don't know why now, you will by the time I'm done because that's what I'm going to preach about today – that Jesus is God, how we know that, and what it means, as a practical matter, that He is.

Jesus' Claim

If Jesus is God, we would expect Him to have articulated that He is, which He did in our text, John 8:56-59.

In 8:31, He began speaking to a group of Jewish people who believed in Him but had not yet decided to follow Him. While what He said in verses 31-55 offended them, what He said in verses 56-59 set them off. Verse 59 records the outcome of it. They attempted to stone Him to death, but He was able to slip away to the temple instead.

His alienation of these Jews began with a statement He made in verse 56. It was that Abraham had a vision of the Messianic kingdom He was establishing among them. They took Him to mean that Abraham had actually seen Him and ridiculed Him for it in verse 57. If was absurd, they declared. After all, He was less than 50 years old and Abraham had lived 2000 years before. So how could Abraham have seen Him, they asked? He responded by addressing their assertion that He had lived for

less than 50 years, boldly proclaiming in verse 58, **“Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was born, I am.”**

That proclamation of His was the straw that broke the camel’s back. It alluded to Exodus 3:14. In that verse, God revealed His name to Moses. One of God’s attributes is that He’s self-existent . Unlike anything else that exists, He has the power of being within Himself. So, He chose a Hebrew word to be His name that expresses that attribute of His, *Yahweh*. That word is translated **“I am who I am”** in Exodus 3:14, or as God Himself shortened it in the last line of that verse, **“I am.”** So, when Jesus said of Himself, **“I am”** in verse 58, He was claiming, **“I am God.”** The Jews grasped that, considered it blasphemy, and attempted to stone Him for saying it.

But this isn’t the only text in which Jesus proclaimed His deity. He did so in others as well including Matthew 9:14-15; Mark 2:5-7; John 5:16-18; 9:35-38; 10:30-33; and 14:7. We can confidently conclude it. Jesus claimed that He is God.

The Early Church’s Claim

And so did the early church, in the first three centuries AD.

That is a point of contention I admit. Critics of Christianity have argued for centuries that the early church did not believe in or worship Jesus as God. His deity was merely a politically motivated creation of the Roman Emperor Constantine in the 4th century AD. Most of you are familiar with *The Da Vinci Code* novel and subsequent movie. It promotes that very myth. Constantine invented the deity of Jesus in order to unite his empire. Several groups, including Jehovah’s Witnesses, like the one who visited that Christian I knew, adhere to that same point of view.

But they’re historically deluded.

First, the New Testament writers believed and claimed that Jesus is God. Consider the following texts: Romans 9:5; 1 Corinthians 2:16; 8:6; 1 Thessalonians 3:11; 2 Thessalonians 1:8; 2:16; 1 Timothy 1:1-2; Titus 2:13; 3:4,6; Hebrews 1:2; 1:8; 1:10-12; 2 Peter 1:1; and Revelation

1:17; 5:8; and 5:13. I've studied each of those texts carefully and objectively. They all reveal the same thing. Jesus is God.

But it wasn't just Jesus and the New Testament writers. It was the early church as well. In his book *Reasonable Faith*, William Lane Craig shows that the church had a full blown Christology proclaiming that Jesus is God within 20 years after His resurrection. Church historian Jaroslav Pelikan confirms that. In his book *The Christian Tradition*, he points out that the oldest Christian sermon, the oldest account of a Christian martyr, the oldest pagan report on the church, and the oldest liturgical prayer all refer to Jesus as God, each one dating to the 1st century AD.

That belief continued into the 2nd and 3rd centuries as well. A church father named Ignatius of Antioch, for instance, wrote letters in 110 AD and in them, referred to Jesus as **"our God"** and **"God incarnate."** Or a Christian leader name Melito of Sardis wrote around 190 AD that He **"rises from the dead as God, being by nature both God and man."** Or Clement of Alexandria wrote in 210 AD that He was **"both God and man – that author of all blessings to us."**

I say all of that to say this. Why do we believe that Jesus is God? It's because He claimed He is, the New Testament writers claimed He is, and Christians in the first three centuries AD claimed He is. And His character and works backed up that claim. We believe and proclaim with confidence that He is God, in other words, because those in the know and the historical facts about Him make clear He is.

It's About Jesus

Notice I said **"believe with confidence"** and it's vital that we do so. That's because what we believe with confidence about Him directs how we respond to Him. Jehovah's Witnesses believe that He is the highest of created beings. Mahatma Gandhi believed that He was **"one of the greatest teachers humanity has ever known."** And I believe that He is God. Their beliefs about Him aren't absolute. Mine is. I will respond to Him, therefore, in a radically different way than they will. My

response to Him, like my belief, will be absolute.

That absolute response is this. I make my life about Him. Because He is God, I make it first of all about Him and second of all about anyone or anything else, including, and perhaps especially, me.

The *Disciples "R" Us* curriculum that our apprenticeship groups study begins with two fill-in-the-blank questions. #1 – **Human life is about _____**. And #2 – **My life is about _____**. If we randomly asked 1000 people to fill in those two blanks, most would answer “**Human life is about humans**” and “**My life is about me**.” But those are the wrong answers. Because Jesus is God, the right answers are “**Human life is about Jesus**” and “**My life is about Jesus**.” That implies what you and I, as individuals, need to do. Since our lives are objectively and ultimately about Jesus, we need to make them that – about Jesus. We make them about Him by doing two things.

The Primary Object of Our Thought

First, we make Jesus the primary object of our thought.

Our thoughts are what Dallas Willard calls our “**lifescape**.” As our senses present a landscape for our body and its actions, so thoughts present a landscape for our will and our life as a whole. Nothing, therefore, reveals our character more than this: what we think about when our minds aren’t necessarily occupied.

I want you to imagine something. You have a computer chip in your brain that registers everything you think about when your mind isn’t necessarily occupied. And every night, you take it out, put it in your computer, and print out a list that records, first, each thing you thought about that day, and, second, how much time you spent thinking about it. I wonder. What things would appear most consistently on your list? And how much time would be spent on those that did?

That helps us understand what it means to make Jesus the primary object of our thought. When our minds aren’t necessarily occupied, we think about Him, in terms of frequency and time, more than anything and anything else. Thomas Watson expressed this so beautifully: “**The first**

fruit of love is *the musing of the mind upon God*. He who is in love, his thoughts are ever upon the object. He who loves God is ravished and transported with the contemplation of God. By this we may test our love to God. What are our thoughts most upon?"

That's an instructive question. When our minds aren't necessarily occupied, what are our thoughts most upon? We should make it Jesus.

We make it Jesus by doing two things. First, we study Scripture and other sources and learn all the details we can about Him. I've shared a number of those the last three weeks. Second, we then purposefully set our minds on those details as much as we can. Doing so trains our minds so that they we eventually think about Him automatically more than purposefully.

I see a flower, for instance, and think about what Jesus said in Matthew 6:28, "**Observe how the lilies of the field grow.**" Or I think about His proclamation on the cross, "**Forgive them for they know not what they do**" when I am wronged. Or I read about the Nobel Prize winners and think about His cognitive and practical mastery over all reality. Or I see a mother and her nursing child and think about the fact that He loves me more affectionately than the mother does her child.

You get the idea. We learn all the details we can about Him. We then purposefully set our minds on those details as much as we can. Doing so trains our minds so that we automatically think about Him.

That then is one thing we do to make our lives about Jesus. We make Him the primary object of our thought.

The Primary Object of Our Concern

A second thing we do is make Him the primary object of our concern. We think and act in practice as if He is a separate and very special kind of reality. We do that by *viewing* and *responding to* everyone and everything primarily in terms of Him and not them or us. What we desire and seek first, in all things, is to glorify Him, that is, to please Him and to cause others to esteem Him.

Henry Blackaby relates a story that illustrates what I mean. A pastor friend of his divorced his wife, left his church and married a woman with whom he had been having an affair. Two years later, he asked Blackaby to meet with him and he did. His friend began to weep and confessed for the first time that he had sinned grievously against God, his wife, his children, and his church. He was sorry, he told Blackaby, and asked him to pray for him. To which he replied: **"I will but let me tell you how I'm going to pray. I'm going to pray that Jesus will forgive you but also that He will deal with you in such a way that anybody who sees the sin you committed won't do the same. I'm far more concerned about restoring His name in the hearts of people than yours. I care about you, but I want you to know that I care far more about what you have done to Jesus."**

Now, most would have viewed and responded to that situation primarily in terms of the people involved – the pastor, his wife, his children, and the church. But Blackaby didn't. Don't misunderstand me. He treasured the people. But he treasured Jesus more. He thought and acted, therefore, primarily in terms of Him not them.

That then is the second thing we do to make our lives about Jesus. We make Him the primary object of our concern. We view and respond to everyone and everything primarily in terms of Him. We're diagnosed with an aggressive cancer, get a promotion at work, are abandoned by our spouse, meet the person of our dreams, or file bankruptcy. What we desire and seek most in those and all circumstances is to glorify Jesus.

Conclusion

I close with an observation. The claim that Jesus made has no parallel in any of the world's other religions. The founder of no other religion said about Himself what Jesus did. Buddha didn't. Mohammed didn't. Confucius didn't. They didn't say, **"I am God."** But Jesus did – because He is. May you and I think and act accordingly.