

Do You Know My Jesus? Studies in the Gospel of Mark **By Bob Young**

Introduction

Selected Texts: Mark 1:1; 4:35-41; 8:27ff; 10:45-52; 15:39—centurion

How does Mark describe Jesus? Several answers: servant, lord, touch, compassion, sensitive

TWIN THEOLOGICAL THEMES IN MARK'S GOSPEL

Theology of Glory: Mark describes a miracle-working, crowd-attracting, demon-exorcising, authority-wielding, debate-winning, future-predicting Jesus who in some ways is not unlike the Jewish and Greco-Roman holy men and wonder-workers of his day. HE LEADS US TO GLORY.

Theology of Suffering: Mark describes a misunderstood, persecuted, betrayed, forsaken, suffering, humiliated, crucified Jesus whose death as a common criminal at the hands of the Romans is as horrifying as it is shameful (1:12,13; 3:22,30; 8:34-38; 10:30,33-34,45; 13:8-13). FIRST, HE LEADS US THROUGH SUFFERING.

THE IDENTITY NARRATIVES OF MARK: Chapters 1-4

Begins with bold declaration: 1:1

Mark begins and ends his story of the earthly ministry of Jesus with the Christological title "Son of God." But framed within these two passages (1:1 from Mark himself; 15:39 from a Roman centurion) is the evangelist's narrative which explains and gives content to that title. In any event, it may not be too far off the mark to describe Mark's Gospel as a definition, or re-definition, of the meaning of "Son of God" as applied to Jesus.

How do we know that Jesus is the Son of God?

Four chapters answer the question, Who Is Jesus? (4:35-41)

- Jesus is the fulfillment of OT prophecy. Will that cause his disciples to know who he is?
- Jesus is baptized and the Spirit descends
- Jesus successfully overcomes temptation from Satan through that Spirit.
- Do his followers understand who he is? They follow him, but the question is left unanswered, 1:14ff.
- This we know—the evil spirits know his identity, 1:21ff.

What follows now are amazing stories of amazing works. Note how these actions attract followers.

- In addition to power over temptation and power over an evil spirit....
- Power over disease as he heals many
- Power over leprosy
- Power over paralysis
- Power over sin and forgiveness
- Power to attract sinners
- Power over the law—fasting and Sabbath

Amazing works PLUS the amazing words of the parables.

The ultimate, capstone story is in 4:35-41

- Power over nature

SON OF GOD: SON OF MAN

For Mark, "Son of God" can only be understood in the light of another phrase, "Son of Man."

"Son of Man" appears in Mark's Gospel in the words of Jesus, who uses it as a self-designation.

Furthermore, in Mark Jesus seems to employ this description as a corrective to the common, erroneous

understanding of "Son of God." For example, in 8:27-38, Jesus' reply to Peter's confession of him as Messiah is that the Son of Man must suffer. Similarly, while Jesus' answer to the high priest's question, "Are you the Messiah, the son of the Blessed One?" is "I am," he immediately qualifies that response by adding, "And you will see the Son of Man seated upon the right hand of God..." (14:61-62)

Mark's point is that we cannot understand who Jesus is, and cannot be his disciples, until we realize the centrality of suffering in his mission—and in ours. Jesus is not a Messiah of earthly glory, but of self-emptying, suffering love for God and humans. Mark prepares us for this in subtle ways in the first half of the Gospel. This section could almost be a "divine man" story, concentrating as it does on Jesus' "mighty deeds" and his imparting information to his disciples. Perhaps this is why there is confusion over Jesus' rebuke of Peter in 8:33: from the foregoing material in the Gospel, it is not difficult for the reader to assume that Peter's confession is correct. Yet Jesus finds it not only inadequate but even demonic. It appears that Mark has "set up" his readers. Up to this point in the Gospel, they have been nodding their heads, comfortable in their understanding of Jesus, feeling confirmed in that understanding. But now Mark delivers the blow: they are condemned, not by Mark, but by Jesus himself.

Mark has not left the critical reader totally unprepared for the development in 8:33. Throughout the first section of the Gospel, we see Jesus identifying himself with those who suffer: the poor, the sick, the hungry, the sinners and outcasts. We see him bridging the gulf between Jew and Gentile. And in chapter 4 we have a glimpse of what is to come, as the disciples, to whom "the secret of the Kingdom of God has been given," are likened to outsiders in their inability to understand Jesus' parabolic teaching. Mark is beginning, in a subtle and creative way, to expose the un-Christian errors of elitism and triumphalism. From 8:33 on, those errors will be repeatedly condemned and corrected by Jesus.

Although the climax of Mark's Gospel is often considered to be Peter's confession, the Gospel's high point is the confession of the Roman centurion at the foot of the cross. Here the implications of Jesus in the gospel of Mark are embodied in an unforgettable scene. Misunderstood and finally deserted by his disciples, and seemingly abandoned even by God, Jesus dies in anguish of body and spirit. He speaks no fine words from the cross (as in the other Gospels); he can only cry out his desolation to God before he dies with a loud, inarticulate cry. And it is only then that a human being—not one of the "saved," but a hated Gentile oppressor and idolater—can call him "Son of God."

CONCLUSION

This, then, is the Christ of Mark: Son of God = Suffering Son of Man. Mark's description of Jesus certainly includes power and authority implied in the Son of God title (the miracles and exorcisms, the correct understanding of the Sabbath, the imminent judgment); but for Mark the power and authority are hidden in Jesus and will not be fully revealed until the coming, the return of Jesus in glory. In the meantime, we must not attempt to appropriate Jesus' future glory to ourselves in the present, but must follow him in the way of the cross. The knowledge he has left us is not the power-bestowing knowledge of the "saved", but the secret of a hidden Kingdom born in weakness, a Kingdom which grows through suffering and opposition so that the divine will may be fulfilled. It is not those who boast of their salvation, who prophesy, and who perform miracles who will be saved, but those who "endure to the end" by "doing the will of my Father," that same will which Jesus accepted at Gethsemane. Jesus, the "suffering servant of God," must be not only our Savior but our model. We cannot share in his resurrection unless we have also shared in his ministry of suffering love. This was Mark's message to the Christians of his day; it is a message Christians today still need to hear.