

Channel 1 – October 4, 1828
BREAKING NEWS:
“JESUS MAY NOT BE GOD”



Character Summaries:

- 💡 **News Anchor (small part):** Briefly introduces and concludes the story.
- 💡 **Field Reporter (big part):** Introduces each character and interviews them.
- 💡 **Hosea Ballou (medium part):** A Universalist, traveling preacher who questioned the Trinity and understood Jesus’s teaching to be centrally about love. For example, he believes that all people are saved and go to heaven (Universal salvation!).
- 💡 **William Ellery Channing (big part):** A Boston, Unitarian minister who supports following Jesus because he was a prophetic leader, not because he is God. He believes that humans wrote the Bible and humans interpret the Bible, so doctrines (like the doctrine of the Trinity) do not always align with Jesus’s teachings or the Bible itself.
- 💡 **An average contemporary Christian (small part):** Has an opinion, but doesn’t necessarily *think* about where it came from. Note: many Christians do think critically!
- 💡 **Ralph Waldo Emerson (small part):** Unitarian preacher who gets himself in trouble when his Harvard Divinity School Address says that Jesus was NOT God.
- 💡 **Jesus (medium part):** Historical figure back from the past! Likes to ask questions.

Script:

News Anchor: Today's breaking story: The Bible may not directly say anywhere that Jesus IS God. Could Jesus be less than divine? What does this mean for Christians everywhere? Let's go to my esteemed colleague in the field for a closer look at this top story.

Field Reporter: Thank you, it's a big question and a big day. Let's go to our first interviewee, the Reverend William Ellery Channing, also known as the father of Unitarianism.

So Rev. Channing, is Jesus God or not? What does the Bible say?

Channing: I'm glad to have the opportunity to speak to this today. So, the Bible is written in a human language, so it must have been written by humans, right? The Bible has all kinds of inconsistencies because it was written for one group of people, in particular situations, a very long time ago. God wouldn't give us the Bible to *reveal* Truth, then mess with our heads by making some of it true and some of it not, and leave much of it obscure and hope that we figure it out. What kind of loving God would toy with people like that? There IS truth contained in the Bible, but people who wrote it made mistakes and inconsistencies. And, anyhow, whoever reads the Bible will see that the Bible does NOT say that Jesus is God and should be worshipped as God. The Bible refers to three Divine Beings (Father, Son and Holy Spirit), but it NEVER literally says that they are all the same God.

Field Reporter: What about in the Book of John when Jesus says, "I and the Father are One"?

Channing: Yes, that is a scripture verse, but that doesn't mean he literally meant that he IS God, anymore than he literally meant it when he said "I am the door" or "I am the vine." It was meant metaphorically and spiritually. See, we need to be super careful when we read the Bible.

Field Reporter: To conclude our interview, Rev. Channing, can you tell us what Unitarian Christianity is?

Channing: Unitarian Christianity is a new and ever-changing thing. We no longer just believe everything that earlier Christians believed. We want to FOLLOW Jesus, not WORSHIP Jesus.

Field Reporter: Thank you, Rev. Channing. We now turn to a traveling Universalist preacher, Rev. Hosea Ballou, who wants to weigh in on the subject. Thanks for speaking with us today, Rev. Ballou. What do you say, is Jesus God? What does the Bible tell us?

Ballou: Hello there! Thanks for having me on. First off, the Bible says that God sent his son. You can't be someone's son and be your own Father, can you? Second, Jesus is sent to reconcile people to God, NOT because God needs to be reconciled to humans (God never screwed up, did he?). Jesus was meant to lead humans to God—to come from the side of human beings; not BE God.

It can be tricky to sort out, I'll give you that. Remember that doubt is always the first step toward truth, and asking questions is the rest of the path. Really, though, it's not as important as why Jesus came in the first place...

Field Reporter: So... why did Jesus come in the first place?

Ballou: I thought you'd never ask! Jesus came to change people's minds about God, not about himself (as God). Oh, and by the way, salvation counts for everyone, not just for some people. Universalists rock! I better be off, the road is calling!

Field Reporter: Ah, thank you, Rev. Ballou, for talking with us today. Oh! Here is a regular, modern-day Christian wanting to weigh in on our question. Hi, there, what do you want to say about whether or not Jesus is God?

Contemporary Christian: The Church says Jesus is God, so I believe them. And the Bible talks about Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; and the Bible is never wrong. It was written by GOD himself. So, yes, I believe in the Trinity—God is three and one at the exact same time. God is the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit; and they are all the same being, like how water can be liquid, ice, or steam... but it's all H₂O. See how that makes sense? Crystal clear!

Field Reporter: That's exactly where the tension lies. Across time there isn't a consensus about whether or not Jesus is God. Thank you for your time! Now, let's turn to another special guest: Rev. Ralph Waldo Emerson, what can you tell us about whether or not Jesus is God.

Emerson: I'm glad we're having more open conversations about this. I feel very strongly that making Jesus into God ruins the whole point. He was a prophet, trying to show us that ANYONE can live a holy life and have an experience of God for themselves. He was showing us how to be the best *human* we could possibly be. Think about this for a moment, if Jesus is God, none of us has any hope of ever being good like him, because we can't be perfect like God. But if Jesus is human, we definitely have a chance. It's important for us, who consider Jesus the Messiah, to follow in his *human* footsteps and try to live morally and prophetically.

Field Reporter: We are glad to have had the chance to talk with you, Rev. Emerson... Holy moly! Is that... no, couldn't be... but wait! Is it Jesus?! I'm not even sure how I would know since no one knows exactly what Jesus historically looked like... let's ask!

Jesus: I'd like to help out—I'm a helpful kind of person.

Field Reporter: We would be happy to hear your thoughts. Could you introduce yourself?

Jesus: “I and the Father are one.” Just like it says in the Book of John. But I’ve said a lot of other things as well, like “I am in the Father and the Father is in me. And the Father is greater than I.” Does that help any?

Field Reporter: We are honored to speak with you today, Jesus, and a bit perplexed as to how... Would you like to weigh in on the question of whether or not, Jesus... er—you—are God?

Jesus: “Worship the Lord your God, and serve only God.” Book of Matthew. I never said people should worship me. Never said it. You can look, but I never said it. Does that help?

Field Reporter: Yes, thank you for sharing your perspective on the matter of... er, you. What do you think about the Bible, the New Testament wasn’t even around when you were alive, right?

Jesus: Yes, indeed, the New Testament does offer a biography of my life from several people’s vantage points, including a bunch of people who later edited and translated it. But no one even thought to write anything down until about 100 years after my death! Does that help?

Field Reporter: Oh, definitely, thank you! And... oh my! Look at the time, we have to go, but thank you so much to all of our guests—and all the of technology available to us to time travel. Can’t say we have a definite answer, but it seems that Jesus himself does *not disagree* with the Unitarians. A lot to think about, folks. Back to you.

News Anchor: Thank you for the riveting story, I was on the edge of my seat the whole time! Please, to all of you listening and watching today, send in your comments and questions and we’ll have a Q&A segment later. Stay tuned for our closing musical number by one of our guests today, Reverend Hosea Ballou. For now, that’s all we have for Channel 1. See you on the flip side!

[Conclude the play by playing this brief video of the hymn “Morning Prayer,” which was written by Hosea Ballou. Ballou would sing hymns while he traveled from place to place.]

Screen share (with audio), start at 0:50:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a8bBIC7QLMY&feature=emb_logo

Lyrics:

*Come, let us raise our voices high,
And form a sacred song,
To Him who rules the earth and sky,
And does our days prolong.
Who through the night gave us to rest,
This morning cheered our eyes;
And with the thousands of the blest,
In health made us to rise.*

*Early to God we'll send our prayer,
Make haste to pray and praise,
That He may make our good His care,
And guide us all our days.
And when the night of death comes on,
And we shall end our days;
May His rich grace the theme prolong
Of His eternal praise.*