

Is Jesus the Son of God?

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

Two weeks ago, we discussed the question, "Is there a God?" You remember we agreed with Einstein and Darwin that the existence of a person who was also intelligent and was the Supreme Being behind the universe, was the most plausible explanation and indeed the only completely satisfactory explanation for the existence of us, the existence of our world, the order and design of the universe itself, and the existence of conscience and moral sense of obligation in people who found morals themselves most unnatural.

Then, last Sunday we dealt with the most striking, empirical evidence of a Creator behind the universe that our world possesses. It's the empirical evidence presented in the last quarter of this book here, the Bible. It's the historical record of an incredible man who said he was the only unique Son of our Creator and that he was of the same substance as the supernatural Creator of the world. We looked at the historical record of this man because he claimed to be God here on earth.

So the big issue that we dealt with last Sunday was, "Is this book a particularly historical record of His life, is it really reliable? Is it history or is it myth?" You remember we saw how the men who wrote about him were actually eyewitnesses of his life and not only were they eyewitnesses but there were other people who did not come to the same conclusion as they did about him who nevertheless said exactly the same things. We found there were contemporary historians like Tacitus and Pliny, Celsius, Porphyry -- men who did not believe in Christianity at all -- but yet in their histories, they have recounted the same effects and the same details of this man's life, of Jesus of Nazareth.

We discovered too that there were other people who were alive while these men were circulating their accounts. There were other contemporaries of theirs who could easily contradict these events that they talked about if they were, in fact, wrong.

Then we studied the transmission of these original accounts down through the centuries. We said that if you compared it with the ancient history upon which we utterly depend for knowledge of Caesar or knowledge of Homer or knowledge of Plato, there is absolutely no comparison. This book has manuscript documentary evidence that makes all other histories seem unreliable.

We accept the poetry of Homer on the basis of two manuscripts, the oldest of which is 900 years after; in fact it's 2000 years after Homer wrote his poetry.

We accept Caesar's "Gallic Wars", which consist of nine manuscripts, the oldest of which is 900 years after Caesar wrote his history. We accept Plato's "Republic", which is based on only two manuscripts, the oldest one of which is 1300 years after Plato wrote "The Republic".

We have behind this incredible history (of the Bible) 4000 manuscripts and thousands more of scraps. Two whole manuscripts in the British Museum that are dated about 300 or 350 A.D. and one particular scrap that is dated as early by Carbon 14 Method as 125-130 A.D.

So, if you question the authenticity or the historicity of this record, you have to reject all of history because this is so far ahead of all history, as far as proving its authenticity is concerned. So loved ones, last day we came to the conclusion that this man Jesus said the things

that he is reported to have said and did the things that he is reported to have done-- or if he didn't, we can't trust any history in our world at all, because this history is so reliably reinforced and substantiated.

So the real issue is, looking at this man's life, is he the Son of our Creator? Was he divine? The issue is not, is he "A son of God?" There are plenty of people like Jehovah's Witnesses who will say, "We're all sons of God and Jesus is a son of God." But was this Jesus the unique Son of God, who knew the Creator before the world was created? Is Jesus the Son of our Maker?

It's important to ask the question because you'll agree that we don't say this about Zoroaster or Confucius or Mohammad or Buddha or Moses or Isaiah. We say they're ordinary men and prophets who tell us about God. But they are not God, the Creator, come to earth. So what we're saying is, is this Jesus the Creator, our Creator come to earth? Because if he is, that's the clearest demonstration that not only we have a Creator but that he is a certain kind of person that we possess.

Why do we say that Jesus is the Son of our Creator? Well, the first reason is -- and don't dismiss it until you've heard me out on it -- the first reason is, He talks like the Son of our Creator would talk. Now, don't dismiss it, because I'll deal with the old cynical observations that certainly I would make upon that comment. He talks like the Son of our Creator would talk. He does.

He was a little guy of 12 in the temple, son of a carpenter, and they lost him. His parents you remember came back to find him and they asked him what he was doing. He said, "Did you not know I'd be about my father's business?" Well, his father's business was carpentry but he was in the temple discussing theology with the doctors of theology there. He talked like the Son of our Creator.

He talked with the authority of the Son of our Creator, that's what they said. They said, "He teaches with authority, not like the scribes. He teaches as if he knows these things." He made this the crucial question in his whole career. He did. He made this the central issue. He said, "Whom do men say that I am?" He didn't go around about it. He said, "Whom do men say that I am"? And Peter said, "You're the Son of the Blessed." Then he said, "Blessed are you that flesh and blood has not revealed this to you but My Father, who is in heaven."

In fact, his contemporaries opposed him because he said he was the Son of God. That's why they tried to kill him. They said, "He treats God as his own father and he makes himself equal with God." That is so, loved ones. Jesus never avoided the whole claim that he was the unique Son of our Creator and he talked that way.

That's why they executed him. Did you realize that? They didn't execute him because of his teachings. They were prepared to accept his teachings, but they executed him because he was God's Son. And the amazing thing is that at the very point when he could have saved himself by denying that, he didn't. Maybe you'd look at it in Mark 14:61. It's during the trial before the high priest.

Mark 14:61-65

"But he was silent and made no answer. Again the high priest asked him, 'Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?' And Jesus said, 'I am; and you will see the Son of man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven.'" And the high priest tore his mantle, and said, 'Why do we still need witnesses? You have heard his blasphemy. What is your decision?' And they all condemned him as deserving death. And some began to spit on him, and to cover his face, and to

strike him, saying to him, 'Prophesy!' And the guards received him with blows."

At the very moment when he could have escaped the whole thing by denying it, he said, "Yes, I am the Son of the Creator of this world." He identified himself with God. He said, "I can forgive sins." He said, "Is it easier for me to say to this man, 'Rise and be healed', or to say, 'Your sins are forgiven you?'" He took upon himself actions and responsibility that only the Creator of the universe could have. He said, "If you've seen me, you've seen the Father." He said, "If you receive me, you receive him that sent me." So he talked in those terms.

Now, so do lots of people in the psyche wards, right? The psyche wards are full of such people, who think they're Napoleon or think they're God or think they're God's Son or think that they're Savior of the universe. The world itself is filled with people like Moon (the Korean), who claim to be in some way supernatural. It's full of Gurus, who are trying to draw attention to themselves as if they were somebody different. That's why I'd ask you to examine this man's life and claims in the light of the other possibilities, besides the fact that he may be the Son of God. Just examine them. You know them because we've talked about them before.

First of all, he was a liar. That's the first possibility. He knew he was not God's Son but in order to lend authority to his teaching, he pretended he was God's Son. But could I point out to you what one skeptic in Britain said? This man called John Stuart Mill was a well-known economist and philosopher and he rejected Christianity utterly. Could I read you what he said?

"Above all, the most valuable part of the effect on the character which Christianity has produced by holding up in a divine person a standard of excellence and a model for imitation, is available even to the absolute unbeliever and can never more be lost to humanity. For it is Christ, rather than God, whom Christianity has held up to believers as the pattern of perfection for humanity."

Men like John Stuart Mill believed there is one supreme moral teacher in the universe and that is Jesus of Nazareth. In other words, wherever you go among philosophers, they'll all agree with this, "He is the supreme ethical teacher that our world has ever seen. His teachings are more sublime than any others and his life is more in conformity with his teaching."

Now, how could that be? How can we say that? If this man, on the most crucial point of his teaching, is a liar? How can you? How can you say that this man, whom the whole world regards as the foremost ethical teacher in our era, how can we say that this man who taught better than anybody else, who lived closer to what he taught than anybody else, on the central issue of his own identity, lied to us?

Do you see it makes foolishness of our whole system of logic? It makes foolishness of us, ourselves. If this man was a liar, he can't have been the great ethical teacher that everybody talks about. He either lied or he was a great ethical teacher.

Some people say, "Well, he was a lunatic. He was misguided. He simply thought he was God's Son when he really wasn't." But do you see the problem about that? His life has none of the abnormality or imbalance that a lunatic's life has. Indeed, most of us, except maybe some extreme skeptics, look to Jesus' life as the balanced life. We look to His attitude to people in love and kindness and patience under pressure, as the ideal life that a human being should live. It isn't the life of a lunatic.

You remember what C.S. Lewis said, "No one has yet explained how such deep moral teaching could come from the mind of a megalomaniac." I think that's the difficulty you're up against when you try to label Jesus a lunatic. None of the rest of his life expresses the imbalance or the chaos of a lunatic. It expresses the very opposite. It expresses sanity and the kind of integrated personality that all of us would like to experience.

Maybe he was a legend. That is, maybe he wasn't all that his followers said he was. Maybe he was an ordinary man who had some good qualities and then they added other bits on in order to make themselves the leader of some great religion. Do you see that a legend requires time to develop? Do you see that?

Let's say that Greg, with his new suit, dies and then we wait two, three or five years before somebody writes a book presenting him as the greatest Greek teacher that the world has ever known. Well, there are many of us here who would say, "No, he was good but he wasn't that good!" And until we all died off, nobody could pass that kind of story on to the world. It requires time for a legend to develop. It requires time for all of the contemporaries to die who knew the man. Do you see that that time didn't exist?

It existed with Buddha. Buddha lived in 500 B.C. and the first time his writings were committed to paper or his sayings were committed to paper, was in 900 A.D., thousands of years later. But with Jesus, the letter to the Galatians was circulating in 48 A.D. That was just 19 years after Jesus died. There were many men, young men and women, 20, 25, 30, who were alive when Jesus was crucified, who were still alive when the New Testament accounts were circulating and they could simply say, "No, it didn't happen like that. Sure he died, but He never rose from the dead. We were in Jerusalem at that time."

There was not time for a legend to develop because the historical accounts of Jesus' life were circulating before all his contemporaries had died and they were known throughout the then known world.

In other words, if Jesus was not a liar and was not a lunatic and was not a legend, then you're left only with one possible conclusion: that he was what he said he was. Another reason we say that is that he didn't only talk like the Son of God but he lived like the Son of God.

Mohammad's life is full of stories of vengeance. I don't know if you know that, but if you study his life it's full of acts of vengeance of all kinds. Confucius' life is full of admitted faults. Jesus' life was sinless. Now, don't say, "He said that?" No, he didn't. He didn't, though he would strangely enough say to people, "Who of you condemns me of a fault or convicts me of any sin?" He would say that to people. None of us would do that but he actually said to people, "Which of you convicts me of sin?"

So, he would do that. But we say he was sinless because the people who knew him said he was sinless. The people who lived with him and ate with him, they said he was spotless. Even his enemies, the centurions said, "Surely, this man was the Son of God." Even Pilate, who was trying to find fault said, "Listen, I find no fault in this man." It is interesting, isn't it, that all of us, however close to God we may be, are conscious of something wrong in our lives, aren't we?

In fact, it's interesting, Paul said that the more you get close to God, the more you realize you're a sinner. And so all saints have admitted some sin in them that they were more conscious of than

ever before. Jesus doesn't have that. Isn't that interesting? Yet you know that the world has not seen him as a conceited fool. Isn't that strange?

They have not seen him as a conceited, blind fool. They have seen him as one of the most perceptive, one of the most humble men that has ever lived. Yet, he was not conscious and he never admitted to any consciousness of sin in his life. His friends confirmed that by their own observations. His humanity was the kind of humanity that we would expect God to live here on earth. It really was.

There's a man called Schaff, a church historian, and he has talked about it this way. He said, "When you look at the perfect humanity of Jesus, you see the kind of humanity that we would think the Creator of the world Himself would produce. His zeal never degenerated into passion, or His constancy into obstinacy, or His benevolence into weakness, or His tenderness into sentimentality. His unworldliness was free from indifference and unsociability or undue familiarity, His self-denial from moroseness, and His temperance from austerity. He combined child-like innocence with manly strength, observing devotion to God with untiring interest in the welfare of man, tender love to the sinner, with uncompromising severity against sin, combining dignity with winning humility, fearless courage with wise caution, unyielding firmness with sweet gentleness."

It is true, isn't it? When you think of Jesus, you think of perfect humanity. Then loved ones, it's not only that he talked like the Son of our Creator and lived like him, but he did the kind of things that we would believe our Creator could do. He calmed storms, he just said to a lake, "Be still", and the storm went down.

He met a man who had congenital blindness and he healed the blindness. He met a widow whose loved one had died and he raised the loved one. He met Lazarus's sisters who were crying because Lazarus had died and he raised Lazarus up from the dead. Jesus did the kinds of miracles that we would expect the Son of our Creator to do.

Of course there is the foremost fact that it is impossible to get rid of. All kinds of Gurus have been able to control their breathing. All kinds of escape artists have pretended that they were buried alive and then have rose from the dead. Nobody has been in any doubt but that they did not rise from the dead. They were not dead at all. It was a trick of some kind. But no man has throughout his life, explained to his friends and followers that he was going to be killed and was going to die and was going to be dead for three days and then was going to rise from the dead and has done it. No man has done that, loved ones.

No man or woman has left our earth and said they would come back when they wanted to and actually come back and persuaded everybody that they were alive and then have disappeared off the earth forever. No one has ever done that, but do you realize that the resurrection of Jesus is an incident that is better substantiated and better reinforced with evidence than any other incident in our history? I mean I am talking about history beyond 100-200 years.

There is no incident in our history that is more variously and more substantially narrated and reported than the resurrection of Jesus. And no event has been subjected to so much questioning -- legal questioning, historical questioning, theological questioning, and geological questioning. No event has so often been questioned, criticized and examined carefully and has come out so absolutely untouched by it, as the resurrection of Jesus.

You know the arguments and I will not draw them out but there isn't one that stands. If Jesus only

swooned, (and hadn't really died) then how, bleeding from the wound in his side and from the wounds in his hands, could he have come back into consciousness so strongly that he could appear on 13 different occasions at 13 different places, sometimes within an hour of each other even though they were miles and miles apart? How could he have done that if he had only swooned? He could never have done it.

If the disciples stole his body, why then did they die for a lie? If the Romans stole the body, why didn't they parade it through Jerusalem and say, "This man was a fraud"? Even if you examine those twin facts of the resurrection appearances and the empty tomb, there is just no way in which you can reject their historicity and their authenticity.

You tackle the resurrection appearances with the whole theory of hallucinations and it falls apart, the whole theory of hallucinations falls apart. A hallucination demands that people experience it personally themselves; it's a subjective experience. He appeared to more than 500 people at one time. A hallucination has to be experienced by a people who want to experience it, who are hoping it will happen. These people said, "Listen, we have given up. We thought that he would have been the one to redeem Israel but he is dead now and gone." They hid themselves in the upper room. They were so convinced that he was finished with.

None of the laws of hallucinations fit the appearances of Jesus. Loved ones, you're bound by the history in this book and by almost every critical theory you can produce. For its interpretation, you're bound to admit finally that this Jesus must have been the son of our Creator. He must have been the son of the one who made your face and your hands. That's the only conclusion you can come to, if you allow your mind to work logically and to examine the evidence in detail.

Well, you see you have to do what you want to then. Is Jesus the son of your Maker? Is he? If he is, you have some things to do. You need to realize that if he is, then he is here now today and he is alive at this moment and he knows you and he can hear you. I wouldn't dream of stepping in on this sacred ground. You have to decide what to do then. It's not for me to give you little theories. If you really believe he is the Son of your Creator then it's your business what you do. But I think you agree that you do have to do something. If he can hear you now, you need to make some approach to him.

Let us pray.

Lord Jesus, we may not even be treating you as our Lord, so we call You Jesus and say that it looks as if you're bound by logic to conclude that you are the person you say you are. You are the Son of our Maker, our Creator, our God. Jesus, we would ask you to kindly show us something more of yourself in our own lives somehow and teach us what we should do next in our communication with you. But Jesus, if you are the Son of our Maker then we want to know what you and your Father want us to do.

We ask you to begin to show us that from this day forward. We ask it because of yourself and because we believe you're real. Amen.