

Why doesn't God make Himself more obvious?

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[0 : 00] The reading today is taken from the Gospel of John and chapter 10, beginning at verse 22. This is on page 1081 of the Church Bible.

That's John chapter 10 and verse 22. At that time, the Feast of Dedication took place at Jerusalem. It was winter, and Jesus was walking in the temple in the colonnade of Solomon.

So the Jews gathered around him and said to him, How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly. Jesus answered them, I told you, and you do not believe.

The works that I do in my Father's name bear witness about me, but you do not believe because you are not part of my flock. My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.

I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand.

[1 : 22] I and the Father are one. The Jews picked up stones again to stone him. Jesus answered them, I have shown you many good works from the Father.

For which of them are you going to stone me? The Jews answered him, It is not for a good work that we are going to stone you, but for blasphemy, because you, being a man, make yourself God. Jesus answered them, Is it not written in your law, I said you are gods? If he called them gods to whom the word of God came, and scripture cannot be broken, do you say of him whom the Father consecrated and sent into the world, you are blaspheming, because I said I am the Son of God? If I am not doing the works of my Father, then do not believe me. But if I do them, even though you do not believe me, believe the works, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me, and I am in the Father.

Again, they sought to arrest him, but he escaped from their hands. He went away again across the Jordan, to the place where John had been baptizing at first, and there he remained.

[2 : 48] Well, why don't you have that passage that was just read a few moments ago open in front of you. We'll get to it in a few moments. Why don't I just pray and ask the Lord to help us as we look at his word together.

Let's pray together. Heavenly Father, we bow in your presence. We would ask that your word might be our rule, and that your spirit, that he might be our teacher, and that your honor and your glory alone might be our supreme concern.

For Jesus' sake. Amen. He has slick back hair, a designer suit, white teeth, and a big smile.

His message for his large and faithful audience and those watching at home was this. God wants your homes and cars to be luxurious, your lives pain-free, and your cupboards and fridge freezers jam-packed with the very best that Harrods has to offer.

To him, God is not harsh and vengeful, no, he is a God of health and wealth and prosperity. And of course, this particular TV evangelist has the car and the house to prove it.

[4 : 18] But then, there is the woman who politely but firmly asks the question, how can you say God exists and loves me when he allowed cancer to kill my husband of 27 years?

To her, God is a monster, a harsh and vengeful being and she has the shattered life to prove it.

These are two very different pictures of who God is, even if they are both passionately believed and expressed.

Some of us may have deeply painful experiences, yet often our personal experiences when compared with others cannot help us to understand who God is because of our personal life story. And that may be hard for us to accept. At best, we will end up with a bag of mixed up and contradictory ideas of who God is if we go by our personal experiences.

But of course when it comes to what God is like, others opt for the more pluralistic route, like for example the school teacher who began most mornings with ten minutes of transcendental meditation followed by a few lines from the Quran only to end this devotional time with a rendition of the Lord's Prayer from Matthew's Gospel.

[5 : 56] Emma Watson who played Hermione Granger in the Harry Potter movies in an interview described herself as more spiritual than specifically religious whatever that means.

And then went on to talk about the unifying tenets between so many religions. But the main problem with that statement is this, a careful examination of the different religions will show that there is nothing particularly unifying about them.

And I'm not just talking about the conflicts they have caused all over the world and down the centuries. What I mean is that different religions don't even agree on a question as basic as the very nature of God himself.

So for the Hindu there are literally millions of gods. Classic Buddhism however denies the very existence of a god.

Judaism Christianity and Islam all believe in one god yes but Jews and Muslims deny the central place given to Jesus in understanding exactly who God is insisted upon by Christians.

[7 : 13] English poet Steve Turner makes the point in his tongue in cheek poem ironically called Creed part of which goes like this we believe all religions are basically the same they all believe in love and goodness they only differ on matters of creation sin heaven hell God and salvation the truth is at best the statement all religions are true is naive and superficial and worse downright misleading and deceitful so all religions can't claim to give us a clear picture of who God is because they simply don't so perhaps no religion tells us clearly who or what God is I suppose that is one possibility isn't it all religions could be false and so billions of people across the world are really just wasting their time going to a religious meeting or reading a religious book and maybe atheists are right and

God does not exist after all but then atheists only make up between 2 to 30% of the world's population it's pretty arrogant of them therefore to say that over 6 billion people are wrong to believe in a God or in some sort of spiritual reality you see most people I think whether religious or not have a hunch an inkling if you like that there is more to life than meets the eye like for example I remember some years ago now a friend of my wife Rebecca out of the blue wanting to attend church with us a little probing revealed that apparently things were going well in her life and she wanted someone to thank a British writer G.K.

Chesterton once wrote the worst moment for the atheist is when he is really thankful and has no one to thank now let me come clean by underlining what I said earlier on in the interview I've been a committed follower of the Lord Jesus Christ for over a quarter of a century and part of the reason for that is because Christianity claims to be the only world religion that reveals clearly who God is perhaps you're not a Christian here this morning in which case it's fantastic that you're here you're very welcome to be here if you remember nothing else from this morning try to remember this according to the Bible the highest source of information about God is God himself therefore the Bible claims to be

God's self revelation about himself because how else could you or I know what he is like I'm not going to try and defend the Bible here this morning I'm just going to state that and you may have questions about that but put it this way back in the 1990s singer songwriter Joan Elizabeth Osborne had a hit single called One of Us and it asked some pretty profound questions I think that song hovers questions like what if God had a name what would it be and if God had a face what would it look like some people got upset because she also asked the question what if God were a slob like one of us but all she was really doing all she was really saying was wouldn't it be great if God became flesh and blood for a while so that we could ask him all our questions and see what he is like what if

God did that in other words with all the confusion in our world why doesn't God make himself more obvious more visible well I'm a Christian because the central tenet of Christianity is that 2000 years ago and in the man Jesus Christ that is exactly what God did he made himself about as visible as humanly possible so I want to start by addressing the question did God by addressing this question did Jesus really claim to be God that's the first question I want to address did Jesus really claim to be God that's the question some would maintain that the early Christians just made this stuff up to both of the image of their executed leader a carpenter from Nazareth and a failed revolutionary well

[12 : 35] John opens his gospel in chapter one by telling us that the one who is God and was therefore there at the very beginning of creation itself became flesh and made his dwelling for a time here on earth walking among us 2,000 years ago that is the staggering claim of Christianity and then later on in John in chapter 14 Philip a close friend of the Lord Jesus one day said to him show us God and that will be enough for us Jesus replied don't you know me Philip even after I've been with you such a long time anyone who has seen me has seen God says Jesus and we see some of these truths reflected in the passage that was read by Laura a few moments ago in John chapter 10

Jesus is at a festival in Jerusalem and while in the temple area some Jews approach him wanting to know once and for all if he really is the Christ that is God's long awaited and one and only king promised many hundreds of years before through the writings of the Old Testament scriptures they plead with Jesus tell us plainly if this is the case you see that at the end of verse 24 John chapter 10 and then in verses 25 to 28 Jesus basically replied that he has told them already but they refuse to believe him the things he has been doing and saying testify to who he truly is but these Jews refuse to believe because they are not his sheep verse 26 you see earlier in the chapter Jesus describes himself as the good shepherd in other words he is the leader

God promised to send a shepherd to guide or care for his people these Jews however will not accept Jesus as their God appointed shepherd and so they refuse to listen to him then look what Jesus says in verse 29 about those who do belong to him verse 29 my father who was given them to me is greater than all and no one is able to snatch them out of the father's hand it looks here like Jesus is saying that God his father is greater than anyone including Jesus himself so Jesus is not claiming to be God after all I hear you say or is he well look at what he says in the very next verse verse 30 Jesus says I and the father are one now you may be thinking well

Raymond that still seems a little bit vague and indirect to me but look at the response of these Jews whom Jesus has been disputing with up to this point verse 31 they the Jews picked up stones again to stone him Jesus answered them I've shown you many good works from the father for which of them are you going to stone me the Jews answered him it is not for a good work that we are going to stone you but for blasphemy because you being a man make yourself God see they were in no doubt about what Jesus was claiming for himself in fact they were so convinced in fact that they were ready to stone him to death there and then notice also in verse 31 that the use of the word again indicates this was not the first time they tried to stone

Jesus if you just flip over a page to the end of John chapter 8 Jesus is again in dispute with certain Jews and things come to a head and Jesus says this verse 56 John chapter 8 your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day he saw it and was glad so the Jews said to him you are not yet 50 years old and have you seen Abraham Jesus said to them truly truly I say to you before Abraham was I am so they picked up stones to throw at him because but Jesus hid himself and went out of the temple see these Jewish men found those two words I am at the end of verse 58 on the lips of Jesus deeply shocking because they were unimaginably significant words for a [17 : 55] Jew 2,000 years ago see more than 1,000 years before that God had revealed to a man named Moses his personal name and that name is I am and in John chapter 8 we have Jesus seemingly a mere man taking this sacred name upon his own lips no wonder these fiercely monotheistic Jews wanted him dead but this is not the only time Jesus does this John's gospel is literally littered with this claim I am the bread of life says Jesus i.e.

the staple we all need in our diet to have a truly healthy life John chapter 6 I am the light of the world the one able to shed light on the true meaning of human existence John chapter 8 I am the good shepherd the leader we all need if life is to have any true direction John chapter 10 I am the resurrection and the life i.e.

the key to this life and life beyond this life I am the way the truth the life i.e.

I am the truth and not one of many truths not one of many ways I am the true vine says Jesus i.e. the very source of your existence John chapter 15 Jesus claimed to be divine or equal with God Almighty himself and all that that entails these are astonishing claims in fact Jesus claim to divinity is unique to Christianity Siddhartha Gautama the founder of Buddhism never claimed this for himself Guru Nanak the founding guru of Sikhism never claimed this of himself Muhammad the prophet of Islam would never have dreamed of making such a bold claim Jesus Christ alone said if you've seen me in action then you've seen God at work he alone claimed to be one with God he alone took upon his own lips the personal name of God for himself such claims are not only

shocking they were dangerous as we've already seen imagine walking into a crowd of heavily tattooed stern looking

[20 : 52] Man United fans and saying why don't you idiots support a decent football team like West Ham when you regain consciousness you will probably be staring inside of an ambulance wouldn't you that's because certain words uttered in certain circumstances can be very dangerous can't they yet Jesus made a habit of it and that was because he was claiming to be God himself come in the flesh but let's ask another question was Jesus' claim to divinity credible was his claim to being divine credible well the late Muhammad Ali was one of the greatest boxers of the 20th century he would often intimidate his opponents before they even got into the ring with him he would say things like a handcuffed lightning through thunder in jail

I'm so mean I make medicine sick and you get the picture again and again he would claim I am the greatest well when I was living in South Africa I remember seeing a poster in a sports shop called Mr.

Price with this quote from Muhammad Ali on it it went like this it ain't bragging if you can back it up it ain't bragging if you can back it up you see Ali understood that he would be the laughing stock of the world if he could not back up what he said outside the ring by what he did inside the ring all sorts of people have claimed great things for themselves haven't they some of us have even got a little bit carried away on our CVs haven't we but as we read the gospels we see Jesus backing up his words or claims by his actions notice in our passage in John 10 verse 25 Jesus says that the works that is the miracles that he does bear witness about him they speak of who he really is then a bit later in verse 37 Jesus says don't believe me unless

I do the works of God and then in verse 38 he says this but if I do them even though you do not believe me believe the works that you may know and understand that the father is in me and I am in the father in other words if you don't believe that I am God come in the flesh says Jesus look at the things I am doing and you will see me acting like God on earth my actions speak for themselves they are the evidence you need to make your mind up about me and so in John's gospel the miracles Jesus did which incidentally throughout the gospels never seem in dispute are recorded in order to help us believe or put our trust in him so in John chapter 2 while at the wedding Jesus creates out of water an abundance of great tasting chardonnay as a picture of the abundance that his kingdom will bring to all those who will enter into it in

John chapter 5 Jesus heals instantly and through the power of his spoken word a man who's been an invalid for 38 years in John chapter 6 and reminiscent of God himself miraculously feeding the Israelites his people in the wilderness Jesus miraculously feeds a vast multitude of men women and children in a remote place in John chapter 9 we have the remarkable and thoroughly attested account true story of how Jesus heals a man who was born blind this man came to believe in Jesus and we are told that he actually worshipped him an extraordinary thing for a monotheistic Jewish man to do to get down on his hands and knees and worship another human being and then in John chapter 11 Jesus raises to life again a man named

[25 : 20] Lazarus who was clearly dead towards the end of his gospel John tells us that Jesus did many other miraculous things that are not recorded in John's gospel but what he has recorded is to help you and I believe that not only did Jesus claim to be God not only did he claim to make God visible he also clearly demonstrated this fact through his works based on the evidence of who Jesus has shown himself to be you and I are asked to put our trust in him faith in other words is not a blind leap into the dark but based on evidence says John evidence leads to faith and faith leads to life in Jesus imagine several hours after first meeting me and getting to know me you start to imagine what my wife Rebecca might look like you start to construct in your mind's eye the kind of woman

I might be attracted to you might even struggle to imagine the kind of woman who could possibly be attracted to someone who looks like me although that will be doubly the case for Simon Dowdy who led the meeting earlier on you might even draw a sketch of my wife as she appears in your mind's eye your drawing might be a work of great intelligence and artistry God forbid I might even find your sketch more appealing than the real thing but if you've never seen or met my wife at best your sketch would be a beautifully intelligent artistic piece of speculation at best but if I showed you this picture that was taken on our wedding day that would end all speculation wouldn't it just know I've got this picture so don't tell her well the point is this Jesus is to God what that photo is to my wife a revelation to end once and for all all speculation about who

God is in Jesus God has provided clear and visible proof of his existence and so third and more briefly you and I need to listen to Jesus in Jesus God made himself clearly visible for all the world to see it's just that you and I lived 2000 years too late to see him in person in the flesh that's all but he was careful to leave a record of his visit we call it the New Testament now if all I've said is true then you and I need to listen to this Jesus don't we look what he himself says in our passage in John 10 verse 27 my sheep listen to my voice I know them and they follow me can I ask you does Jesus know you as you sit here this morning in other words do you listen to his voice and are you following this

Jesus in your life no matter how imperfectly see if not Jesus said you're in grave danger of being snatched from him and perishing eternally verse 28 of John 10 if you have been living your life without Jesus at the center where he rightfully belongs whether actively rejecting him or just passively ignoring him he will one day call you to account if he is your God how can it be otherwise this attitude is called sin and its resultant behavior deeply deeply dishonors Jesus but rather than punish us for our rebellion God in the person of Jesus Christ takes his own punishment upon himself a great great Christian scholar preacher and writer put it very succinctly with these words God himself gave himself to save us from himself in the word

Jesus and so despite all the confusion of the different religions and philosophies and ideas on offer in the world today the one true God of the Bible commands people like me and like you to turn from our rebellion and to put our trust to rely to depend on him why wouldn't you want to listen to a God who is willing to serve you and me like that to share in our humanity and to suffer in our place and for our sake why wouldn't you reach out to a God like that well perhaps that's a whole load of stuff to take in and sounds very strange and maybe might be quite new to you can I suggest three ways to take things forward if you would not perhaps call yourself a Christian or perhaps are not sure where you stand in relation to the person of the Lord Jesus Christ as you sit here this morning first why not commit to reading something there's a great book table over there with a number of different things to read a John's gospel would be something that I'd recommend reading

[30 : 51] Simon's already suggested that Simon and the staff team here would be more than happy to help you read through a gospel perhaps or recommend something for you to read from the book table why not commit to reading something secondly why not commit to finding out more perhaps you've done a bit of reading but why not commit to finding out more so Grace Church as Simon has already said runs a course called Christianity Explored it's for people who want to find out more about the Christian faith in a friendly atmosphere where they are free to ask questions and won't be made to feel uncomfortable no matter where they are in their journey in their spiritual journey why not commit yourself to finding out more commit to reading something commit to finding out more why not try one of those two people but lastly why not actually commit to following Jesus even here and now today this morning I'm going to pray a simple prayer there's nothing magical about the words they just express the kind of thing you might want to say to

God if you'd like to commit yourself to him let's bow heads close our eyes and you may like to echo this prayer in the quietness of your heart and if you do so why not tell someone maybe Simon or someone you know that is a Christian let's pray dear God sorry that I have rejected the revelation of yourself to the world in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ I know that I deserve to perish for rebelling against you thank you for sending Jesus to show me who you are thank you that he died for me on the cross help me from today onwards to live with Jesus as my God and Savior Amen Amen unfortunately

I can't die in dem em he you again hear heard them and I can't can't pay them since I