

School of Ministry – New Testament 1

Unit 2 – Prepare the Way of the Lord

Reflection:

In Christian circles what titles are used of Jesus? From where are they derived?

Preparing the Way

As Mark begins his gospel, he puts into writing what Christian preachers had begun proclaiming since the resurrection of Jesus – the news about Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

This heralds a new era in God's plan for the world, but not a new plan. Salvation history recognises Jesus as the continuation and climax of God's plan for the salvation of God's people from all nations. A plan that begun with Abraham (Gen 12:1-3), was challenged but not altered by the universal sinfulness of the nation of Israel, through the redemption of Israel as recorded in the Exodus to a new life as God's people (c.f. enslavement Gen 15:13-14 to redemption Ex 12:21-42 to new life in Ex 19:5-6). Despite this great work and faithfulness of God, Israel continued to sin as so throughout the rest of the Old Testament we find a record of the see-saw from human sin and the consequence to the hope in the grace and mercy of God. It is a pattern of salvation from corruption.

Mark tells us in his opening verse of the gospel that the origin of the gospel is Jesus Christ – Jesus is the fulfillment of God's promised salvation (c.f. Is 40:1-5 & 52:7 & 61:1-3 with Mk 1:1-3).

Infancy Narratives

'The Infancy Narrative' is the general title used for the gospel accounts of Jesus' birth. Due to each authors different agenda each gospel will handle Jesus' infancy differently – Matthew and Luke both record the birth of Jesus in their first two chapters, whereas Mark skips Jesus' birth completely and introduces Jesus at his baptism (Mk 1:9). John's gospel, as it is not a Synoptic Gospel (it doesn't record the chronological account of Jesus life), does not contain a 'infancy narrative'.

As you study each of the Gospels (referring back to Unit 1 notes), it is worth pondering how each of the different writers agendas influence what they choose to record in their gospels. For example Matthew appears quite concerned with the opposition of evil and so his gospel recounts the opposition Jesus faced more so than the other gospels. Luke, a physician, appears quite interested in the miracles and wondrous signs that Jesus performed.

Mark 1:1-15 – Beginnings

- Well written books set up the scene (context) and introduce you to the main character very early – Mark does just that. First he sets the scene by referring back to Old Testament prophecy (Mk 1:1-8 c.f. Mal 3:1; Is 40:3¹). Second, he identifies his central figure – Jesus (Mk 1:9-13).

¹

Notice that the author ascribes the quotation to Isaiah, yet the first half is from Malachi!

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- John the Baptist is used as the agent who points you directly to the coming Messiah Jesus. His purpose is two-fold.
 - 1) To break the Jews (old Israel) out of their complacency and help them realize that God's forgiveness is open to all – both Jew and Gentile (Mk 1:4-5).
 - 2) To prepare people for the arrival of Jesus (Mk 1:7-8). Note that John *points*, it is Jesus who *introduces* (Mk 1:15).
- Jesus arrives rather significantly with the words 'at that time' (1:9) clearly affirming the fulfillment of John's words. No details of Jesus' origin or appearance (as we had with John) – this focus is one who Jesus is. His first act to to submit to John's baptism thus identifying the need for the forgiveness of sin (c.f. 1:9 with 1:5). Gloriously the voice from heaven announces him as Son of God (quoting Ps 2:7).
- 'At once' Jesus is sent out into the desert (1:12-13) to be tempted by Satan. Notably the testing of Jesus is not described in Mark as it is in Matthew and Luke (c.f. Mt 4:1-11 & Lk 4:1-13). The conflict is left open ended. That said, this testing is vital to the mission of Jesus. He is beginning to deal with the sinfulness of humanity. He is withstanding Satan by being obedient to God as Adam and Israel should have been. Forgiveness (as proclaimed in 1:4) can only come when Satan has been overcome and his power in people's lives destroyed. Satan attacks Jesus, God's appointed person and Son. Will Jesus fail?
- The Gospel of Mark is introduced as the 'gospel about Jesus Christ' – he is the 'good news'², both the messenger *and* the message.
- Notice that in the first 15 verses 'good news' appears three times. Verse 1, 'the good news (gospel) about Jesus', verse 14, 'proclaiming the good news of God' and then verse 15 it is simply 'good news'. Jesus is the good news (read 'tremendous' news) and the one who proclaims the good news of God.
- The Gospel of Matthew starts with a Genealogy of Jesus (Mt 1:1-17 c.f. Lk 3:23-37) – much can be established about Jesus' earthly origins from just a few verses.³ In contrast

The beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God. 2 It is written in Isaiah the prophet: "*I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way*"-- 3 "*a voice of one calling in the desert, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.'*" 4 And so John came, baptizing in the desert region and preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. 5 The whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem went out to him. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River. 6 John wore clothing made of camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. 7 And this was his message: "*After me will come one more powerful than I, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. 8 I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.*"

9 At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. 10 As Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. 11 And a voice came from heaven: "*You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.*" 12 At once the Spirit sent him out into the desert, 13 and he was in the desert forty days, being tempted by Satan. He was with the wild animals, and angels attended him.

² Refer back to Unit 1 Notes on 'good news'

³ There has been much discussion contrasting the two genealogies. One common suggestion is that Matthew's genealogy follows the role of Joseph while Luke's genealogy makes Mary the more central figure (see R.T. France 'Life &

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- Mark only tells us that Jesus comes from Nazareth – nothing further about his origin or appearance is mentioned.
- However, what is said about Jesus' heavenly origins, just in the first chapter of Mark is illuminating – his title/s, his baptism, the following temptations, and then the authority he holds over people, evil spirits and over sickness - all tell us much about him.
 - The reader therefore is in a privileged position. Right from the very first line we are told who Jesus is – a secret that those in the story (apart from the demons) have to discover for themselves.
 - A tension then exists for us as readers – to a certain extent, readers share with the author everything there is to know about Jesus' identity. While the characters come to know Jesus, we as readers start with a working knowledge of him that should actually help us get to know him better. The danger is that we become complacent and fail to realize the significance of some of the things Jesus says and does.

Exercise:

From Mark 1:1-13 (printed above) construct a character profile for Jesus – list the qualities or titles that have been ascribed to him.

Teaching of Jesus Christ' in *NBD*, 2nd Ed, Leicester; IVP, 1992, 575.). This is too simplistic. Upon contrast it is more likely that Matthew's genealogy is trying to show Jesus the true Israelite of Davidic decent, while Luke is trying to show that Jesus is truly a human being. This may account for some of the differences in form and content. The main point of both however is to explain that Jesus is the focus and fulfillment of all who came before. (B. Witherington III, 'Women in the Earliest Churches' in *SNTSMS 59*; Cambridge: Uni Press, 1988.)

The Titles of Jesus

- Many titles are used to describe Jesus in the gospels. John's gospel is the most prolific – you can count approximately 14 titles for Jesus in just the first Chapter.
- Understanding the titles very often helps us understand more about a person and their true identity.

Jesus

- Jesus as a name is not a title, but because of the significance of Jesus in scripture and in history, it has become a title as well (hence the reason that there are not many kids running around called 'Jesus'!)
- It is a name with meaning – it is actually the Greek word for *Joshua*, and means 'save people from their sins' (Mt 1:21).

Messiah (Christ)

- Hebrew for 'anointed one' – the Greek equivalent is *Christos* (Christ).
- It is the term used of David when he was anointed by Samuel (1 Sam 16:13) – and so it carries with it Kingly connotations. (In English OT translated 'LORD')
- The Messiah was the one that Israel longed for – he would come and deliver Israel from the hands of her enemies (c.f. 2 Sam 7:12-16; Is 11:1-10 and Jer 23:5-6).
- Jesus in everyway fulfilled the role of Messiah, but he did it in ways that were unexpected – for instance no one expected this Messiah to free them from their slavery of sin – they were looking for him to free them from oppression.
- Although the term is used of Jesus – it is not as prolific as you would expect of the one who has come as the promised Messiah.
- It is however a title that Jesus used indirectly of himself (Mk 12:35; 13:21), yet actively discouraged people from calling him until his task was complete (Mk 8:30). Notice that Jesus has not used the title 'Christ' of himself until after Peter calls him the 'Christ' in 8:29. How does Peter reach his conclusion?

Son of God

- More than just God's sons, Jesus is recognized as the Son of God. He is descendant of God and is God in a way that no other can be.
- In Mark, Jesus is recognized as the Son of God by others namely the writer (1:1), God himself (1:11; 9:7), those who are demon-possessed (Mk 3:11; 5:7 c.f. 1:24) and the Centurion (15:39). Interestingly, Jesus never uses the title of himself.
- In Exodus 4:22-23 and Hosea 11:1 Israel is described as God's 'son' which appears more significant once we understand Jesus the descendant of Israel dying for his people as the 'Son of God'.
- Further the 'Son of God' was the term given to describe relationship between father and son that is a feature of the offspring of David (c.f. 2 Sam 7:14, Ps 2:7 and 89:26-27). So 'Son of God' then is a term equivalent to the term 'Messiah'.
- The significance of this title is that it demonstrates that Jesus is the one in the unique position to bring people into relationship with God *his* Father.

An interesting aside is that the emperors at the time of Jesus were often declared 'god' upon their death and so the title of 'Son of God' being attributed to Jesus would have been a touchy point for some of the authorities of the day.

This following coin⁴ features the face of Caesar Tiberius (14-37AD) who lived as emperor throughout Jesus public ministry. The inscription reads 'TI (BERIVS) CAESAR DIVI AVG (VSTI) F(ILIVS)' which translated means 'Tiberius Caesar Son of the God Augustus'.⁵

⁴ <http://www.wildwinds.com/coins/ric/tiberius/i.html>

⁵ Translation thanks to J. Dickson in '*Spectators Guide to Jesus*', Sydney: Blue Bottle Books, 2005, 135-6.

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When Jesus was questioned by the Pharisees and Herodians in Mark 14:13-17 (c.f. Mt 22:15-22) about whether to pay taxes to Caesar (as god) or not, Jesus simply answered 'Give to Caesar what is Caesar's (the coin with his face on it) and give to God what is God's' (by implication meaning that Caesar was not God). The (possible) intended irony is that Jesus is the one who is 'Son of God', not Tiberius who proclaims himself as 'son of god'.



Son of Man

- This is the title Jesus uses of himself most frequently – 13 times in Mark (11 times in his final days leading towards the cross and resurrection).
- In the gospels it is only Jesus who uses this title of himself – a possible indication that Jesus identified with those he came to save.
- More likely however is the connection this title has with Old Testament scripture – particularly Daniel 7. In his resurrection, Jesus fulfills all that is predicted in Daniel 7.
- Most interesting the use of 'Son of Man' progresses the idea of what this one will do – this Son will be rejected, mocked, he will suffer, and he will die (Mk 8:31; 9:12, 31; 10:33; 14:21, 41). Nowhere in the Old Testament is the Son of Man spoken of in such terms.

Other titles to look for include:

Teacher or Rabbi (Mk 4:38; 9:17, 38; 10:17) – recognizing the activity of Jesus as one with authority and deserving of respect.

Lord or Master (Mk 7:28) – recognizing Jesus as one demanding the highest respect and as one who possessed miraculous powers. This was a title that was not fully realized until after the resurrection of Jesus (c.f. John 20:28).

Prophet (Mk 6:4, 16; 8:28) – used in a unique sense as one who speaks the words of God. It is in this manner that we can relate the title to the function of Old Testament prophets such as Elijah.

King of the Jews (Mk 15:26) – a title that is derived from Israel's relationship as the special people of God. Jesus was mocked by the Romans and given the title 'King of the Jews' (c.f. 15:32).

Son of David (Mk 10:47-48; 12:35) – this is a title that directly connects Jesus to the recognized hero king of the Old Testament - David. In a sense David is the prototype of the true

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king to come. You'll note in Mark that it is a blind man who 'sees' Jesus as the true king in the line of David.

Titles therefore are helpful to understanding more about the person in question, but it should also be noted that the teaching in the New Testament about Jesus is not expressed solely in understanding the titles of Jesus. The titles sum up some of the New Testament's teaching, but it is in his life, his words and his actions that we get to know the real significance of who Jesus is for us.

Exercise:

Given the profile you have built of Jesus from Mark 1:1-13 and your consideration of the titles given to Jesus:

- What does it mean for Jesus to be the Messiah?
- When and How is Jesus linked to the forgiveness of sin?

Conclusion

- Simply in the prologue, Mark ensures that his readers are left in no doubt that Jesus is the one coming from God, a worthy one, able to baptize with the authority of God, a Nazarene, well pleasing to God and the one that was spoken of by the prophets – the Messiah.

Exercise:

- Compare the temptation passages from the Gospels (Mt 4:1-11; Mk 1:12-13; Lk 4:1-13). What are the differences? Why do you think the authors have chosen to record what they have?
- What comparison can be drawn from the temptations that Adam and Eve experienced in Gen 3:1-7?

Reflection:

- How do you relate to Jesus? For you, what title would best describe the way you honour him?
- What titles are most used of Jesus today? Do you think they are used in the way that the Gospels would use them? If not, how?

For next Week:

- 1) Read Unit 3 of the PTC Notes.
- 2) Re-Read Mark's Gospel (each time you read the gospel, it should become more familiar).
As you are reading think about:
 - How does Mark use Old Testament Scripture to point to Jesus? What is being fulfilled by Jesus?
 - What titles are given to Jesus?

References (for possible further reading)

Marshall, I.H., 'Titles of Jesus Christ' in *New Bible Dictionary*. Edited by I.H. Marshall, Ar Millard, J.I. Packer, D.J Wiseman. 3rd Ed. Leicester: IVP, 1996, pp 575-83.

Witherington III, B., 'Birth of Jesus' in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*. Edited by J.B. Green, S. McKnight, I.H. Marshall. Leicester: IVP, 1992, pp 60-74. – read only if you really want to explore 'infancy narratives' further.