

## ***“Liar, Lunatic, Or Lord?”***

**John 6:35, 41-51**

Today I will ask you to hear our text not with the heart of faith, but with the mind of skepticism. Imagine that you have never heard of Jesus before, and you that don't know anything about him. You're a skeptic, not a believer. Then you hear what Jesus has said about himself:

*“I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. “*

*“It is the Father who sent me.”*

*“I will raise you up on the last day.”*

*“I have come down from heaven.”*

Just imagine if you went over into the City Park for the Kiel Picnic, and you heard someone over there say these things. Things like -- *I have come down from heaven.....I will raise you from the dead.....I can give you eternal life.* You would think that that particular person has spent too much time in the beer tent, right? It is even possible that you might be offended!

Well, Jesus is on the New Testament record as making such claims about himself. And yes, some people got offended. They said to one another: *“Who does this guy think he is? We know where he's from! He's from Nazareth, just up the road! Mary and Joseph are his mom and dad! Joseph has that carpentry shop in town. How can he say then, that he came down from heaven?!? We know THAT isn't true!”*

Throughout the four Gospels, we have documentation that Jesus did make some very high claims as to his identity. Elsewhere in John's Gospel, Jesus said: *“I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”* (John 14:6)

Jesus didn't say that he is just one of many ways, but rather that he is THE way. In our day, age, and culture we find such exclusive claims to be offensive. Today's spirit of reductionism prefers to admire Jesus as being “a great teacher” but nothing more. But the truth is, Jesus claimed to be more than just a teacher.

C.S. Lewis, in his book *Mere Christianity* makes the following statement about Jesus: “A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic on the level with a man who says he is a poached egg -- or he would be the devil of hell. You must take your choice. Either this was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us.”

Remember -- today I am asking you to use your intellect in particular. Let's look at these three possibilities. The first one is -- *maybe Jesus was lying when he said all of these things.*

In my life and ministry I have yet to meet a person who honestly believes that the historical person of Jesus was a liar. All over the world there are millions of people who are decidedly NOT Christian; they either practice other faiths or they practice no faith at all.

I have enjoyed meaningful dialogue with a handful of these folks. In my ministry I have had personal conversations with people who are Hindu, Muslim, and Buddhist. I have also visited with people who are Unitarian, agnostic and atheist. None of these conversations were contentious or angry in any way. Each of these people were very courteous and thoughtful. In fact they were pleasant to be around! (Interestingly, the most contentious and heated conversations that I have had were always with my fellow Christians!)

My acquaintances of other religious faiths always had high regard for the person of Jesus. They spoke of him in the most complimentary of ways! Even the atheist gentleman acknowledged that he admired Jesus for his great morality, wisdom, and compassion.

Why do so many people around the world admire Jesus? Well, for one thing Jesus is an actual historical figure. History proves that such a person actually existed. Another reason is because the records show that in every situation Jesus manifested perfect morality.

Was Jesus of Nazareth a liar? With the possible exception of Bill Maher (Host of HBO's *Real Time With Bill Maher*), hardly anyone thinks so. There simply is no basis for Jesus being untruthful about anything that he said.

Well, if Jesus wasn't lying -- that is, if he wasn't *deliberately* trying to

mislead people -- then that brings us to our next possibility: *Maybe Jesus was not mentally healthy!* Or, to borrow the stronger word used by C.S. Lewis -- maybe Jesus was a “lunatic.”

Is that possible? Is it possible that Jesus' elevator didn't stop at every floor? Could he have been a few sandwiches short of a picnic? Was his compass needle stuck on south? When Jesus said such things as *I am the living bread that came down from heaven* was he out of his right mind?

Just like with the first possibility, I have never heard of Jesus being listed among the insane of the world. People all over the world, Christian and not, have admired Jesus for his teachings. Even though we have noted that Jesus claimed to be more than just a teacher, he is still widely recognized and admired for his uncanny insight into the nature and plight of humanity. To this very day, his teachings are held in the highest regard around the world!

The truth is, Jesus' own words and actions do not paint us a picture of a man who is insane. His teachings are widely respected as being deeply insightful, and his mind as belonging to that of a great critical thinker. Even when challenged by his enemies, Jesus' response to them was that of a man completely in control of his own faculties.

There is no basis for Jesus being a lunatic.

Well, if Jesus wasn't lying when he said these things.....and if he wasn't a lunatic.....then that leaves us with only one more possibility: *Just maybe He really is who He said He is: “Lord.”*

Jesus' own claims about being sent into the world by God the Father are not misspeak. They are not Freudian slips. Throughout the Gospels we see Him repeatedly reminding His disciples Who He is and what His purpose in this world is.

*“For the Son of Man came to seek and save the lost”* as He said in Luke 19:10. The high priest asked Jesus: *“Are you the Messiah? The Son of the Blessed One?”* And Jesus answered him, saying: *“I am; and you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of the Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven.”* (Mark 14:61,62)

So what do you say? When Jesus claimed to be the Son of God was he lying about it? Was he just plain nuts? Or is He Who He says He is?

I'll leave that up to you to decide. Each of us must decide for himself or

herself.

As for me, I made my decision twenty-three years ago. Like the Apostle Paul, I confess: *“I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day.”* (2 Timothy 1:12)

AMEN.