

- **HOW I RESPOND TO LIFE IS DETERMINED BY WHAT I BELIEVE.**

- This truth is why we are examining the foundations of what we believe (or say we believe) as those who follow Jesus.
- It is exciting because it can give life and depth to our faith. It can help us realize that our belief system is not blind and is quite logical.
- It is challenging because it forces us to examine the ways we think and act in light of the truths we are affirming.
- Just because we believe something, doesn't make it true. Consider Steve Stephens, Facebook murderer, killed himself while being apprehended by police. His mother said this about him: "Steve was a good Christian person...he just snapped...he had a gambling problem," she said.

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- Last week we examined the first line of the Apostles Creed, which we are using as our guide for exploring what we believe. *"We believe in God the Father, Almighty Maker of the heavens and the earth"*
- We saw that he is the Creator, he is Almighty (both of which are true regardless of how you choose to respond to him) and that he wants to be your heavenly Father (which is a choice that you make).
- What about Jesus?
- Almost all scholars agree that he was a historical figure – he is referred to by Tacitus, Josephus and a number of other historians, many hostile to Christianity.
- He was a Jewish Preacher, a Rabbi
- Judaism sees Jesus as a false prophet, a deceiver.
- Religions like Islam and Hinduism see Jesus as a mighty prophet.
- Many people (even some atheists) see him as a good, moral teacher.
- Modern movies, plays and books depict Jesus as a man who had children, who married Mary Magdalene, who had children, whose descendants became rulers.
- He has been described as a good person and an evil person.
- Among those who follow him, he is seen as the Messiah, the Savior.
- *No man can read the gospels without feeling the actual presence of Jesus. His personality pulsates in every word. No myth is filled with such life. Theseus and other heroes of his type lack the authentic vitality of Jesus.* – Albert Einstein
- *Jesus was the first socialist, the first to seek a better life for mankind.* – Mikhail Gorbachev
- *And some people say Jesus wasn't Jewish. Of COURSE he was Jewish! 30 years old, single, lives with his parents, come on! He works in his father's business, his mom thought he was God's gift, he's Jewish! Give it up!* – Robin Williams
- So who was Jesus? Who IS Jesus?

- Our faith depends on the answer to this question.
- How you respond to Jesus is the biggest decision you will ever face.
- If you've already made that decision, how you see Jesus impacts the way you go about your life.

- The Apostles Creed continues:
- *"And in Jesus Christ His Son*
- *Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit*
- *He was born of the Virgin Mary"*
- So what do we believe about Jesus?

I. Jesus was fully God.

- “And in Jesus Christ His only Son”
- Jesus was not simply a good man.
- Some common misconceptions about Jesus:
- Falsity: He began when he was born.
- Truth: Jesus is eternal. He has always existed. *“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God.”*
- Falsity: He is a lesser God. Many people see God as the stern God. Jesus as the compassionate gentle God and the Holy Spirit . . . well, they don’t know what to do with him.
- Truth: He is God in all his fullness and power. He is the one through whom the world was created. He sustains everything.

Hebrews 1:3 The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.

- Falsity: he is one of three gods.
- Truth: There is one God, but three persons. This is called the doctrine of the trinity (the word trinity is not mentioned in Scripture, but the concept is)
- It means that God the Father, Jesus and the Holy Spirit (which we will be looking at in a later week) have the same power, the same essence, the same eternity. Yet they are distinct.
- Consider that the trinity is a great model for the church. It is complete unity with diversity. There is complete harmony and oneness within the godhead, but diversity in role and appearance.
- When Jesus came, he was fully God. Not partial God. Not a lesser God. God!
- Falsity: He never claimed to be God.
- Truth: This is not something attributed to him after his death by his followers, as some people have said.

John 10:30 I and the Father are one.” 31 Again his Jewish opponents picked up stones to stone him, 32 but Jesus said to them, “I have shown you many good works from the Father. For which of these do you stone me?” 33 “We are not stoning you for any good work,” they replied, “but for blasphemy, because you, a mere man, claim to be God.”

- Paul sums in up in this passage.

Philippians 2:5 In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: 6 Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; 7 rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. 8 And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death – even death on a cross!

- Christ voluntarily and temporarily emptied himself of the full display of his glory and independent use of his attributes so that he could be fully human and die for us
- Implications:
- 1) What he says matters.
- If he is simply a good teacher, then we can take or leave it. We can follow some of his teachings and not others.
- If he is fully God, then we would do well to pay attention.
- 2) He really loves me.
- It is a demonstration of God’s love – how else could he fully do this.
- It shows God’s love. It demonstrates it. We are not needed for God to love. God is love and he loved before we were ever created.
- You can tell if someone loves you if they will help you move.
- How do you demonstrate to someone that you love them?

Romans 5:8 But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

- He came alongside us.
- If really loves me, I can trust him. I can let go. I can listen to him.

II. Jesus was fully human.

- “Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, He was born of the Virgin Mary”
- Jesus birth was a supernatural event.
- Many people have scoffed at a virgin giving birth, but this is absolutely critical.

Matthew 1:20 But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.”

- If he was born of two human parents, it would be difficult to understand how he could be exempted from the sin nature.
- We know from Scripture that once Adam sinned, each of us inherited a sin nature. We are under condemnation, our hearts are deceitful, and we need something or someone outside of ourselves to be saved. Left to our own devices, we never become sinless.
- We will explore this idea of sinlessness more next week, but it was crucial for Jesus to be born because of God’s intervention, not from natural manmade desires.
- But he was BORN! He didn’t just look like a man, he was one.
- Jesus was subject to what it was like to be human.
- He had a material body which men could see, and a rational soul.
- He got tired (Mark 4:38).
- He got hungry (Matthew 4:2).
- He exhibited the same range of emotions that we have. He showed love (John 11:5), felt compassion (Matthew 9:36), sorrowed (John 11:35) and expressed anger (Matthew 23).
- He was subject to normal physical growth, starting as a baby and growing into a man.
- He dealt with rejection and betrayal. He experienced joy and fun. He was burdened and he was free.
- He suffered and died, with his earthly body expiring on the cross.
- We think at times he doesn’t get my struggles, because, after all, he was God.
- Implications
- 1) He understands and identifies with me.
- Jesus became a human. He understands.
- Some people say that since Jesus wasn’t married, or he didn’t have kids, he does really get me.
- That is missing the point.
- When someone comforted me when my dad died, they didn’t need to be people whose dad died during an operation at 75 years old far away from home. It just mattered they had suffered loss. They understood the anguish and pain of losing a loved family member.

Hebrews 2:17 For this reason he had to be made like them, fully human in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people.

Hebrews 4:15 For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are – yet he did not sin.

- Jesus knows what it is to suffer physically. He knows what it is to experience broken relationships. He understands having unfulfilled desires. He knows what it is like to suffer loss. To be mocked. To have nothing. To be praised and vilified.

- Books like The DaVinci Code seek to minimize the godhead side of things, making Jesus “more human” with sins and failings.
- Other writings seek to elevate his godhood and turn him into someone unrelatable.
- In either case, we lose something.
- There is a theological term called "Hypostatic union" to refer to this connection of being fully God and fully man. It sounds fancy in English, but simply means personal union. It is the personal union of Jesus's two natures.
- If Jesus was not really God, but was mostly or all human, then he becomes something less. Just another guy. Worthy of attention but not of my life.
- If Jesus was God but really a man, then we dismiss his claims as unreachable and his example as unattainable or unreasonable.
- Where does this leave us?

III. Jesus extends us an invitation to follow.

- Throughout the course of his life, there was one invitation he repeated over and over. To crowds. To his disciples. To inquirers. To sinners. To rich people. To poor people. To busy people. To those preoccupied with work and family.

*Matthew 4:19 “Come, **follow me**,” Jesus said, “and I will send you out to fish for people.”*

*Matthew 8:22 But Jesus told him, “**Follow me**, and let the dead bury their own dead.”*

*Matthew 9:9 As Jesus went on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax collector’s booth. “**Follow me**,” he told him, and Matthew got up and followed him.*

*Matthew 10:38 Whoever does not take up their cross and **follow me** is not worthy of me.*

*Matthew 16:24 Then Jesus said to his disciples, “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and **follow me**.”*

*Matthew 19:21 Jesus answered, “If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, **follow me**.”*

- There’s a great scene at the end of Jesus life.
- After he had died and come back to life, his disciples are in disarray. They had abandoned him and Peter particularly had denied even knowing Jesus at a crucial point in life.
- The disciple don’t know what to do, they are scared of being killed as Jesus’ followers, so a bunch of them go back to fishing.
- While they are fishing, they catch nothing, and then Jesus shows up on the shore. They did not recognize him but he called out to them, “Did you catch anything?”
- Then he told them to throw their nets on the other side of the boat. Dumbest advice ever.
- But something must have begun to stir in their minds. Some type of memory.
- They did as they were instructed and they caught so many fish they couldn’t even pull it in. At this point, all the bells start going off and John says to Peter, “It’s Jesus.”
- Peter gets excited and jumps into the water fully clothed and swims to shore.
- The rest followed him and when they got there, there was a fire, with fish cooking and fresh bread.
- They did not really know what to say or do.
- Jesus turns his attention to Peter who was extremely uncomfortable.
- There is a great exchange were Jesus asks Peter three times if he loves him (one for each time he denied him). Peter is hurt, vulnerable and probably still questioning what to do.
- Peter knew the humanness of Jesus. He had lived with him nonstop for three years. They had shared campfire stories and a lot more.
- But now Jesus had proved he was God. Rising from the dead will do that. Peter wasn’t entirely sure what to do with this.

John 21:18 Very truly I tell you, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go.” 19 Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God.

- Not the most inspiring thing. You have said you love me. I know your future. What now?

*Then he said to him, “**Follow me!**”*

- Peter, having just been reinstated and given purpose and direction by Jesus, looked around and thought, “what about these guys” but didn’t keep the thought there.

20 Peter turned and saw that the disciple whom Jesus loved was following them. (This was the one who had leaned back against Jesus at the supper and had said, “Lord, who is going to betray you?”) 21 When Peter saw him, he asked, “Lord, what about him?”

- “Peter, eyes here. Don’t worry about everyone else. Don’t try to decide what to do based on another person. I will deal with them.”

*22 Jesus answered, “If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must **follow me.**”*

- Follow me

- Who is Jesus? What do we believe about him?
- This invitation to follow him is the same invitation extended to you and to me.
- How you see Jesus will steer your answer to that invitation.
- Jesus is fully God. He has always been God.
- He is all powerful. All knowing. He has always been and always will be.
- He loved us enough to demonstrate it by coming to be with us.
- As a fully human person, subject to all the problems of living on this planet.
- So that we could see his love and ultimately know God personally as a result.
- And now he says, “Follow me!”
- What keeps you from following him fully?
- Because he is fully God, he is worth following. He can be trusted. His plan is better than your plan. He has the power to work in and through you.
- Because he was fully man, he is worth following. He loved you enough to identify with you. He gets you. He understands your struggles and barriers.