

“CHRISTIANITY 101: (#2) WHO AM I?”
(Mark 8:27-30)

[PROPS NEEDED: (#1) YouTube Video “Jesus Name Above All Names” ; (#2) Movie Clip from Schindler’s List; (#3) “Story of God & Humanity” PowerPoint Slides]

[East Cobb U.M.C.; 1-20-08]

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1. Read Texts: Mark 8:27-30 and Pray.
2. **[SHOW YOU-TUBE VIDEO “Jesus, Name Above All Names” (Time – 1:00)]**
3. In 1926, Dr. James Allan Francis wrote the basis for a poem that has since come to be titled “*One Solitary Life.*”

A—Many of you have perhaps seen and read it: it starts with a whole litany of how Jesus was “*born in an obscure village*” to “*peasant parents,*” and how he never really wielded any kind of earthly power, or even did anything that we today might consider “successful.”

B—And yet, Francis ends his poem with these words:

*“...All the armies that ever marched, all the navies that ever sailed, all the parliaments that ever sat, all the kings that ever reigned, put together, have not affected the life of humanity on this earth as much as that **one solitary life.**”*¹

C—But who is this Jesus? How is he connected with God? And more than simply being a *historical figure*, what role can and should he play in our spiritual lives?

—II—

4. Well, like we did last week, I want to start kind of “light-hearted” by looking at how 8-year old Danny Dutton of Chula Vista, CA answered the question “Who Is Jesus?” in his third grade homework assignment. Here’s what he wrote...

A—“*...Jesus is God's Son. He used to do all the hard work like walking on water and performing miracles and trying to teach the people who didn't want to learn about God. They finally got tired of Him preaching to them and they crucified Him. But He was good and kind, like His Father, and He told His Father that they didn't know what they were doing and to forgive them and God said "O.K." His Dad (God) appreciated everything that He had done and all His hard work on earth so He told Him He didn't have to go out on the road anymore. He could stay in heaven. So He did. And now He helps His Dad out by listening to prayers and seeing things which are important for God to take care of and which ones He can take care of Himself without having to bother God (like a secretary, only more important). You can pray anytime you want and [God and Jesus] are sure to help you because they got it worked out so one of them is on duty all the time.*”²

B–Again, like he did last week in his definition of God, I think that considering the difficulty of the task, Danny did a pretty good job describing who Jesus was – especially the fact that Jesus was “*like a secretary, only more important*” (our secretary Nancy will be glad to hear that she’s in good company!)

5. And one good thing I like about Danny’s description is his awareness that for the person of faith, the first thing we need to acknowledge is that Jesus is more than just a good person.

A–Now, we find a sense of this happening in today’s scripture from Mark 8, where Jesus is asking his disciples about the rumors that they’re hearing about his identity.

1–The disciples share all kinds of responses – they tell Jesus that some people say he’s the spirit of Elijah or some other great prophet, while others say that he’s John the Baptist come back to life.

2–But then in Verse 29 Jesus asks the most important question of all (one that we *all* have to answer at some point): “*But who DO YOU say that I am?*”

3–And in faith, Peter answers, “*You are the Messiah*” ...which means that Peter believed Jesus to be the promised one from God that the Jewish people had been looking for for centuries.

B–You know, like the people of that time, quite often today we hear people who make Jesus out to be a great teacher and preacher, or a good moral example, or a compassionate social worker, or even a lovable wonder-worker – and he certainly *was* all of these things.

1–But like Peter, in faith we as Christians take it one step further by asserting that Jesus was nothing less that *God himself come to earth in the flesh*.

2–John 1 says that “*the Word [referring to Jesus] was with God, and the Word was God... and the Word became flesh and dwelt among us...*” (Verses 1 & 14).

3–In fact, Jesus’ very name in Hebrew (*Yeshua*) literally means “*Yahweh has saved*” – which is an explicit connection back to the description that we gave last week of God as “*Yahweh*”/the great “*I AM*.”

C–Now, throughout the Bible there are, of course, many other names, descriptions, and titles for Jesus, each of which add to our understanding of both his identity & role in our lives.³

1–We saw many of these flash across the screen in our opening video.⁴

2–But all of them stem from a faith belief that through the life, death, and resurrection of this person Jesus, *God shows us His love*.

6. If we think about it, this was actually Jesus' task on earth: **to show/demonstrate TO us the depth of God's love FOR us.**

A–Remember last week how I said that the Bible is really the *story of GOD* – how He's the central character and star in and behind all the stories?

B–Well, if God is the main character of the Bible, then Jesus certainly gets the award for “*Best Supporting Actor*,” ...because – more than with any other biblical character – Jesus is *the key* to seeing and understanding who God really is.

C–Bible scholar S.D. Gordon says that “*Jesus is God spelling Himself out in language that [we] can understand.*”⁵

7. Let me summarize God's story in the Bible so we can better understand Jesus' part in it.

A–[SHOW PPT Slide#1: “**Perfect Mirror Image**”] ...The story starts with God creating all of humanity in His image – you and I are made to reflect a oneness with God, and to naturally reflect God's love for others perfectly.

1–[SHOW PPT Slide#2: “**Distorted Image**”] But because of what the Bible calls “the Fall” of Adam and Eve described in Genesis 3, that image was distorted to in way that created a distance that separates us not only from a relationship with God, but from being the reflection of God that we were created to have in the first place –in theological terms, we call this distortion “*SIN*.”

2–[SHOW PPT Slide#3: “**Imperfect Human Solutions**”] So, the rest of what we call the Old Testament is spent describing various human attempts restore/correct this distortion and try to mend our relationship God:

- (a) the 10 Commandments and Hebrew Covenant/Law (“*Torah*”);
- (b) the Hebrew Kings and words of the Prophets;
- (c) the sacrifice of animals in the Jerusalem Temple.

3–And yet, the Bible tells us that we as human beings were so enslaved by sin and evil, and the distortion *so* great, that even all of these “good” endeavors could not fully correct the distortion or mend/restore the relationship.

B–So we come to what we call the New Testament which tells us that God finally did the only thing left to do: [SHOW Slide#4: “**God Sends Jesus**”] ...He came down to earth *Himself* in the form of the human being that history has come to know as “*Jesus of Nazareth*.”

1–And in that form, God literally “bought” the earth and its people back from the sin, and evil that had captured and carried away its heart, and kept it in bondage for so long, and made possible the restoration of God's image in & through us once again.

2–In Mark 10:45 Jesus says that he came to earth “*to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.*”⁶

3–Now, the word “*ransom*” comes from the root of the word “*redeem*,” which in the Greek language of the Bible literally means “*to buy back*.”

4–So, in Jesus, we have the sense that God has “bought” his people (*US!*) back from slavery and bondage to sin and evil.

C–In World War II, German industrialist Oskar Schindler thought up a way to keep many of his Jewish factory workers out of the Nazi death camps.

1–I want us to watch this clip from the 1992 movie Schindler’s List as he explains to his Jewish accountant how he intends to do this...

[WATCH “Schindler’s List” VIDEO-CLIP... “...*the list is life*” (Side B, 9:35-11:24 = Total time: 1:50)]

2–With his own *money*, Oskar Schindler literally bought the lives of over 850 Jews during World War II.

D–Well, in an even greater way, Jesus – with his very *life* – spiritually “bought back” the soul of every human on the earth from sin & death (in theological terms called “*Salvation /Atonement*”).

1–Perhaps you’ve heard the saying, “*I owed a debt I could not pay; so Jesus paid a debt he did not owe.*”

2–In other words, Jesus’ willing sacrifice and death on the cross made possible our redemption/salvation from sin.

3–Because of what *he* did on the cross, a way through the distortion was created that enables us to re-establish our relationship with God and begin once again to reflect and become the kind of people God wanted us to be to begin with.

–IV–

8. But here’s the catch: [SHOW PPT Slide#5: “OUR Responsibility”] ...even though Jesus is now our way *possible* back to through the distortion of life/sin, *we’ve* got to put him there!

A–Even though the Bible teaches that the answer to the question “Who is Jesus?” is that He’s God in flesh come to show us His love by redeeming/ransoming us from sin, the real question that Jesus asks of each of us today is “*Who Am I... to YOU?*”

1–I.E., “*Am I merely the founder of a large world religion? ...To you, am I just another famous person in world history (even if an important one)? ...To you, am I just another moral teacher or great prophet?*” ⁷

2–“...OR, do you see me as *YOUR* Messiah, come to help *YOU* connect with God so that you can be the person you were created to be?” – THAT’S the question each of us is asked to wrestle with today!

9. So where are YOU? Like Peter, have you claimed the “*Messiahship*” of Jesus by receiving him as your Savior and Redeemer?

A–Have you given him *your* heart and begun *your* journey to “put Jesus in the middle” of the distortion by promising your life to following his will and his way?

B–If not, today’s as good a day as any. And as we close, I want to invite everyone here to do so –perhaps for the first time, or perhaps for the hundredth – by praying with me now...

10. [PRAY... *For those accepting Christ as Savior and Redeemer for first time, as well as those who are recommitting themselves to him again.*]
11. [CLOSING SONG: UMH#191, “Jesus Loves Me”; OR “Jesus Loves Me” to tune “*House of the Rising Sun*”]

ENDNOTES:

1. James Allan Francis, cited in Edythe Draper, Draper's Book of Quotations for the Christian World (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1992). Entries 6352-6354.
2. From inspiration@inspirationlist.com.
3. For example, to help us grasp how God could become human, the Bible refers to Jesus as the “*Son of God*” and the “*Son of Man*.” And while the name “Jesus” was his historic name, we Christians often refer to him as Jesus “*the Christ*” or simply “*Jesus Christ*” as a statement of faith (the word “*Christ*” is the equivalent for the Hebrew word meaning “*Messiah*” or “*God’s chosen one*” because we believe God chose Jesus as the form by which he would save the world).
4. For example,... Savior, Lord, Redeemer, Son of David, living Word, Master, Lion of Judah, Lamb of God, Prince of Peace, Shepherd, Fortress, Rock of Salvation, King of Kings, King of the Ages, Eternal Light, Lord of Glory, the Life, the Door, the Living Water, Bread of Life, and others.
5. S.D. Gordon, summarizing John 1:14, in Bruce Demarest, Jesus Christ, The God-Man, p. 41. In like manner, Martin Luther once said, “*Anything that one imagines of God apart from Christ is only useless thinking and vain idolatry.*” For example, through Jesus we learn of God’s compassion, mercy, and power to heal brokenness and hurt. Through him, we’re reminded of God’s justice and his call for moral and ethical accountability in our lives. Above all, through him we learn that God is love – *not* wrath, or anger, or vengeance, but true, self-giving love. In summary, through Jesus we come to know God – Jesus shows us who God is and how God chooses to deal with humanity.
6. In addition, Colossians 1:13 says that Jesus came to “*rescue us from the power of darkness and transfer us into the kingdom of his Son.*”
7. This one (“great teacher and prophet”) is how our Muslim friends understand who Jesus is.