

What is Jesus On?

In last week's sermon, I mentioned that Jesus was making the bold claim of being the Good Shepherd that is mentioned in the 23rd Psalm. In making this claim, Jesus is making the audacious assertion that He is God. In today's Gospel reading, Jesus is making that same audacious claim regarding His identity. While the context of last week's Gospel reading and today's Gospel reading are different, we do hear this same claim by Jesus. Last week, in the first part of John's "Good Shepherd" chapter, Jesus claims that He is the gatekeeper who determines which sheep get into the sheep pen and which ones go out and when. In the part of the chapter following this text, Jesus claims to be the Good Shepherd, paralleling His claims with the Good Shepherd image from the 23rd Psalm. Last week, Jesus was addressing the Pharisees who took exception to Jesus healing a blind man on the Sabbath. The context for today's Gospel reading is that Jesus is addressing His disciples on Maundy Thursday evening during the Last Supper.

In talking about the intimate relationship that Jesus has with the Father, Jesus is claiming to be God. By referring to the closeness of identity between the Father and Jesus, He is intimating that the relationship between the Father and Jesus is such that the two are indistinguishable by those who are not in that relationship. The first part of this passage, which is heard at many funerals gives us the assurance that we will be taken to where the Father is by Jesus; that we are not going to be excluded from their relationship but taken into that relationship.

This is a very bold claim by Jesus. An outside observer at that time might comment that either Jesus is onto something or that He is 'on something.' If Jesus is on something, then He is just a charismatic figure who got people to believe in

Him and is someone suffering from a 'God complex.' This observer could conclude that Jesus was a failure; not accomplishing anything of significance in His lifetime. Those who had followed Him were equally deluded and proceeded to craft a story that fit this delusion and were able to convince many others of its truthfulness - making it the ultimate conspiracy theory. Those who continue to believe in Jesus are fooling themselves.

However, if Jesus is who He says He is, that is if He is the Son of God, then we are not wrong to put our trust in Him to do those things He says He can & will do. We can rely not only the promises given to us in the beginning of this text - the promises that deal with our life after death, but also in the promises that are inherent in the 23rd Psalm and those throughout the Bible that assures us that God will stay true to God's word and will bless us with good things, even on this side of the Resurrection.

But critics of Christianity contend that if we believe that Jesus is the Son of God, then why don't we act like it? Why do we still lie, cheat, and hurt others? Why don't we live the way that Jesus did? They would point out all the atrocities that have been done to others 'in Jesus' name' as proof that Jesus is a phony. These critics may then extend this 'mistaken' belief in Jesus to wonder even if God exists at all. They would point out to our image of God being kind, merciful and loving and question how this image fits in with the reality of all kinds of suffering in the world. They may contend that this discrepancy would be enough proof to show that God doesn't exist and Christianity is not something to rely upon, that religion is something made up in order to distract people from the real problems of the world.

The answer to this critique of Christianity is that because we live in a fallen world, because there is evil in the world that resists God and that sin has entered

this world (which is turning our backs to God) is that we are simultaneously saint & sinner. We struggle with living the way Jesus wants us to live. We have the temptation of making ourselves the center of the universe and as the center, everything revolves around us and should be for our benefit. Because of the forces that try to make us not believe in God, we are urged to make everything about us, regardless of who gets hurt as we benefit. This struggle between being selfless and selfish is with us individually and corporately. On a corporate, or community scale, this is evident wherever there is a group of people who try to find ways to make others who are not in their group to be something less than human, less than a child of God, less than deserving the blessings that God has given humanity. Hopefully, as we go along our life's journey, we become closer to Jesus, doing more of those things that we ought to do and less of those things that we should not do. Our sins and shortcomings, either individually or as a community, do not invalidate the One who lived His life in perfect union with the Father in whose name we live and are given life.

Jesus then makes another audacious claim that if we ask for anything in His name, we'll get it. Many of us can point to times we 'asked' Jesus for something and we didn't get it: lottery win, health, job promotion or new job, a spouse, etc. These kinds of requests tend to make Jesus a '*Vending machine Jesus*' where we go and make a request of Jesus, usually it is a selfish request. But this is the wrong way of praying. We need to remember that this is during the Last Supper. Shortly after today's text, Jesus gives us His new commandment: "to love one another as I have loved you." In today's text where Jesus talks about being 'in the Father' He is making the point that Jesus does and says what the Father wants, not what Jesus wants. In short, Jesus does the will of the Father. So, as we pray like Jesus,

praying in His name, we will be asking more about doing God's will and less and less about God doing our will. The focus of our prayer requests will change from an "I want or need" perspective to one of requesting what others need.

Throughout His ministry, Jesus makes some very audacious claims, making one wonder if Jesus on something or onto something. While these audacious claims are about Himself, the believers in Jesus are the ones who receive the advantages of those claims. Each day, may we live closer to the way Jesus wants us to live so that all may have life in His name.

YouTube links:

Gospel and Sermon: <https://youtu.be/QWEqmyOAnf0>

Service: <https://youtu.be/c-sNWplorgM>