

Did he really say that? You're in church. It's time for the lessons. Instead of the pastor reading the lessons, different men from the congregation take turns reading. A young man, about 30 years old, is asked to read. He's doesn't look anything special. He's a son of the congregation, a local boy. He was a carpenter, a son of a carpenter. He's been gone, but now he's back in town. He opens the Bible, reads from Isaiah, closes the Bible. He smiles and says: "I'm the answer to your hopes and prayers! I'm God's answer to your hopes and prayers!" If you're there, what do you think? "Did he really say that? Who's he to be talking like that? The carpenter's kid is going to make life right for us? He's nuts; he's full of it. He's either one of those traveling preachers out to scam us, or he's got a screw loose. He's either a liar or a lunatic."

Same guy, but this time at the temple. All around, God's house of prayer has become a noisy market place rolling in the money. This guy makes a whip out of some cords; he chases off the sheep and cattle; he overturns the tables of the money changers. Now money is rolling around, lost. The temple authorities get in the guy's face: "Who do you think you are? What gives you the right?" He answers: "**Destroy this temple and I will raise it again in three days.**" If you're there, what do you think? "Did he really say that? He's not just full of it; he's full of himself. Who does he think he is?"

Same place, two years later. A crowd is gathered. That same thirty-something says: "**Before Abraham was, I am.**" Who does he think he is? He goes on: "**I am the Good Shepherd. I lay down my life for the sheep.**" But that's not all, he says: "**I take it up again.**" How in the world? He says: "**I have this command from my Father.**" You hear that and what do you think? I'll tell you what many in that crowd thought: "He's nuts."

You know whom I'm talking about, don't you? Jesus. Listening to Jesus and his claims, you could think Jesus a fake, a fraud, out to scam

people, a liar. Listening to Jesus and his claims - **“Before Abraham was, I am”** - you could think, if Jesus really believes what’s he’s saying: “He must be nuts, a lunatic.” “If Jesus really believed” Jesus did believe what he was saying. Arrested, under threat of death for blasphemy, under threat of death for claiming to be God, when the high priest demanded: **“Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?”** Jesus didn’t waffle, swaffle, back down, or back away. Jesus answered: **“I am.”**

We can believe what Jesus says, too. Jesus didn’t just talk a big game and make big claims. He backed up his words with actions, miracle signs to prove his words, to prove his identity. He changed water into wine. He walked on water. He fed 5000 with a couple small fish and 5 small loaves of bread. He cast out demons. He healed the sick. He even raised the dead. With his miracles he proved divine power, supernatural power over the things of this world. With his miracles, he proved divine power, supernatural power to undo the work of the devil, to undo the work of sin and evil, to undo sickness and death. Jesus wasn’t nuts. Jesus wasn’t just talk. Jesus is the Son of God, God himself.

What does that mean for us? In Jesus, we have God’s answer to the evil of this world. In Jesus, we have God’s answer to the broken-ness, the hurt and heartache of this world. In Jesus, we have God’s answer to our broken-ness, our guilt, our hurt and heartache. Jesus faced the devil and demons and put them in their place. Jesus faced the worst of this world and could not be broken. And worse than that, worse than facing the devil, worse than facing the evil of this world, Jesus carried the evil of this world, yes, he carried your guilt and mine. He carried it as his before God and paid the price we could never pay. On the cross he faced God’s anger and satisfied God’s judgment. On the cross, the Son of God, God himself, died, crushed and cursed for your guilt and mine. On Good Friday, it looked like the great talker was shut up. It looked like the great miracle worker was broken, over-matched, beaten. It looked like Jesus was a fake, a fraud, a liar, or a lunatic. But the cross and the grave wasn’t the end for Jesus. Instead, the cross was the end of God’s judgment. So three days later, Sunday morning, Easter Sunday morning, Jesus raised himself back to life - just as he had promised. The devil couldn’t hold him. Death couldn’t hold him. Today, Jesus lives as

the Son of God, God himself, to keep his word to you.

And what is that word? It's not just the word of a liar or a lunatic. It's the word of the Lord God, Lord over death and the devil, the Lord of life and love. His word isn't just: "Be nice to one another." His word isn't just: "Love your neighbor as yourself." His word is love from out of this world - "Peace, your sins are forgiven; no matter what you have done, you are forgiven." In the mess of this world, his word is: "Peace, I have overcome the world; even in this mess of a world, I have you safe with me." And not just in this world, Jesus promises a life out of this world - "Do not let your hearts be troubled. I'm coming back for you, to take you to be with me, in heaven."

Most of the world doesn't believe that. Some see Jesus as a great guy with a friendly smile, a traveling teacher teaching a better way to live, a prophet of peace. Some see Jesus as nothing more than an inspiring story with a tragic ending at the cross. Most hear Jesus saying: "Be nice to one another. Love your neighbor as yourself." And that's about it. They imagine Jesus is little more than a good guy saying good things, a godly guy saying godly things.

But what the world thinks of Jesus doesn't make or break or change who Jesus is. What the internet says about Jesus doesn't make or break or change who Jesus is. Logical arguments don't make or break who Jesus is. Jesus is who he is. He is who he says he is - the Son of God and Son of Man, God himself, conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the virgin Mary Why? To take your place before God as damned. Why? To give you his place with God as his brothers and sisters, to give you his place as children of God right for heaven. What this world thinks of Jesus doesn't make or break or change who Jesus is, but what we think of Jesus does change who we are. Thank you, Lord Jesus! Amen.