

GOD'S SON TO THE CALLED

As you know, our goal this month was to survey the four eyewitness narratives of Jesus' life, seeking the writers' perspective to an age-old question: *Why did Jesus come?* Thus far we have seen three similar but different answers: Matthew = God's sign to the religious, Mark = God's servant to the suffering, Luke = God's Savior to the world. In this lesson, we are going to consider one final answer to our question. Today we are going to find out what Jesus' best friend said about Him.

Do you have a best friend, someone who knows you better than anyone else and still likes you? Best friends are hard to come by in any age, especially our current one. There are a lot of cultural factors that work against us today in having and keeping a best friend, which has always been true to some extent in every age. Well, Jesus had a best friend. His name was John. Jesus and John were from similar blue-collar backgrounds, a carpenter and a fisherman. Both were raised in the same geographic area and were about the same age. Both had pious Jewish religious upbringings. But One was clearly the leader, and the other His follower.

John was one of Jesus' most passionate followers. He took people's rejection of Jesus most personally. Even to the point that Jesus at times had to restrain John's anger. But as Jesus' closest friend, one advantage John had was the privilege of being included in Jesus' life in both public and private moments. So John truly is able to give us an insider's look into Jesus' life. And I think more than any other disciple, John zeroed in on Jesus' statements of personal identity and mission as to who He was and why He had come.

For example, John records one of the most controversial statements Jesus ever said, "*I and the Father are one!*" Meaning we are of the same divine essence. Well, those kinds of statements in John's day, just as they would in our day, received a lot of ridicule and criticism. People claiming to be equal with the Creator God more than raised the eyebrows of people in John's day. It piqued their interest, but soon drew their contempt and scorn. And the primary reason people reacted to Jesus was based on His claim of being God incarnate! John understood Jesus' claim clearly. In fact, he wrote his entire biography of Jesus with this theme in mind. So John answered our question of why did Jesus come by pointing to Jesus as God incarnate.

The people of Jesus' day would have rejected such a claim—as people of today do—based on their religious belief system. In Jesus' day there were several prominent theological systems of belief that dominated the world scene just as there is today. In fact, there is an additional theological belief system today that probably didn't exist in Jesus' day. But let's pause to consider four of the dominant religious belief systems. You will notice that these theological views are all identified with labels made from two Greek words. The one word in common is theism, from *theos*, the Greek noun for God.

Polytheism = the belief in and worship of MANY gods. Most of the ancient world believed in many equal gods: the god of wind, trees, rain, sun, etc. Each belief system eventually devised its own hierarchy of power, with certain gods ranking over other gods. All the major ancient empires, Egypt, Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome did this. So people who believed in polytheism, like Hindus do today, would have had little problem with simply adding Jesus to their pantheon of gods. You say Jesus is God's Son? Fine, I'll add Him to God's other sons. A subcategory of polytheistic theological belief was...

Henotheism = the belief in & worship of a PRIMARY god. And this is technically where many ancient tribes were. They believed in many gods, but worshipped one as the primary god or goddess, like the Ephesians who worshipped Diana, the goddess of fertility. So if Jesus had come to these kinds of people and said what He said and did what He did, he probably would not have been killed. They would not have crucified Him, they would have crowned Him. But the people that Jesus came to, the Jewish nation, was one unique bunch of folks. Unlike anyone else in the entire world at that time, before and for centuries after, they believed in...

Monotheism = the belief in & worship of only ONE God. From the time a Jewish boy or girl could talk and comprehend, they would hear their father weekly, if not daily, say to his family...

"Hear, Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is one! And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. (Deuteronomy 6:4-5)

They would hear it at the synagogue, and when they reached age 12 and went with parents to the major religious celebrations at the temple in Jerusalem, they would hear it again there. Monotheism was part and parcel of their entire national and personal life. In fact, they were commanded to stone, to execute anyone and everyone who taught to the contrary. Well, it was to this particular group of people that Jesus came and made His claim, which would have been the toughest crowd of all to convince. But with the advent of the modern age and new scientific discoveries, a fourth belief system has appeared.

Atheism = belief in and worship of NO god. It's a belief that everything in existence, living and non-living, is the result of an incredible series of never to be repeated cosmic accidents. And everything that exists by design in our world has no Designer behind them. Rather, all is the result of a random accident and can be explained without the presence of a Divine Being. Obviously, Jesus didn't encounter any atheists in His day, but He did face the other three. And His greatest opposition came from monotheistic people who could not or would not reconcile their biblical understanding with Jesus' claim. Let's review five of those claims that John heard Jesus making.

I have come in My Father's name, and you do not receive me (John 5:43)

Jesus came to declare the Father's NAME! (God's Person) For Jesus to claim that His coming was in the Father's name was to say that HE was on special divine assignment, and that He spoke for the Heavenly Father, God. He represented God in a very unique authoritative way. It was as if God had given Jesus His divine power of attorney. He came with authority to represent God and tell them what God had said. Tell them how it was! The Jewish people of Jesus' day understood that concept. Their bibles had taught it and the people believed that a God-anointed, sent One would come to rescue their nation. The Hebrew label for that One was Messiah. Jesus said I am that One.

"For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of Him who sent me. For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life, and I myself will raise him up on the last day." (John 6:38, 40)

Jesus came and did the Father's WILL! (God's Purpose) So Jesus not only claimed a unique identification with God's divine PERSON, He also claimed exclusive identity with God's PURPOSE. Jesus, in the midst of preaching, healing and comforting people, made these outlandish statements of personal identity and mission. He said, I speak for the Creator God. I have come in His name, meaning with His divine authority. And I have come to do God's will, to fulfill His divine purpose. And did you see how Jesus actually tied Himself exclusively into that purpose? No devout Jew would ever have said "**My Father**". None would have dared claim that kind of exclusive relationship. They would have said God is "our Father," meaning the divine Father of our nation.

But Jesus said this all the time. He said, I have come in My Father's authority (name). I represent Him, His Person. I have come to do My Father's will. I am the extension of God's purpose for humankind on planet Earth. I have been sent from heaven to earth. In other words, my personal existence did not start here on earth like your lives did. I have come from heaven, where I lived with My Father, to here on earth to live with you. Now the history of the world is filled with the occasional messiah who shows up on the world scene with big words. But John, who is writing all that he saw, records that Jesus backed up divine claims with divine power.

But He answered them, "My Father is working until now, and I myself am working." For this reason therefore the Jews were seeking all the more to kill Him, because He not only was breaking the Sabbath, but also was calling God His own Father, making Himself equal with God. (John 5:17-18)

Jesus came and did the Father's WORK! (God's Power) Intense religious controversy followed Jesus wherever He went because Jesus trampled over the religious establishment's traditions and hypocrisy. Jesus marched to a different life drumbeat than anyone before Him. From Jesus' perspective, His personal identity and life agenda were set. He had come to reflect God's person, accomplish God's purpose aided by God's power, and the chips would have to fall where they may. But Jesus made two other claims to tie all this together.

I have come as Light into the world, so that no one who believes in me will remain in darkness. (12:46)

Jesus came to be the Father's LIGHT! (God's Path) This statement reveals a great deal about how God in heaven views mankind on earth. Now, this is a figurative statement, but it represents the real condition of mankind in regard to our own personal identity and life agenda. We're in the dark about it! From God's perspective, people on earth live out their entire lives like a group of people in a dark room trying to find the door. Picture a group of folks in a gym in total darkness, feeling around for an exit. They are making contact with one other with their physical senses, but only seeing shadows and never find the door out into the light. Jesus says that is how God in heaven sees the human race living out their meager, temporal existence. They have no real clear sense of who they are and why they are here. Most see those occasional rays of light shining from the outside into the dark room. They sense that there must be a door to that outside light. There must be a way to that greater life clarity and purpose, but very few find it.

Jesus claimed to be God's path to that outside light of eternal understanding. John remembered that Jesus made this very clear. He used pictures anyone could understand. He said, I am the way that is the door to God, the path to ultimate reality and to pure actuality, to God Himself. I am the light shining from heaven's glory into earth's darkness. Follow the light God gives you. After His arrest, while on trial for His life before Pilate, He said it again another less figurative way.

Therefore Pilate said to Him, "So you are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say correctly that I am a king. For this purpose I have been born, and for this I have come into the world: to testify to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice." (John 18:37)

Jesus came to declare the Father's TRUTH! (God's Plan) So, to be clear about Jesus' claim, exactly what truth did Jesus come to declare? He said it was the truth about God's Person, Who God is, and what kind of a God is He, not only His triune nature, but His character and attitude towards His creature, mankind. Jesus from God came to show them what God was like, not only His divine power, but also His divine purpose in the universe, in time and space, in world history. Jesus came from God to tell us the truth about ourselves, about our misconceptions of ourselves, of each other, and about the nature and duration of human existence. Jesus came to show us God's original design for our lives and our destiny, to be a pathway to God and a light to shine on our path. Jesus came to declare to any who would hear and heed God's plan for mankind. It was a plan of personal restoration renewal and restoration to God Himself. It was a plan for spiritual fulfillment and personal significance.

But it was a divine plan that had human response and responsibility built into it. Everyone who sees God's light is responsible for recognizing it as God's light and following it. Everyone who hears God's truth is responsible for recognizing it as God's truth and obeying it. Our calling is based on our spiritual enlightenment as God's saints. The Father's life in us enables us to recognize Jesus' Person and respond to His Plan. The most important decision we will ever make in our lives is our decision for or against Jesus. Jesus' claims are clear! Those who hear God's call to faith and life recognize that Jesus is God's Son. They follow God's call to them, and God gives them eternal life.

Point to Ponder: The people of Jesus' day would have rejected such a claim—as people of today do—based on their religious belief system.

Question to Answer: What religious belief system do your unsaved family and friends embrace?

PASTOR BRYAN'S PRAYER POINTS

Grace Family,

On behalf of the church, we want to wish you a very merry Christmas! We are excited to gather for services this Thursday at 1:00, 2:30, 4:00 and 5:30pm. As we host hundreds of people on campus, we ask for you to keep the church in prayer. People are hungry for Christ and community. We pray that the goodness of the Gospel will make 2020 great. Thanks for your continued prayers as a member of the team!

For the Gospel,
Pastor Bryan

Pray for the staff and volunteers as they make final preparations for services this Thursday. We anticipate up to 800 people on campus during Christmas Eve. While busy, pray that staff would have the opportunity to enjoy the people and the services. Pray for the staff and their families as they navigate their own celebrations while conducting services.

Pray for people who are new to Grace. This year, we look forward to serving and connecting people who are new since the church started regathering. So many people are hungry for Christ and connection. Pray that the service will be a catalyst in their life for meeting with God's people and growing in a relationship with Jesus.

Pray for those gathering remotely. It has become clear that Grace is not defined by those on campus. Grace is the sum of everyone engaged in relationship, physically and virtually. Pray that our 2:30 p.m. broadcast on YouTube Live will connect with people who need to experience the love of Jesus. Pray for all the team members that make each broadcast possible.

Pray for safety on our campus. While we gather to celebrate the birth of Christ, we want to ensure that we do all we can to mitigate the spread of Covid-19. While we go to great lengths to ensure this, we covert your prayers.

Pray for those in our congregation and community who may be suffering from loneliness. The holidays can be some of the most challenging times because people are often reminded of what they are missing or what they have lost. Whether it is a broken relationship or loss of a loved one, pray God's comfort and peace in people's life. Pray that they would experience the sufficiency of God's grace this Christmas.

Finally, pray that we would glorify Christ this Christmas. It's not about us. It's about him! Jesus is worthy of our worship, no matter how challenging the year. Jesus took on flesh so that we would have a mediator that identifies in our circumstances, yet lived a life without sin. God loves us. God is for us. God is Emmanuel, God with us. Merry Christmas!