



John 10:22-42
So That You May Believe: John
“Jesus Is God”

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For those of us who preach on Sundays, our most readily accessible source of illustrations and examples for sermons is ourselves. Obviously, there are other resources – Biblical examples, the news, people in the church who are willing to have part of their story told, family members – whether they’re willing or not sometimes, cultural stories and jokes that have been passed around for generations, and so forth. But for any of us – including you all, not just “preachers” – we know our own story best: how God has changed us, touched our lives, how we’ve lived our faith, and so forth.

So, over the last nearly 10 years, along with other sources, I’ve shared with you different stories from my life – how God has changed me healed me, some examples of me living for Jesus well, even more examples of me falling short, in an effort to point us all to Jesus. The stories really are secondary. The goal of any of them is to help us all move closer to Jesus and live more courageously as his disciples.

But there’s one part of my life I have not actually ever mentioned, and that is my skill as a guitar player. You know I play drums – I played a few times a year in the worship band for several years; you know I play trumpet – some of you even heard that at a Christmas pageant a few years ago; you know I teach elementary band a few hours a week in the local schools. But what I have left out of all of that is my talent as a guitar player. And, while I don’t want to boast, I’m pretty good. In fact, I guess if I’m honest, and again, not trying to gloat or anything...but I’ve found false modesty isn’t really helpful in life either...I can hang with most any guitar player. So, this morning, I would actually like to play for you, that I hope will be a blessing to you here in worship...

So, what do you think? 😊 As you can tell, what I told you about my guitar abilities and what you actually experienced don’t really line up. Now, I actually *can* play a few chords and when Gwen and I were in seminary I would occasionally play the guitar leading worship with our youth group. (Though Gwen did as well, and she is actually the better guitar player

between the two of us.) But clearly, in regards to what I said and what you heard, there's an incongruency there. And if I actually believed I was a good guitar player, then you'd start to question my judgement, my ethics, my ability to recognize and tell the truth, etc. You'd start to question my trustworthiness.

And: For those of us who are followers of Jesus, we've come to a place where we trust him for our eternal lives – which is kind of astounding, really, because he makes some pretty bold claims. A person could question – and it's fair to do so – a person could question if Jesus really is someone who's worth trusting. Many people do question that. Maybe you're one of them. Maybe you wonder: Does Jesus really “save” us? Is he really the gate to eternity as he claims and we looked at last week? Is he really the good shepherd who we need leading and guiding us in our lives now and eternally, as we also looked at last week? Does Jesus tell the truth about who he is – and what exactly does he say about who he is?

Well, this morning's passage gives us a window into what is at the core of Jesus' teaching about himself. And, as we'll see in a moment, it is arguably the most audacious teaching he has. But is he trustworthy – unlike my grandiose proclamations of my guitar playing? So, this morning God's Word to you and me is in John 10, beginning in verse 22. We will take the passage in a few sections...**(John 10:22-23)**

So, right off the bat, John gives us the setting. Jesus is at the Jerusalem temple, in what was known as “Solomon's Colonnade” – essentially, an outdoor, covered area of the temple grounds. Probably had lots of columns supporting the roof over the patio area. Later, in the book of Acts, we see that the disciples often met in this exact location.

John also tells us that it is winter time, during the Festival of Dedication, which came about three months after the Feast of Tabernacles. That feast is what brought Jesus to Jerusalem back in chapter 7, though he went somewhat hesitantly. This festival was named this in part because it celebrated the restoration and rededication of the Temple in about 175 B.C. Not a total rebuild, like we read about in Ezra and Nehemiah after it was destroyed, but

repairing and re-appointing, and making it fit for worship after it had been ransacked. So, this Festival of Dedication is about new beginnings, and new hope for the future, including an emphasis on anticipation of the Messiah, one who would rescue Israel from its oppressors.

Thematically, as we'll see in a moment, Jesus' teaching in this passage links with what comes earlier in John 10. Perhaps some of the Jews in the audience in today's passage were in the audience last week. But this is a couple months or more later, so probably not the exact same people. Let's continue with just the next verse (**John 10:24**).

The anticipation of the Messiah was a significant part of this Festival of Dedication. It's on their minds. And so, here's Jesus, who himself claimed to be the Messiah – for instance, we see that in John 4:26 – and whom others said was the Messiah – such as when Andrew went to Simon and invited Simon to come with him and follow Jesus because, “we have found the Messiah” and now they've got this opportunity to ask him about this. “Tell us plainly” if you're the Messiah.

So, what does Jesus say? Let's continue on (**John 10:25-30**). Jesus plainly answers them, “I did tell you, but you do not believe.” And he could have left it there, kind of like me telling you that I'm this great guitar player who can hang with the greats of all-time like Jimmy Hendrix, Jimmy Page, Eddie Van Halen and Paul Hudson... (By the way, you all don't know how good Paul really is, because shredding guitar solos just aren't really what worship is about...but Paul is *really* good.) So, **Jesus could have left it at those words, but words are hollow. Jesus backs up his words with actions. He walks the talk.**

Then he gives some teaching that is similar to what we looked at last week, in the first 20 verses or so of John 10. So, John, the author, has arranged his telling of Jesus' life so these similarly themed teachings come together. It wouldn't surprise me if this was a common theme of Jesus' teaching, even beyond what we have recorded for us in the Gospels. If you were to read through all of my sermons from 20 years of serving as a pastor, you would undoubtedly find common themes, the same stories, same facets of my life

repeated, throughout: illustrations from skiing, telling my faith journey, and picking on country music. Jesus undoubtedly repeated a lot of his teaching as he traveled around from place to place and had different audiences.

But at the end of this he makes a statement that irks them. **“I and the Father are one” (John 10:30)**. Their understanding of the Messiah was of an earthly leader who would bring them earthly freedom from their earthly oppressors. But Jesus has a bigger, more eternal, spiritual view in mind. He exceeds their expectations of the Messiah: and it is completely spiritual in nature. Yes, Jesus touches and changes lives here and now. Yes, we live out our faith here and now. But **Jesus came from eternity to earth to show us the way to eternity, the way to heaven, the way to life after death in relationship with the God of the universe who makes us. In the end, Jesus’ mission is completely spiritual in nature.** Anything he does in the physical realm is done with the goal of pointing us to the spiritual realm, pointing us to God our Heavenly Father, the God of the Universe and of the entire space-time continuum. But the people in this audience – seemingly *all* of them, but certainly the majority of them – they just couldn’t go there. Their view of the Messiah is stuck in earthly thinking.

Let’s see how they respond: **(John 10:31)**. Because of Jesus’ claim to equality with God in his statement, “I and the Father are one” they pick up stones to stone him; it was a method of execution. **They are literally threatening his life right here.** We’ve seen this happen before. Some Pharisees previously tried to stone the woman caught in adultery back in John 8, and then later in John 8, in verses 58 and 59 we see some people like today – “Jews,” not necessarily religious leaders like Pharisees – who tried to stone Jesus. I mean, you read all this and you can’t help but thinking, “They just wanted people to be stoned.” Which sounds really different today than what it actually means...and so I’m not going to touch that one any more.

Let’s continue on and see where this goes **John 10:32-33**. Jesus responds with a question to begin with. “What have I done that is causing you to stone me?” And they say, “It’s not the miracles we have a problem with. It’s what you’ve said, that you, a mere man, claim to be God.”

Ok, we need to pause here for a moment. If you have questions about who Jesus is, you need to pay attention to this. This is crucially important. **Notice what Jesus' opponents and critics are saying that Jesus has said: That he claims to be God.** It's not just that Jesus says this. It's not just that his followers say it. Those who opposed him, like in this passage, say it as well. There's a good chunk of the world today who believe that Jesus was a good teacher, a teacher of morals and a teacher of limited spiritual truth. But in Jesus' day, in front of his own face, this group of people are ready to stone him because *they* understand him to be communicating more than that: that he is God. He is God in the flesh. He is God become a man.

In this instance, it comes from his statement a moment ago when he said, "I and the Father are one." They clearly understood what Jesus is saying there: That he is on equal footing with God...that he is God. And if that's what they understood him to be teaching, if that's who Jesus really is, then it's worth asking ourselves, **"What is my response to Jesus?"** Are we like these people who say to him, "If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly." Well, we've got the gospel accounts of his life and his ministry. We can see that Jesus backs up his claims with his actions. He walks the talk...right to the point of his death on the cross and being raised from the tomb on the third day. Do we *really* need anything more than that – especially the cross and the empty tomb? His whole life is a testimony to who he really is and what his mission is. If you have not considered this claim of Jesus before, or if you've written it off as just something that "crazy Christians" claim about Jesus, then I urge you to consider Jesus' own words, and even the words of those who opposed him to his face.

Let's finish out the rest of the passage, **John 10:34-42.** So, **Jesus responds by quoting to them from Psalm 82.** There's a play on words in the Hebrew (that's the original language of the OT, and he would have quoted the Hebrew) that's going on. One of the most common words in the Old Testament for God is "Elohim." Over 2300 times it refers to the God of the Bible. But it can also be translated as or "judge" or "gods" in a "little g" sense, and the Bible uses it those ways over 200 times. And Psalm 82 uses the word in that sense. This "gods" is referring to those who were leading Israel at the time the Psalm was written, and in the message of Psalm 82 is a

reminder that they are mere mortals, and yet God calls them “Elohim.” He calls them “gods” with a little “g”.

And so, Jesus’ argument here is to say, “Look, even God (Elohim), through the writer of this Psalm, calls these mere mortals “elohim” (and not in a derogatory way) so how blasphemous is it, really, for me to say I’m God, when I’m sent here by God? My works testify to who I am, they back up my claims...I’ve shown you things that support this claim. So why is that blasphemous when the Scriptures call your leaders of old “gods”? That’s the logic he’s using here.

They couldn’t handle this, and try to seize him, but John tells us that Jesus escaped their grasp. This happens a couple of times in the gospels, where, as it’s very simply reported, it seems that Jesus just kind of pulls a Houdini act on everyone and just slips away when he should have been an easy catch.

So, this was a pretty harrowing experience. And: **Sometimes, when we have gone through a particularly difficult experience, we need to retreat to a place of safety.** A place that gets us back to our roots and our mission, and reminds us of who we really are so we can get centered and encouraged for the road ahead. And that’s what Jesus does, as he returns to the region of the Jordan river where John the Baptist had had his ministry, probably where Jesus himself had been baptized since he was baptized by John, and there he gets back on his feet a bit, as people put their faith in him. It’s a totally different response from what he had in Jerusalem. You may recall back in John 7, and I mentioned it briefly earlier: Jesus was reluctant to go to Jerusalem, but ultimately did. And based on what has happened in these verses, and earlier as well, with all the opposition, you can kind of understand why. So he returns to a place of safety and a place where people are more receptive to who he is.

So, as I opened with: Talk is cheap. We can claim whatever we want, but actions are what validate our claims. **Jesus backed up what he said with what he did.** It’s a crucial part of his ministry and even his opponents acknowledged his claims; they just couldn’t handle it. I hope you’ll give serious consideration to Jesus’ claims if you haven’t before, and that your

heart would be receptive to Jesus, the Messiah, God come to us in the flesh, to lead us like a shepherd back to God for all eternity. That's Jesus' mission, and he invites you into it, and he is trustworthy. He backs up his words with action.

For those of us who are already his disciples, I'd simply say this: **Do our lives back up what we say we believe?** Does your life, does my life, does our collective life together here at Rose Hill, look like Jesus? I think when it comes down to it, Jesus' life was marked by exceeding expectation and generosity (synonymous words). He was generous with his time. He was generous with his talents. He was generous with his love. He was generous with his hospitality. He was generous in so many ways. Ultimately, he's generous with his very life, leaving eternity to walk the earth as a human, suffering a brutal death on the cross for our benefit. He exceeded expectations of the Messiah. He was, and still is, generous.

I think, at its core, it's what caught people's attention about him – he exceeded their expectations. As his disciples, we can do the same. **Let's exceed people's expectations about how Christians live, treat others, love people, serve the world, and bless people.** To say we're "Jesus followers" and then *not* back it up, and not exceed expectations is like me saying I am a great guitar player, and then actually trying to play for people. My guitar playing is completely underwhelming. Instead, let's make sure our lives are more like how Jesus lived. Let's be generous with love, grace, compassion, and more. Let's exceed people's expectations of Christians, so we would point them to the one who inspires us to live that way and who set the standard for living that way: Jesus the Messiah, God in the flesh. Let's pray...Amen.