

Questions: What do you think were Jesus' most significant claims about Himself?

If someone walking on the street came in and proclaimed themself to be God, our gut reaction would be to consider them a mentally unbalanced and go from there. When Jesus responded to the High Priest's interrogation that He was indeed the Messiah the reaction was not only unrestrained but violent. The High Priest asked Jesus, **“Are you the Christ the Son of the Blessed?”, Jesus said, “Yes, 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 we have need of witnesses? You have heard the blaspheme. What do you think?”** And they all condemned Him to be deserving of death.” (Mark 14:61-64) What the religious leaders recognised immediately was that Jesus was referring to a passage in the Old Testament book of Daniel and that He would be the fulfilment of one of Daniel's visions. The passage reads, **“Behold, One like the Son of Man, coming with the clouds of heaven! He came to the Ancient of Days and they brought Him near Him. Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom is one which shall not be destroyed.”** (Daniel 7:13-14). They had no doubt as to what Jesus was claiming: that He was the promised Messiah and would be enthroned with or as God, claiming divine status and reward. Which included the ultimate ruling of all the earth. This, in the context of the time, was a blaspheme worthy of only one outcome: death.

What Jesus was doing here was identifying to Israel's leadership that He was not only not an ordinary man, or prophet, or even the Messiah as they commonly understood Him to be. Rather He was both their Messiah and divine in nature, equal with God. This, for the religious leadership, was beyond comprehension, that a man, any man, even the Messiah, could claim to be equal with God.

When you speak with various religious organisations today one of the quickest ways to identify if they are Christian or not, regardless of what they claim is to ask if they believe that Jesus is God. If they deny this, or see Jesus as one of a number of Gods, they are not Christian regardless of what they claim because this essential claim is core to who Jesus is and understood Himself to be: God incarnate, God made flesh, God amongst us. So, for example, for all the good they might do and moral lives they might live, religious groups such as the Jehovah's Witnesses, Unitarians, Christadelphians and Mormons are not Christian in the core beliefs. The Jehovah's Witnesses believe Jesus is God's Son and a created being not God Himself. Unitarian groups believe God is a single being and Jesus was a prophet or spiritual teacher but not divine. Christadelphians hold a similar belief. The Mormons view the Father, Son and Spirit as separate beings not unified. There are multiple other groups with all sorts of other views or derivatives of the same but none of these can be considered Christian because core to Jesus' self-identity and mission was His knowledge that He and the Father are One. This is clear in the Scriptures: John 10:25-33 reads **“Jesus answered, “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. Again his Jewish opponents picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus said to them, "I have shown you many good works from the Father. For which of these do you stone me?" "We are not stoning you for any good work," they replied, "but for blasphemy, because you, a mere man, claim to be God." We see a very similar scene in John 5:17,18. Of course one of Jesus' most famous discourses is recorded in John 8:56-59. There we read, "Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad." "You are not yet fifty years old," they said to him, "and you have seen Abraham!" "Very truly I tell you," Jesus answered, "before Abraham was born, I am!" At this, they picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus hid himself, slipping away from the temple grounds. Actually, the number of times they tried to stone Jesus for blasphemy it is amazing He lived long enough to be crucified! Claiming to be the great "I AM", a statement of God's own self-identification given to Moses to use when speaking to the Egyptians, was even more shocking. It claimed that Jesus actually pre-existed His own birth! At a basic level it makes sense. When God walked with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden He walked with them as a man. Jesus is God in the flesh. For God time is of course no issue but for our linear thinking it has its challenges. For the religious leaders it was just too much.

It wasn't just the religious leaders that struggled to understand. Jesus' own disciples struggled with Jesus' true identity, but Jesus was explicit with them. In John 14:7-9 we get a clear explanation. In speaking to His disciples Jesus said, "If you really know me, you will know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him." Philip said, "Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us." Jesus answered: "Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'?" In other words, if we want to see God, look at Jesus. The Scholar William Barclay, observing that for both Jew and Greek the divine was always invisible, this particular claim of Jesus was probably, to the ancient world, the most staggering thing that Jesus ever said: "If you have seen me you have seen the Father."

A second statement of Jesus is equally confrontational, both then and now. In John 14:6, Jesus stated, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." In other words, there is no way to God except by accepting Jesus as Lord and Saviour, all other paths are false trails. This makes Christianity an exclusive religion that sees all others as well-meaning at best and deluded and deceived at worst. Not a comfortable place to sit in today's world but mono-theism, belief in one God alone, has been something the Hebrew people have had to deal with throughout their existence. Jesus is not only the Way, He is the only Way. If we want to know God, if we want to experience the fulness of His forgiveness, love and grace, the only way we can do so is through Jesus.

The implication of this uniqueness and the self-awareness of Jesus of His mission was made explicit by Jesus multiple times. Jesus knew that He came to die for the sin of the

world as the sacrificial lamb, as the suffering servant, as propitiation, atonement for our sins. As a good shepherd He would give His body and blood for the sheep/

In being the unique Way to the Father, Jesus used seven “I Am” statements, metaphors, to communicate His divine purpose and how we could relate to Him and His work. These statements are:

1. **I am the bread of life:** (John 6:35): Jesus teaches us that there is more to life than just physical sustenance and that spiritual sustenance also sustains life in wonderful ways.
2. **I am the light of the world:** (John 8:12): To a world that is getting increasingly dark Jesus bring a light that reveals what happens in the dark and that cannot be shut down. Where there is spiritual darkness and depression, His light shines through for those who allow it to do so.
3. **I am the door:** (John 10:7, 9): Jesus is the only means through which believers can find salvation and become part of God’s community. Jesus points out that those who try to take shortcuts or enter His kingdom any other way will be identified for what they are.
4. **I am the good shepherd:** (John 10:11, 14): Jesus cares for those entrusted to His care, who place their lives in His hands. Like a shepherd He cares for and protects His own.
5. **I am the resurrection and the life:** (John 11:25): Jesus is the first-born, the first resurrected to eternal life, of all who have died, and He is the source of eternal life for everyone who believes in Him.
6. **I am the way, the truth, and the life:** (John 14:6): As noted before, Jesus provides an exclusive path to God for all believers and becomes stumbling block for all those who will try other ways or false gods.
7. **I am the true vine:** (John 15:1, 5): Jesus provides ongoing life and leads us to bear fruit as we remain connected to Him.

There can be no doubt that the most significant and unwavering claim of Jesus was to be God incarnate come amongst us to provide unique salvation for our sins; to be the only gateway to life as it should be, here on earth and for eternal life. Through Jesus alone can salvation be found and all other paths will ultimately be fruitless and bereft of life. Understanding this means that we can see that the unfolding of Jesus mission on earth was always going to be challenging. He provided both a living demonstration of how we are to be and a challenge to those for whom self has been placed above all else. Jesus’ mission was to reveal the Father to us, to all of us, and to provide a means by which we can come into the fullness of relationship with God that was always intended. Our sin is not without cost and he would pay that cost Himself; the cost of our free-will, our rebellion and disobedience to our Creator. But most of all, He would show us what love looks like and how far love will go for others, how far God will go for the people He has created in His own image. **“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”** (John 3:16)

Jesus was very clear in stating who He is and what His mission was. Our challenge to is answer the question: who do we think Jesus is?

Amen

Next week: Jesus and prophecy.