

## **“Jesus Is God”**

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*John 10:22–33*

<sup>22</sup> Then came the Feast of Dedication at Jerusalem. It was winter, <sup>23</sup> and Jesus was in the temple area walking in Solomon’s Colonnade. <sup>24</sup> The Jews gathered around him, saying, “How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly.”

<sup>25</sup> Jesus answered, “I did tell you, but you do not believe. The miracles I do in my Father’s name speak for me, <sup>26</sup> but you do not believe because you are not my sheep. <sup>27</sup> My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. <sup>28</sup> I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. <sup>29</sup> My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father’s hand. <sup>30</sup> I and the Father are one.”

<sup>31</sup> Again the Jews picked up stones to stone him, <sup>32</sup> but Jesus said to them, “I have shown you many great miracles from the Father. For which of these do you stone me?”

<sup>33</sup> “We are not stoning you for any of these,” replied the Jews, “but for blasphemy, because you, a mere man, claim to be God.”<sup>1</sup>

Perhaps the biggest question one can be asked is, “Who is Jesus?” How we answer that question will determine our relationship with God. If we want a real relationship with God—a *right* relationship with him—then we need to be careful about how we answer that question. Orthodox Christianity has said, for almost two thousand years, that Jesus is God. And I have said as much several times during this sermon series. But I want to spend more time focusing on this issue because it’s important and because not everyone believes that Jesus is God.

We know that Jewish people who are not Christians do not believe that Jesus is the Son of God and the Messiah. The same is true of Muslim people. Islam teaches that Jesus was a prophet, not the Son of God, and certainly not God in the flesh.<sup>2</sup> Arius (256-336), a church leader who was active in Alexandria, Egypt, at the beginning of the fourth century, thought that Jesus was in some way divine, but Arius also thought he was a created being. His beliefs have been

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise noted, the Scripture quoted herein is taken from the New International Version (1984).

<sup>2</sup> Surah 4.171: “O People of the Book! Commit no excesses in your religion: Nor say of Allah aught but the truth. Christ Jesus the son of Mary was (no more than) an apostle of Allah, and His Word, which He bestowed on Mary, and a spirit proceeding from Him: so believe in Allah and His apostles. Say not ‘Trinity’: desist: it will be better for you: for Allah is one Allah: Glory be to Him: (far exalted is He) above having a son.” Abdullah Yusuf Ali, trans., *The Meaning of the Holy Qur’an*, 2004.

echoed by Jehovah's Witnesses. They believe that Michael the Archangel was the greatest creation of God and that Michael became the "perfect man," Jesus, to redeem humanity.<sup>3</sup>

Mormons also believe that Jesus is divine, but they believe a lot of strange things about God and Jesus. They believe that God was a man and is now an exalted man who has flesh and bones. They believe that Jesus is another God. And they believe that we can become gods, too. They deny that God made everything out of nothing. So, they don't believe in the clear distinction between Creator and creation that Christianity has always made.<sup>4</sup>

Various New Age believers—people who believe they are spiritual but don't subscribe to any formal religion and who are attracted to vaguely eastern forms of religion—are happy to believe that Jesus is divine, but only in the sense that all of us are divine. These are many people like Deepak Chopra and Eckhard Tolle who think we are, or can be, gods. But this is certainly not what Jesus believed, and it doesn't fit the Jewish or Christian worldview.

So obviously the deity of Jesus is challenged today. My goal today is to show that the four Gospels found in the Bible—Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John—present Jesus as the unique Son of God, who is equal with God the Father and one with him. I'll also spend a little time showing why this matters.

Some doubt that the Gospels show that Jesus is truly God. Shabir Ally, a Muslim apologist, says, "There is nothing recorded in the Gospels showing that Jesus clearly affirmed his own divinity."<sup>5</sup> This is certainly not true. We have no evidence of anyone "tampering" with the Gospels, adding comments about Jesus being God. From the beginning, we have evidence that Jesus is God.

Let's first take a look at Matthew's Gospel. In chapter 1, Matthew tells us some of the events related to Jesus' birth. An angel tells Joseph what is going to happen: Mary is going to give birth to a son named Jesus, who will save people from their sins (v. 21). And then Matthew writes, "All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: 'The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel'—which means, 'God with us'" (Matt. 1:22-23). Not only will this child be known as "Jesus," which means "Yahweh

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<sup>3</sup> Richard Abanes, *Cults, Religious Movements, and Your Family* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1998), 256.

<sup>4</sup> Mormon beliefs are well documented in Richard Abanes, *One Nation Under Gods: A History of the Mormon Church* (New York: Four Walls Eight Windows, 2003); Ethan E. Harris; *The Gospel According to Joseph Smith: A Christian Response to Mormon Teaching* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2001); and James R. White, *Is the Mormon My Brother? Discerning the Differences Between Mormonism and Christianity* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1997).

<sup>5</sup> Shabir Ally on PAX's *Faith Under Fire* program, November 27, 2004, quoted in

saves” or “the Lord saves,” but he will also have another name: “Immanuel,” which means “God with us.” In other words, Jesus is “God with us.”

In Matthew 3, John the Baptist is announcing that the kingdom of God is near. Matthew tells us, in verse 3,

This is he who was spoken of through the prophet Isaiah:

“A voice of one calling in the desert,  
‘Prepare the way for the Lord,  
make straight paths for him.’ ”

Matthew quotes Isaiah 40:3. In that passage, the “Lord” is Yahweh, the God of Israel. Here, Matthew applies that prophecy to John the Baptist and Jesus. John is the voice calling out in the desert, and Jesus is the Lord, or Yahweh. According to Leon Morris, “When Matthew records this use of Scripture he is revealing something of his Christology. To ascribe to Jesus words that in Holy Scripture applied to God shows that for the writer Jesus occupies the highest of places.”<sup>6</sup>

Let’s move to Matthew 7. Toward the end of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says that people will say to him on Judgment Day, “Lord, Lord.” We see that in verses 21 and 22. The Greek word that is translated as “Lord” for us, *κυριος* (*kyrios*), is used to translate “Yahweh” in the Greek translation of the Old Testament. Many New Testament writers repeatedly use that name to refer to Jesus, sometimes when referring to Old Testament passages that very clearly refer to Yahweh. In other words, once again, we find that Jesus is associated with the God of Israel. But more than that, we find that Jesus will judge all those who have lived. We see this quite clearly in Matthew 7:24-27:

<sup>24</sup> “Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. <sup>25</sup> The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. <sup>26</sup> But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. <sup>27</sup> The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.”

I already talked about this passage in this sermon series, but it’s worth bringing up again. Jesus says that everyone who puts his words in action—in other words, whoever trusts him and knows

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<sup>6</sup> Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1992), 54.

that his words are authoritative—will survive judgment. That’s what the metaphor of the rain, flooding, and wind is. It’s a metaphor for judgment.

Jesus makes this abundantly clear in Matthew 25. Let’s turn to Matthew 25:31-34:

<sup>31</sup> “When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. <sup>32</sup> All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. <sup>33</sup> He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

<sup>34</sup> “Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.’”

Jesus refers to himself as the Son of Man, which is a reference to a passage in Daniel 7, specifically verses 13 and 14, which says “one like a son of man” “was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.” Even with just that one term, “Son of Man,” Jesus claims that he will rule over all nations and will receive worship. That can only be true of God. But here in Matthew 25, we see that this “Son of Man” will judge everyone from his throne. The sheep represent God’s people, who have responded to his voice. They will enter into the kingdom of God. The goats, those who have rejected God, will enter into “eternal fire” (v. 41) and “eternal punishment” (v. 46). Again, Jesus claiming that he will judge everyone.<sup>7</sup>

There are other passages in Matthew that show, often in subtle ways, that Jesus is God. In Matthew 8, Jesus is travelling from the west side of the Sea of Galilee to the east. We find something remarkable in verses 23-27:

<sup>23</sup> Then he got into the boat and his disciples followed him. <sup>24</sup> Without warning, a furious storm came up on the lake, so that the waves swept over the boat. But Jesus was sleeping. <sup>25</sup> The disciples went and woke him, saying, “Lord, save us! We’re going to drown!”

<sup>26</sup> He replied, “You of little faith, why are you so afraid?” Then he got up and rebuked the winds and the waves, and it was completely calm.

<sup>27</sup> The men were amazed and asked, “What kind of man is this? Even the winds and the waves obey him!”<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> See also Matt. 16:27.

<sup>8</sup> A parallel passage appears in Mark 4:35-41.

Jesus rebukes the winds and the waves, and suddenly they are still. That would be striking enough, but then Matthew wants us to see the disciples' reaction: "What kind of man is this?" I think Matthew wants us to wrestle with that question and come to our own conclusions.

Matthew writes of another time when Jesus displayed his control over creation. In Matthew 14, the disciples are in a boat, crossing the Sea of Galilee once again.<sup>9</sup> Jesus had gone up a mountain to pray by himself (v. 23), and the disciples were together trying to cross over to the other side. Suddenly, Jesus approaches the boat by walking on the water (v. 25). They think it's a ghost (v. 26), but Jesus says, "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid" (v. 27). Later, when Jesus gets in the boat, the wind that had been blowing against the ship stopped. And what did the disciples do? They worshiped him and said, "Truly you are the Son of God" (v. 33).

Who alone were Jewish people supposed to worship? Yahweh! Even Jesus said as much in Matthew 4, when he quoted a passage from the Old Testament, Deuteronomy 6:13: "Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only" (Matt. 4:10). But here Jesus doesn't correct the disciples. He doesn't say, "Don't worship me!"<sup>10</sup> And there were other times when Jesus was worshiped, particularly after his resurrection.<sup>11</sup>

When Jesus says, "It is I. Don't be afraid," he may be referring back to another passage in the Old Testament, a passage about God. Literally, Jesus says, "am I," or, "I am." Several times throughout Isaiah, God says, "I am." That may not sound important at all. But without going into too much detail, this kind of sticks out in Greek grammar. So Jesus' statement, "It is I," or "I am," combined with his control of weather and his ability to walk on water, probably tipped off the disciples to his true identity. After all, Isaiah 41:13 says,

For I am the LORD, your God,  
who takes hold of your right hand  
and says to you, Do not fear;  
I will help you.

There are also some passages in the Psalms that talk specifically about God calming the sea (primarily Ps. 107:23-32).

As we continue to examine Matthew's Gospel, we also see that Jesus claims he can forgive sins. In Matthew 9, Jesus arrives back home in his adopted city of Capernaum. Some

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<sup>9</sup> Matt. 14:22-33. A parallel passage appears in Mark 6:45-52.

<sup>10</sup> Compare the reaction of the angel to the apostle John's attempts to worship him in Rev. 19:10; 22:8-9.

<sup>11</sup> Before his resurrection: John 9:48. After his resurrection: Matt. 28:9, 17; Luke 24:52.

people bring a paralyzed man to him. In Mark's Gospel, we're told that Jesus was in a crowded house, preaching, and because the house was so crowded, these people climb up the external stairs of the house, dig a hole through the flat roof, and lower the man down the hole (Mark 2:2-4). This is what we read in Matthew 9:2-8:

<sup>2</sup> Some men brought to him a paralytic, lying on a mat. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Take heart, son; your sins are forgiven."

<sup>3</sup> At this, some of the teachers of the law said to themselves, "This fellow is blaspheming!"

<sup>4</sup> Knowing their thoughts, Jesus said, "Why do you entertain evil thoughts in your hearts? <sup>5</sup> Which is easier: to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up and walk'?" <sup>6</sup> But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins...." Then he said to the paralytic, "Get up, take your mat and go home." <sup>7</sup> And the man got up and went home. <sup>8</sup> When the crowd saw this, they were filled with awe; and they praised God, who had given such authority to men.

It's important to see what's going on here. These men bring their paralyzed friend to Jesus so he can get physically healed. But at first, Jesus simply says, "Your sins are forgiven." Now, the teachers of the law, the scribes, they knew what Jesus meant. So they say, "This man is blaspheming!" What is blasphemy? At the least, it's speaking of God in a demeaning, or sacrilegious way. But at most, it's the crime of claiming something that only God can do. After all, who can forgive a sin? The only one who can forgive is the one who has been wronged.<sup>12</sup> But this paralyzed man doesn't seem to have offended Jesus. However, all wrongs, all sins, are ultimately against God.<sup>13</sup> So it seems clear that Jesus is claiming something that only God can do. And to prove it, he heals the paralyzed man. After all, it's easy to say "you are forgiven." But to show he can indeed forgive—using that "Son of Man" title again—he heals the paralyzed

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<sup>12</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: HarperOne, 2001), 51-52: "One part of the claim tends to slip past us unnoticed because we have heard it so often that we no longer see what it amounts to. I mean the claim to forgive sins: any sins. Now unless the speaker is God, this is really so preposterous as to be comic. We can all understand how a man forgives offences against himself. You tread on my toes and I forgive you, you steal my money and I forgive you. But what should we make of a man, himself unrobbed and untrodden on, who announced that he forgave you for treading on other men's toes and stealing other men's money? Asinine fatuity is the kindest description we should give of his conduct. Yet this is what Jesus did. He told people that their sins were forgiven, and never waited to consult all the other people whom their sins had undoubtedly injured. He unhesitatingly behaved as if He was the party chiefly concerned, the person chiefly offended in all offences. This makes sense only if He really was the God whose laws are broken and whose love is wounded in every sin. In the mouth of any speaker who is not God, these words would imply what I can only regard as a silliness and conceit unrivalled by any other character in history."

<sup>13</sup> In Psalm 51:4, David says he has sinned against God only. But this Psalm is a poem of repentance and confession following a horrible chain of events in David's life. He sinned against a man named Uriah and woman named Bathsheba. He had an affair with Bathsheba, Uriah's wife, and then had Uriah killed. David must have realized that he sinned against these people, but he knew that, ultimately, all sins are against God.

man. And look what the crowd does: they are full of awe and they praise God. They don't quite realize that Jesus is God yet, but they knew something amazing happened. In Mark's Gospel, it says, "This amazed everyone and they praised God, saying, 'We have never seen anything like this!'" (Mark 2:12).

Many of the points I've made thus far could have been supported by some passages in Mark and Luke. Those three Gospels—Matthew, Mark, and Luke—are quite similar. They share a lot of the same material. However, John's Gospel is quite unique. It shows more clearly that Jesus is God. I don't have time to sort through the evidence in John as carefully, but what we find there is quite clear.

John's Gospel begins with these famous words: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1). Jesus is called the Word of God because he is the definitive expression of God. He is God revealed in the flesh. He is the embodied message of God. Jehovah's Witnesses want to translate this verse to make it read, "and the Word was a god." However, Greek grammar won't allow it. Also, John doesn't just say Jesus is God. Jesus is also the creator of everything that was ever made. That's what it says in verse 3: "Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made." So Jesus can't be a created being, the way Jehovah's Witnesses say he is.

We also see that Jesus is God at the end of John's Gospel. After Jesus' resurrection, which I'll talk about next week, Jesus appears to Thomas, one of his disciples. Thomas said he wouldn't believe that Jesus rose unless he could see the marks from the nails that held him to the cross and could touch Jesus' side, which was pierced. When Thomas sees Jesus, he says, "My Lord and my God!" That's John 20:28. So John wants us to know, from beginning to end, that Jesus is God.

In John 2:19 (see v. 21), Jesus claims that his body is the temple. The only person who could say that is God. The temple is the meeting place between God and his people. It indicated God's presence among his people. It was also the place of worship. Therefore, the only person who could say, "My body is the temple," is God.

In John 5, Jesus heals a man who had been an invalid for thirty-eight years (vv. 5-9). The religious leaders in Jerusalem didn't like this. They thought Jesus was working on the Sabbath, something he shouldn't be doing. But Jesus says, "My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working" (v. 17). In Genesis, after it says that God created over a span of six

days, he rested on the seventh day. But God didn't stop working, because God sustains all the universe at every moment. Perhaps Jesus is indicating that he sustains the universe.<sup>14</sup> At any rate, it seems that Jesus is saying that his work is comparable to God's. Whatever he meant exactly, these religious leaders knew that he was comparing himself with God, because in the next verse (18), it says, "For this reason the Jews tried all the harder to kill him; not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God."

In John, Jesus makes a number of "I am" statements. As I said earlier, these "I am" statements seem to refer back to several passages in Isaiah that refer to God. In John 6:20, when Jesus walks on Water, he says, "It is I; don't be afraid." We already looked at Matthew's account of that passage and saw that Jesus is probably borrowing language from Isaiah 41:13 to show he is God. But he makes a few other "I am" statements in chapter 8, when he's talking once again to the Jewish religious leaders in Jerusalem. In John 8:24, Jesus says, "I told you that you would die in your sins; if you do not believe that I am the one I claim to be, you will indeed die in your sins." Who can make such a statement but God? Again, Jesus is referring back to statements like these in Isaiah:

I, even I, am he who blots out  
your transgressions, for my own sake,  
and remembers your sins no more (Isa. 43:25).

"Listen to me, O Jacob,  
Israel, whom I have called:  
I am he;  
I am the first and I am the last (Isa. 48:12).<sup>15</sup>

Then he gets into a conversation with them about who are truly God's children. Jesus claims that these religious leaders are not Abraham's children (another way of saying they aren't God's children). Jesus says to them in John 8:56, "Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad." Jesus meant that somehow Abraham looked forward to the time when the promised one from God would come to make all things right. Abraham believed the promises of God, but Jesus' opponents did not. So they say to him, in the next verse (57), "You are not yet fifty years old . . . and you have seen Abraham!" Then, in verse 58, Jesus says, "I tell you the truth . . . before Abraham was born, I am!" There it is again, that "I am"

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<sup>14</sup> The author of Hebrews tells us as much in Heb. 1:3.

<sup>15</sup> See also Isa. 41:4; 43:10, 13; 46:4; 48:12.

statement. We might miss the importance of these statements, but Jesus' opponents didn't. We read this in verse 59: "At this, they picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus hid himself, slipping away from the temple grounds." These Jewish leaders wanted to kill Jesus because they knew he was saying that he is God.<sup>16</sup>

A similar thing happens in John 10, in the passage we heard read earlier. Jesus says, "I and the Father are one" (v. 30). And what did the Jewish leaders want to do? They picked up stones to kill him with (v. 31). They knew Jesus was claiming to be God.<sup>17</sup>

So we see that the Gospels are clear: they portray Jesus as God in the flesh. And the Gospels show that there is a God called the Father, and there is also the Holy Spirit. These are not the same person but they are all God, which is why Jesus told his disciples to baptize in the one name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit (Matt. 28:19).

We may wonder why Jesus wasn't more obvious about his claim to be God. Why didn't he go around saying, "Here I am, I'm God"? Well, I think one reason is simply that the Bible often teaches in ways that are far more subtle than most people would think. Also, if Jesus went around saying "I am God" then he would have been killed instantly. But Jesus knew when his time would come, and he didn't want to be killed before the time was right. He had to teach, he had to perform miracles, and he had to wait until the right time to be crucified. And if Jesus went around saying, "I am God" without proving it through his amazing teaching and his miracles, people might not believe him. The idea that God could be a man was shocking, and it would be hard to accept immediately.

This last point is captured by C. S. Lewis, who writes,

Among these Jews there suddenly turns up a man who goes about talking as if He was God. He claims to forgive sins. He says He has always existed. He says He is coming to judge the world at the end of time. Now let us get this clear. Among Pantheists, like the Indians, anyone might say that he was a part of God, or one with God: there would be nothing very odd about it. But this man, since He was a Jew, could not mean that kind of God. God, in their language, meant the Being outside the world, who had made it and was infinitely different from anyone else.

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<sup>16</sup> I could also mention John 18:4-6, when Jesus is arrested. Jesus asks Judas, a group of soldiers, and some religious officials, "Who do you want?" They answer, "Jesus of Nazareth." Jesus says, "I am he." When he said that, they drew back and fell to the ground.

<sup>17</sup> I could also mention John 14:1-11. Jesus equates trusting in God with trusting in him (v. 1). He claims to be the only way to God (v. 6). And he says that anyone who has seen him has seen the Father (v. 9). Furthermore, the Father lives in him, and he lives in the Father (vv. 10-11). They are one, as he says in John 10:30.

And when you have grasped that, you will see that what this man said was, quite simply, the most shocking thing that has ever been uttered by human lips.<sup>18</sup>

Lewis realized that no mere human could make the claims that Jesus did. In a famous passage, he writes,

I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: 'I'm ready 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 with any patronising nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.<sup>19</sup>

There is a fourth option, other than the “lunatic, liar, Lord” trilemma that Lewis presents to us. All of this could be a legend, a myth. Yet, as I stated at the beginning of this sermon series, there are no reasons to believe that this story of Jesus is legendary. The Gospels and the other New Testament documents present this story of Jesus as history. These documents were written by eyewitnesses, or those who had access to eyewitnesses, and there is evidence outside of the Bible that supports the historicity of these events.<sup>20</sup>

The Gospels show that Jesus demonstrated many of the attributes of God. They show that Jesus claimed to be God. And they show that many people came to believe he is God and that they worshiped him.

So, why does this matter? It matters for two reasons. One, it matters for our salvation. And, two, it affects how we worship. Earlier, I mentioned Arius, the false teacher at the beginning of the fourth century who said that Jesus was not eternal, and that he was a created being. A man named Athanasius fought against Arius's teachings. He said that if Jesus is not eternal and unchangeable—two attributes of God—then we couldn't be guaranteed salvation. How does that work? The reason we need salvation is because we have sinned against God. Our sin would always be in front of God if it were not covered by an eternal sacrifice. It is our sin

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<sup>18</sup> Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 51.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.

<sup>20</sup> See my sermon, “How Can We Know Jesus?” from December 14, 2014, <http://wbcommunity.org/jesus>.

that separates us from God (Isa. 59:2). In other words, we always need a sacrifice that pays for our sin, for sins in the past, present, and future. If we didn't have an eternal sacrifice—one who is always present as a sacrifice in our place—then we would be in danger. The logic is simple: because sin is a crime against God, he has every right to kill us for it. In fact, because God is a perfect judge, he should punish us for our sin. So, because of the crime, someone must pay. We need another human being to pay the penalty for us. That's the negative side of being made right with God—someone must pay for what we've done, and that person needs to keep on paying.

But if Jesus were not truly eternal—having no beginning and no end—perhaps one day he could cease to exist. If that happened, then who would cover our sins? Who would stand in our place? If Jesus ceased to exist, our sins would once again be before God, separating us from him.

On the positive side of salvation, we need to be credited with someone's perfect obedience to God. Without righteousness, without a right moral standing in front of God, we couldn't have a relationship with him. So we need to be united to a sinless, perfectly righteous sacrifice. But if Jesus were not unchanging, perhaps one day he could sin and then we couldn't be credited with his perfect righteousness.

Fortunately, Jesus remains the “Lamb of God” throughout eternity. That is why he is referred to as “the Lamb” throughout the book of Revelation. Even in the new creation, he is the Lamb of God, slain for the sins of his people (Rev. 21:9, 14, 22, 23, 27; 22:1, 3). Or, to quote the words we sang earlier, he is “the great unchangeable ‘I AM.’”<sup>21</sup>

To put all of this a bit differently, to have a relationship with God, we need to be on God's level. But we are not on God's level, because we are humans, and fallen ones at that. We need someone who can come down to the level of humanity and raise us up to the level of God. And Jesus does that. He unites God and man.<sup>22</sup>

So, for us to be saved, we need the perfect righteousness of God, but we also need a human being to pay the penalty for our sin, or else we would be destroyed. We need that perfect righteousness to be eternal and unchangeable, and we need that substitutionary sacrifice to be eternal. Jesus, the God-man who died on the cross in our place, gives us his righteousness so we can be right with God.

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<sup>21</sup> Charitie L. Bancroft, “Before the Throne of God Above.”

<sup>22</sup> See 1 Tim. 2:5.

The second main point that Athanasius made was that only God is worthy of worship. Yet, from the dawn of the church, Christians have worshiped Jesus. This means that one of the following possibilities must be true: Jesus is God, Christianity has multiple Gods, or all Christians are guilty of idolatry.

Worship matters because God made us to worship him. If we don't understand that Jesus is God, we will not worship him. For example, some people claim to be Christians but don't really believe that Jesus is God. They believe Jesus was a good example. But if Jesus is only a good example, you won't worship him. If you don't worship him, you don't really know who he is. You don't really have a relationship with him. And if you don't know who Jesus is, and don't have a right relationship with him, you don't know God. God the Father wants us to worship him through his Son, Jesus, by the enabling power of the Holy Spirit. The apostle Paul says that all things were created by Jesus and for Jesus (Col. 1:16). So the point of life is Jesus. He is the beginning and the end.

To be a Christian means to be united to Jesus. If you are united to Jesus, you will know who he is, the God-man. If you realize Jesus is God, you can trust him to deliver you from all your greatest problem: your sin against God, and the punishment of death that comes from sin. When we are united to Jesus through a relationship of trust, love, and obedience, we know that even though we physically die, we will live forever with him. Because Jesus rose from the grave, Christians will, too. And this should cause us to worship Jesus. He is worthy of our trust and he is worthy of our salvation.