

SERMON OUTLINE 1

Good or God?

I. Introduction

- A. In Matthew 16:13–20, we read the story of how Jesus was travelling with his disciples to the region of Caesarea Philippi. It was there that Jesus asked his disciples, “Who do people say the Son of Man is?” (verse 13 NIV).
 - 1. The disciples reply with the responses they have heard: John the Baptist, Elijah, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets (see verse 14).
 - 2. Each of these individuals was dead by this point, but it’s possible the people thought they had come back in the form of Jesus.
 - 3. Jesus then asked a follow-up question: “But what about you. . . . Who do you say I am?” (verse 15 NIV).
- B. These questions drive us to the core of Jesus’ identity—and getting the answer right carries eternal consequences. People everywhere, both in Jesus’ time and in our own, have been asking these questions about his claims:
 - 1. Is Jesus just a *good* moral teacher, or is he actually *God*?
 - 2. Is Jesus our *friend*, or is he our *foe*?
 - 3. Was Jesus truly a *king*, or just a *pawn* in the power struggles of the day?
 - 4. Is Jesus *a way* to God, or is he truly the *only way*?
 - 5. Is Jesus the *Lion* of Judah, or the *Lamb* of God?
- C. In this message, we will look at whether Jesus was a real, historical person, as confirmed by both the Bible and non-Christian historians. We will then consider Jesus’ identity as confessed by his disciple Peter.

II. Teaching

- A. The first question we must address is whether Jesus was *a real person who existed in history*.
 - 1. The Bible is clear that Jesus was real person.

- a. Jesus was born in the city of Bethlehem and grew up in the region of Nazareth (see Matthew 2:1, 19–23; Luke 2:4–7).
 - b. Other references indicate that people knew he was from the region of Nazareth (see Matthew 21:11; 26:71; Mark 1:9; John 1:44–46). Jesus conducted much of his ministry in the region around the Sea of Galilee.
2. Four early historians also mention the existence of Jesus.
- a. Tacitus (AD 56–120), a Roman senator and governor, wrote in his work *Annals* that “Christus [Christ] . . . suffered the extreme penalty [crucifixion] in the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilate.”
 - b. Suetonius (AD 66–122), a court official and overseer of the libraries of Rome, wrote in his *Lives of the Twelve Caesars* that the emperor Claudius banished the Jews from Rome “since the Jews constantly made disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus [Christ].” This correlates with Acts 18:2.
 - c. Pliny the Younger (AD 61–113), a Roman governor, wrote in a letter to the emperor Trajan, “[Christians] were accustomed to convene of a given day before dawn and sing a hymn antiphonally to Christ as if to a god.”
 - d. Josephus (AD 37–100), a Roman-Jewish scholar and historian, wrote in his work *Antiquities of the Jews* that “[Jesus] was the Christ, and when Pilate, at the suggestion of principal men among us, had condemned him to the cross . . . he appeared to them alive again the third day.”
- B. The second question we must address is regarding Jesus’ identity. Was he just a good teacher, or *was he truly God as he claimed to be?*
1. This question is at the heart of what Jesus was asking his disciples in Matthew 16:13–20. This story takes place in the region of Caesarea Philippi, which was the location of the Cave of Pan.
 - a. Pan was the god of the wild, of shepherds, and of flocks.
 - i. Pan was depicted with the legs and feet of a goat and with the torso and head of a man.
 - ii. The Cave of Pan was believed to be a bottomless pit that led to the underworld. It was called “the gates of Hades.”

- b. Peter, speaking for the rest of the disciples, confessed Jesus as Messiah, the Son of the living God.
 - i. Peter said to Jesus, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God” (Matthew 16:16 NIV).
 - ii. Jesus replied, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah” (verse 17 NIV). He went on to say, “I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it” (verse 18 NIV).
 - iii. Jesus was saying that he was God, and that he would build his church with Peter as a foundation. The “gates of Hades”—or any false mythologies—would not stand against it, because God had revealed this truth to Peter.
- 2. Other accounts in the Bible reveal that Jesus definitely claimed to be the one true God. One such story is found in John 10:24–33.
 - a. The Jewish leaders asked Jesus to tell them plainly if he was claiming to be God (see verse 24).
 - b. Jesus replied by saying that he has already told them this, but they did not believe. He concluded by saying, “I and the Father are one” (verse 30 NIV).
 - c. The Jewish leaders clearly took this as Jesus stating that he was God, for they picked up stones to execute him. They said, “We are not stoning you for any good work . . . but for blasphemy, because you, a mere man, claim to be God” (verse 33 NIV).

III. Application

- A. Jesus actually appeared on the landscape of human history.
 - 1. Tacitus, Suetonius, Pliny the Younger, and Josephus, as well as the four Gospels, confirm this truth.
 - 2. Jesus is not a myth, not a legend dreamed up by the early church, nor a figment of religious imagination. He walked this earth in time and space.
- B. Jesus was *good*—he was moral—and yet he claimed to be much more.
 - 1. Jesus claimed to be *God*. In addition to his own claims, we see that his disciples confessed that he was “the Son of the Living God.”
 - 2. As we investigate the question of *who is Jesus*, we must wrestle with Jesus’ question, “Who do you say I am?”

- C. Author and theologian C.S. Lewis once observed that Jesus was either telling the truth about being the Messiah, or he was a liar, or he was a lunatic.
1. Jesus leaves us no other choice—we can't just say that he was a good moral teacher and ignore his claims to be God.
 2. So, what answer is forming in your mind as you listen to the evidence? Do you believe that Jesus was actually the Son of God?

SERMON OUTLINE 2

Friend or Foe?

I. Introduction

- A. Sometimes first impressions can be misleading.
 - 1. Louie Giglio tells a story about how he did ministry in England back in the 1980s. He and his wife, Shelley, and a team of college students would do evangelism among the young people there.
 - 2. On one occasion, they were doing ministry in a small town west of London. It was there Louie encountered a man named “Flash” coming down the street flanked by two friends and two street dogs.
 - 3. Flash was a punk rocker with a pink Mohawk and a cross tattooed on his forehead. It made Louie wonder, *was he a friend or foe?*
 - 4. At one point, Louie saw Flash alone in an alley with one of his dogs and started a conversation with him. Louie found out that Flash’s real name was Andrew—and he was one of the kindest, gentlest, not-hurt-a-fly type of people he’s ever met! The two became good friends.
- B. Many people have the same reaction to Jesus that Louie first had to Flash.
 - 1. When people hear about Jesus, they picture him like Flash walking down the alley with his dogs, and they wonder, *Is he a friend or a foe?*
 - 2. We have to let Jesus answer that question—and he does it well in the story that we will be discussing today in the Gospel of Luke.

II. Teaching

- A. Jesus intentionally connected with people on the outside of society in his day.
 - 1. In Luke 19:1–10, Jesus encounters a man named Zacchaeus, who was a tax agent for Rome. Zacchaeus was despised by his own people.
 - a. Tax collectors were despised by the Jews in general because they worked for the hated Roman empire.

- b. Zacchaeus, the chief tax agent in Jericho, was especially despised because he gotten wealthy by taxing more than Rome required and pocketing the excess (see verse 2).
 - c. Zacchaeus' fellow Jews considered him "a sinner" (verse 7 NIV).
 - d. Zacchaeus heard that Jesus was passing through Jericho, and he wondered whether Jesus was a *friend* or *foe*. Being short, he climbed a sycamore tree to find out (see verse 3).
 - 2. Jesus personally connected with marginalized Zacchaeus.
 - a. Jesus, in the moment, saw Zacchaeus up in the tree, recognized his need, and decided to be a friend (see verse 5).
 - b. Jesus initiated the contact, and then invited himself to Zacchaeus' house for a meal (a sign of honor in Jesus' culture).
 - c. Zacchaeus' life was changed forever at that meal (see verse 8).
- B Jesus intentionally seeks to make a connection with us.
 - 1. We may question whether Jesus is really our friend or our foe.
 - a. Does he reject us or accept us?
 - b. Is he angry with us or pleased with us?
 - c. Is he for us or against us?
 - 2. Jesus answers this question at the end of this story when he states, "The Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost" (verse 10 NIV).
 - a. Jesus knows that we are *all* sinners—and he says that he wants to be our friend (see Luke 7:31–34 and Matthew 11:16–19).
 - b. It is actually the self-righteous people that turn Jesus off (see Matthew 23:1–39).
 - c. Like Zacchaeus, when we meet Jesus and recognize his love for us, it changes our entire lives.
 - 3. Jesus intentionally and joyfully seeks to find us.
 - a. Jesus, who died on the cross for us, is eternally alive from the dead and sees us, loves us, and longs to be connected to us.
 - b. Jesus said, "Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me" (Revelation 3:20 NIV).
 - c. Jesus deeply desires to be our friend—for life and eternity.

III Application

- A. Was Jesus a friend or foe to Zacchaeus?
1. Zacchaeus' own people had judged him as being no good—a sinner. But Jesus went out of his way to initiate contact with him and eat at his house. Jesus is the friend of sinners.
 2. Jesus befriended another tax collector named Levi or Matthew and invited him to become his disciple (see Luke 5:27–32).
 3. What can we make of Jesus' habit of accepting and honoring people who society marginalizes or rejects? Does this make him seem more like a friend or a foe to us?
- B. Louie tells the story of being in a picture one time with Kanye West.
1. Louie posted the photo on social media and received some negative reactions because he had appeared with Kanye. Other people thought well of Louie because of the photo.
 2. From the Gospel account, it is clear that Jesus and Zacchaeus also received negative reactions from the crowd for eating a meal together. But Jesus was not only Zacchaeus' friend—he was Zacchaeus's defender.
 3. What needs to happen for Jesus to connect with us today and show us that he wants to be our friend, not our foe?

SERMON OUTLINE 3

King or Pawn?

I. Introduction

1. Magnus Carlsen, at the age of thirteen, became the youngest chess master in the history of the game.
 - a. Magnus said, “It’s possible to calculate fifteen to twenty moves ahead. But the trick is in evaluating the position at the end of the calculation.”
 - b. It is difficult enough to be able to think fifteen to twenty moves ahead in chess. It’s even more difficult to be able to evaluate what position is left on the board at the end of those moves.
2. In life, as in chess, unexpected things can happen, causing us to wonder what is our next best move. The doctor reports cancer. What’s the next move? A spouse walks out. What the next move? Life can seem chaotic and random.
3. The last hours of Jesus’ life also seemed out of control. When we read the stories of his trials and crucifixion, we wonder whether Jesus was a *king* as he claimed to be, or whether he was just a *pawn* in the hands of the political power of the day.

II. Teaching

- A. The Bible tells us that God is sovereign and moves in the affairs of people and nations (see Isaiah 40:10–11).
 1. God knows the end from the beginning. His purposes on earth can never be thwarted or defeated.
 - a. The Israelites were sent into exile because of their sin. Although they were *God’s own people*, they were forced to live under the rule of foreign and pagan nations.
 - b. The Israelites wondered if they were just pawns in the power struggles of these foreign nations. Was God truly sovereign? Had he forgotten them? Did he still have plans for them?
 - c. God answered this question through the prophet Jeremiah: “ ‘For I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the LORD, ‘plans to

prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future' ” (Jeremiah 29:11 NIV).

- d. God promised to restore the Israelites to their land. “This is what the Sovereign LORD says: I will gather you from the nations and bring you back from the countries where you have been scattered, and I will give you back the land of Israel again” (Ezekiel 11:17 NIV)
2. God can move anyone—even pagan kings—to fulfill his purposes.
 - a. In Isaiah 45:1, God refers to King Cyrus of Persia—where the Jewish people had been living in exile—as his anointed.
 - b. God says of Cyrus, “From the east I summon a bird of prey; from a far-off land, a man to fulfill my purpose (verse 11 NIV).
 - c. Later, we read that it was Cyrus who declared the edict for God’s people to return to their land (see Ezra 1:1–4).
 - d. Cyrus, a powerful king, was a mere “bird of prey” in God’s hand.
 3. “Our God reigns!” is the declaration of Israel and the church. “God reigns over the nations; God is seated on his holy throne” (Psalm 47:8 NIV).
- B. Apparent chaos reigned in Jesus’ arrest, trials, and death by crucifixion. On the surface, it appeared that he was just a pawn in the power struggles of the day.
1. The Jewish powers didn’t know what to do with Jesus.
 - a. The Jewish guard who arrested Jesus brought him to Annas (see John 18:12–13).
 - b. Annas, not knowing what to do with Jesus, sent him to Caiaphas, the high priest (see verse 24).
 - c. The Jews did have the right to execute a person, so Caiaphas sent Jesus to Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor (see verse 28).
 2. Pilate questioned Jesus about his kingdom and authority. He asked Jesus, “are you the king of the Jews?” (verse 33 NIV).
 - a. Pilate viewed Jesus, a “king,” as a threat to Caesar.
 - b. Jesus said he was the king of a different kind of kingdom (see verse 26).
 - c. Jesus declared that Pilate’s power came from above (see 19:11).
 3. Later events would reveal that the seeming chaos of Jesus’ last hours fulfilled God’s purpose (see Acts 2:23).

- C. We can feel secure in knowing that God’s purposes are being fulfilled in our lives—even when that seems unlikely on the surface (see Romans 8:28–29).
 - 1. Life gets out of our control . . . but not out of God’s.
 - 2. We are never a pawn if we belong to the King.
 - 3. No one is wrecking God’s plans for us if we’re submitted to him.

III. Application

- 1. Scholar N.T. Wright observes, “The ‘rulers and authorities’ of Rome and of Israel—the best government and the highest religion the world at that time had ever known—conspired to place Jesus on the cross. These powers, angry at his challenge to their sovereignty . . . celebrated a triumph over him.”
- 2. Wright continues, “[Paul] declares that, on the contrary, on the cross God . . . [was] leading them in his own triumphal procession.”¹
- 3. The safest place to be is in the hand of God and in the will of God. Regardless of what it looks like on the outside, God is always sovereign and in control.
 - a. Have you submitted your life to Jesus’ rule? Have you accepted him as the true king of your life? If not, what is keeping you from doing so?
 - b. God knows the end from the beginning. Why not trust in Jesus Christ today and believe in him for your next move?

Notes

- 1. N.T. Wright, “Colossians and Philemon,” *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries*, p. 116.

SERMON OUTLINE 4

A Way or the Way?

I. Introduction

- A. What if an obscure island in the Timor Sea in Indonesia was the site of complete healing for all kinds of fatal diseases? Wouldn't millions of people would seek to get there by any means?
- B. Rich, poor, and people of all races would pay anything to get to that island for healing. No one would whine about this island being the *only* place where total healing is available. No one would object to its exclusivity.
- C. Jesus claimed and demonstrated that he alone was the cure for all that threatens the human race. He also claimed he was the *only way* to God the Father. This is a truth that many people celebrate. But for others, this truth irritates them.
- D. Is Jesus truly just *a way* to God, or is he *the way* as he claimed? That is the question that we will be exploring today.

II. Teaching

- A. In John 14:4–6, Jesus made the claim that he was “the way” to God.
 - 1. Jesus said he was returning to the Father and the disciples knew the way there (see verse 4).
 - 2. Thomas, one of Jesus' disciples, stated that he didn't know where Jesus was going—so he didn't know the way (see verse 5).
 - 3. Jesus replied to him, “I am the way . . . no one comes to the Father except through me” (verse 6 NIV).
 - 4. In making this statement, Jesus was not trying to be narrow and restrictive. He seeking to be helpful to Thomas.
- B. What is the problem with believing Jesus is “a way” to God among many other pathways to God?
 - 1. Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, and other religions are not all ways to the same destination. Each religion claims to be an exclusive way to God.

- a. Hinduism does not necessarily promise heaven with God.
 - i. Hinduism promises a life on the other side that is *hopefully* better than the one you are living.
 - ii. You work for good *karma*. If your karma works out, then you get another shot at a better life.
 - b. Buddhism does not promise heaven with God.
 - i. Buddhism tries to lead people to a heightened enlightenment or state of awareness called Nirvana.
 - ii. It does not promise there is a place for you with God in an eternal future, or give a path for you to get there.
 - c. Islam does say there is a heaven—but getting there is predicated on whether your good works outweigh your bad acts.
 - i. We all know that is a difficult sled to push through life!
 - ii. Islam also teaches that if you believe in Jesus Christ as the Son of God and Messiah of the world, you are condemned into eternal damnation.
 - d. Judaism promotes keeping the law of Moses, but it does not recognize Jesus as the Messiah of the world.
2. The assumption that all paths lead to God begins to break down when we look at what each religion actually claims. When two of the five major religions in the world don't even promise heaven, it's difficult to logically state that all roads lead to the same place.
 3. We cannot assume that whatever we believe is the way to God and true.
- C. Instead of looking at the problem with Jesus' claim to be the only way to God, we need to focus on the uniqueness of the offer that he is making to us today.
1. He is God in human flesh. Jesus is both God and man in one person. "I and the Father are one" (John 10:30 NIV).
 2. Jesus is the only solution to the problem of our sin. The other religions of the world do not deal with human sin. "In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace" (Ephesians 1:7 NIV).
 3. Jesus as "the way" places us in the realm of grace. We cannot save ourselves—we need outside help. "For it is by grace you have been

saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God” (Ephesians 2:8 NIV).

4. Jesus offers a personal relationship with God. In John 14:8, Philip said, “Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us” (NIV). Philip knew that knowing God as Father was enough to satisfy the soul.

III. Application

- A. In the end, we must conclude that while the *truth is narrow, the gospel is wide*.
 1. We can picture salvation like a funnel. One end of the funnel seems narrow—this is the *exclusivity* of Jesus’ claim.
 2. But the other end of the funnel is wide—this is the *inclusivity* of what Jesus is offering to each of us.
 3. People get caught up on consider how narrow the way is to God through Christ, but the truth is that God allows *everyone* to come to him.
- B. The Bible declares that whoever calls on the Lord shall be saved (see Acts 2:21).
 1. Jesus’ exclusivity is not a hurtful idea, but the most eternally helpful truth we will ever know.
 2. Truth may feel narrow, but it leads into a beautifully wide, freeing, and expansive life with God. The poorest may come, the richest may come, the less-than-perfect can come and be saved.
 3. Have you come to Jesus for salvation? If not, what is holding you back? Today, consider for yourself what Jesus is truly offering to you.

SERMON OUTLINE 5

The Lion or the Lamb?

I. Introduction

- A. We have all heard of *oxymorons*, or combinations of words that appear to contradict one another. These are words like *jumbo shrimp*, *old news*, *original copies*, *open secret*, *clearly confused* . . . there is no *exact estimate* on how many oxymorons like this exist.
- B. When many people read in the Bible that Jesus is the Lion and the Lamb, they view it as an oxymoron. After all, the two are completely different animals. How could they both represent Christ?
- C. In this concluding message, we will explore the Bible's claim that Jesus was both the *Lion* and the *Lamb*.

II. Teaching

- A. In Revelation 5:1–6, we read how the apostle John saw Jesus exalted in glory on the throne of heaven.
 - 1. God, on the throne, holds a sealed scroll, and no one is found worthy enough to open it (see verse 3).
 - a. This is a crisis situation, because the scroll represents the unfolding of the final chapters of God's plan to demolish sin.
 - b. Whether or not this plan can unfold depends on whether someone can open the scroll, break the seals, and usher in the permanent reign of God's kingdom.
 - 2. John weeps, but then an elder assures him that the "Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David," is worthy to open the seals (verse 5 NIV).
 - 3. John turns to look at the *Lion*, but instead sees a sacrificial *Lamb* at the center of the throne (see verse 6)

- B. Jesus Christ is *both* the Lion of Judah *and* the Lamb of God.
1. Jesus as the Lion of Judah:
 - a. Judah was the fourth of the twelve sons of Jacob. He was likened to a lion's cub and a resting lion (see Genesis 49:9).
 - b. The tribe of Judah had the largest territory in the Promised Land, and within it was the city of Jerusalem.
 - c. Jesus was a descendent of the tribe of Judah, the "Root of David" (see Matthew 1:3–16 and Luke 3:23–33).
 2. Jesus as the sacrificial Lamb of God:
 - a. The people of God in Egypt were spared from the angel of death by placing the blood of a lamb on the doorframes of their houses (see Exodus 12:21–23).
 - b. John the Baptist called Jesus "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29 NIV).
 - c. The apostle Peter describes Jesus as "a lamb without blemish or defect" who redeems people from sin (1 Peter 1:19–19 NIV).
- C. Jesus the *Lamb* is our Savior, but Jesus the *Lion* is our king and defender.
1. Jesus as the Lamb is the God of selfless sacrifice.
 - a. The penalty of our sin is eternal death (see Romans 6:23).
 - b. Jesus paid the penalty in our place on the cross (see 1 Peter 2:24).
 - c. If we confess our sins, Jesus is faithful and just to forgive us and cleanse us from unrighteousness (see 1 John 1:9).
 - d. Jesus as the Lamb provides the way to eternal life (see John 3:36).
 2. Jesus as the Lion is the God of sovereign power.
 - a. To one can stand in the presence of God's glory and live (see Exodus 33:19–20).
 - b. By God's power, all things were created in heaven and on earth (see Colossians 1:16).
 - c. The Bible states that God is our defender and protector (see Deuteronomy 32:4 and Psalm 18:2).
 - d. Jesus as the Lion will defend us from every eternal threat. He is the "King of Kings and Lord of Lords" (Revelation 19:16 NIV).

III. Application

- A. The apostle John writes, “To all who did receive [Jesus], to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God” (John 1:12–13 NIV). We are as valuable to God as his own Son, Jesus.
- B. God gave his Son to die in our place. None of us can earn our own way to God because of our sin—so we needed one without sin to pay the penalty for us. Jesus, as the Lamb of God, paid the price as our Savior. Jesus, as the Lion, is our king and defender. He conquers sin and death provides a way for us to reign with him forever (see Revelation 3:21).
- C. Jesus extends his invitation to each of us today as the Lion and the Lamb. How do you answer the question, “Who is Jesus?” What’s keeping you from saying yes to his invitation? What is stopping you from entering into the love of Jesus the Lamb and the power and rule of Jesus the Lion? Trust him today.