

“CHRISTIANITY 101: (#2) WHO AM I?”

(Mark 8:27-30)

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**[PROPS NEEDED: (#1) “Story of God & Humanity” PowerPoint Slides;  
and (#2) Movie Clip from Schindler’s List;**

[Cornerstone U.M.C.; 1-14-24]

--I--

1. Read Text BEFORE SERMON: Mark 8:27-30 and Pray.
2. A number of years ago, 8-year old Danny Dutton of Chula Vista, CA was given a homework assignment from his private school third grade teacher in which he and his class were asked to answer the question “*Who is Jesus?*” 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.*” <sup>1</sup>

B--Well, today as we're continuing a series begun last week called "Christianity 101," we're exploring the person and role of Jesus, and the difference that he can make when we choose to follow him as Lord and Savior of our lives.

C--And despite the fact that Danny's description sounds simplistic, he actually does a fairly good job describing who Jesus is and what he does -- I especially liked how he said Jesus was “*like a secretary, only more important*” (our secretary Janet will be glad to hear she’s in good company!)

3. For one, Danny correctly acknowledged the fact that for a person of Christian faith, Jesus is more than just a good person. <sup>2</sup>

A--We actually find a sense of this in today's scripture from Mark 8 read earlier, where Jesus is asking his disciples about the rumors circulating about his identity.

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

2--But in Verse 29, Jesus asks Peter, “*But who do YOU say that I am?*” And, in faith, Peter answers, “*You are the Messiah*” -- or, “God's chosen one”; God in flesh come to save his people.

B--And while this conversation with Peter and the other disciples, there's a sense in which it's also a conversation that Jesus wants to have with us today, as well.

1--After all, many people today make Jesus out to be a great teacher or preacher, a good moral example, a compassionate social worker, or even a lovable miracle-worker -- and he certainly *was* all of these!

2--But I believe that Jesus' final question wasn't meant *just* for Peter, but for us, as well -- it's a question that we ALL have to answer at some point in life: “*Matt, Judy, Chad, Cindy, Aaron, fill in your name...Who do YOU say that I am?*”

C--And like Peter, WE are invited to go beyond what *other* people say and -- in faith -- affirm that Jesus is nothing less that *God himself* come to earth for us.

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

2--In fact, Jesus' very name in Hebrew (*Yeshua*) literally means “*Yahweh has saved*” -- which is an explicit connection back to last week's main description of God as “*Yahweh*”/the great “*I AM*.”

--II--

4. And while the Bible also gives us many names and descriptions of Jesus to tell us something about his nature, purpose and character, <sup>3</sup> if we think about it,... “*God who saves (Yeshua)*” captures the essence of *all* of them, because in JESUS, we're able to see and claim the depth of GOD'S love and salvation for each of 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.*” <sup>4</sup>

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

A--[SHOW 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 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 and broken, creating a distance separating us from a relationship with *God* -- in theological terms, we call this distortion and brokenness “*SIN*.”

2--[SHOW Slide#3: “Imperfect Human Solutions”] So, the rest of what we call the Old Testament is spent describing various human attempts to restore/correct this distortion & brokenness (to bridge the gap) to try & mend our relationship God:  
 (a) the 10 Commandments and Hebrew Covenant/Law (“*Torah*”);  
 (b) the Hebrew Kings and words of the Prophets;  
 (c) the animals sacrifices in the Jerusalem Temple.

3--But the Bible tells us that we as human beings were so ensnared by sin, and the distortion *so* great, that even all of these “good” endeavors could not fully bridge the gap or mend/restore the relationship.

B--So, in the stories of what we call the New Testament, we Christians believe God did the only thing left to do: [SHOW Slide#4: “God Sends Jesus”] ...He came to earth *Himself* in the form of the human being that history knows as “*Jesus of Nazareth*.”

1--And in that form, through his life, death on the cross, and resurrection, Jesus bridged the gap of sin, and made possible a relationship with God once again.

2--In Mark 10:45, Jesus himself says that he came to earth “*to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many*” <sup>5</sup> -- the word “*ransom*” comes from the root of the word “*redeem*,” which (in Greek) literally means “*to buy back*.”

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

C--During World War II, German industrialist Oskar Schindler was trying to find a way to save the lives of his Jewish factory workers from the Nazi death camps.

1--In this clip from the 1992 movie Schindler’s List, 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--You see, with his own *money*, Oskar Schindler literally “bought back” the lives of over 850 Jews during World War II.

D--But in an even greater way, Jesus -- through the giving of his own *life* on the cross -- spiritually “bought back” the soul of every human on the earth from sin and death, and formed bridge over the distortion/brokenness to enable us to have a relationship with God again -- in theological terms, we call this “*Salvation/Atonement*.” <sup>6</sup>

6. But here's the catch: [SHOW Slide#5: "OUR Responsibility"] ...even though Jesus makes the way back to God *possible*, we've got to claim that way *ourselves*!

A--Yes, the Bible's answer to the question "Who is Jesus?" is that He's God in flesh, come to save/redeem/ransom us. But the *vitaly important* question we all have to answer is the one Jesus asked Peter: "*Who do you say that I am?*" Or in other words, "*Who Am I... to YOU?*"

B--Growing up in East Point, GA, I had learned *about* the goodness and love of God and Jesus from my parents and Sunday School teachers.

1--But it wasn't attending Camp Glisson (our Methodist camp in Dahlonge, GA) as a preteen that I chose to claim that Jesus was also Lord and Savior of *my* life.

2--And that claim -- for me -- has made all the difference through even today!

--III--

7. So where are YOU in today's story? Who is Jesus... TO YOU?

A--Is he just the founder of a large world religion? To you, is he just another famous person in world history? To you, is he just another moral teacher or great prophet?" <sup>7</sup>

B--Or, like Peter, have you claimed him as YOUR "Messiah" by receiving him as Savior and Redeemer of your life?

C--Have you symbolically given him your heart and begun your journey towards wholeness and connection to God *again* by promising your life to follow him and his ways from now on?

D--If not, today is as good a day as any. So as we close, I want to invite everyone listening today (whether in-person or online) to pray with me -- perhaps for the first time, or perhaps for the hundredth...

8. [PRAY... *For those accepting Christ as Savior and Redeemer for first time, as well as those who are recommitting themselves to him again.*]
9. [CLOSING SONG: UMH#191, "Jesus Loves Me"]

### **ENDNOTES:**

<sup>1</sup> While the reality of Danny's essay is questionable according to [snopes.com](https://www.snopes.com/fact-check/god-defined/) (Read <https://www.snopes.com/fact-check/god-defined/>), his description of the role and purpose of Jesus is nevertheless consistent with most orthodox teachings.

<sup>2</sup> There is a sense of this in the famous 1926 poem "*One Solitary Life*" by James Allan Francis, where it talks about how Jesus was "*born in an obscure village*" to "*peasant parents*," and how he never wielded any kind of earthly power or did anything that we today might consider "successful." Yet, the poem ends 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***" [Full poem by Reverend James Allan Francis, originally published in the chapter "*Arise Sir Knight!*" in the book *The Real Jesus and Other Sermons* (Philadelphia: Judson Press, 1926), pp. 123-124, cited from <http://www.spirituality.org/is/221/02.asp>].

<sup>3</sup> 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. To help us grasp how God could become human, the Bible also 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). Yet, all of these names (and more) stem from a faith belief that through the life, death, and resurrection of this person Jesus, *God shows us His love*.

<sup>4</sup> S.D. Gordon, summarizing John 1:14, in Bruce Demarest, *Jesus Christ, The GodMan*, 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.

<sup>5</sup> 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.*"

<sup>6</sup> Perhaps you've heard the saying, "*I owed a debt I could not pay; so Jesus paid a debt he did not owe.*" In other words, Jesus' willing sacrifice and death on the cross made possible our redemption/salvation from sin. Because of what *Jesus* 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.

<sup>7</sup> This final one ("great teacher and prophet") is how our Muslim friends understand who Jesus is.