

Dr. Mark Jennings, Mark, Lecture 25, The Theology of Mark

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This is Dr. Mark Jennings in his teaching on the book of Mark. This is session 25, The Theology of Mark.

Hello, it's good to be back with you as we now finish up this study through Mark.

We've gone through the entire book, and we've been discussing the various elements in each pericope. And throughout this discussion, I've also been drawing lines together. We've been discussing the various themes and thought lines.

But I want to spend a little bit of time here at the end just addressing some of the larger arcs if you will. Before we begin, though, I do want to make sure that I recognize some of the scholars who have helped me and played a role in influencing my thought. I've mentioned Mark Strauss a lot, his commentary on the Gospel of Mark I find to be most convincing.

Other scholars, Ben Witherington III, James Edwards, Robert Stein, and R.T. France. Each of them has contributed to my thinking of the Gospel of Mark in a significant way. Today also I want to talk about, as we talk about some of the theology of Mark, I want to mention David Garland's recent publication, A Theology of the Gospel of Mark.

I find it especially useful in this regard. And my final discussion here certainly reflects some of his thinking. The Gospel of Mark is, at its heart, a book that seeks to answer one question.

Who is Jesus? Mark begins his Gospel with a proclamation announcing the good news, announcing that Jesus is the Son of God. He begins his tale in a triumphant way. His Gospel is not a tragedy; it's not a lament, but rather, it is a joyful proclamation that the one who is anticipated in the Scriptures, the hope of God's people, has come.

The Gospel of Mark tells us about Jesus. It is about Jesus. There are certainly other people in the Gospel, but these others only have meaning based on their relationship to Jesus.

So, it seems fitting then, as we sort of wrap up and conclude our final considerations of Mark, to talk about the Christology of Mark. Ultimately, we have discussed how Mark presents Jesus as the stronger one, the stronger one who suffered and died to

save his people. We've talked about how Jesus is Son of God and Son of Man while also simultaneously the suffering servant.

In this discussion of Christology, I'd like to take first the traditional approach, which is to look at the various titles ascribed to Jesus. The first one, of course, that we should consider is the Son of God. Without question, the title Son of God is one of, if not the main title for Jesus in the Gospel of Mark.

Interestingly, pronouncement of Jesus as God's Son, God's Son who has come into the world, happens in his very introductory comments of the Gospel. We see early on Mark wants us to understand Jesus as the Son of God. Twice, a voice from heaven addresses Jesus as the Son of God.

We see that in Mark 1:11 at the baptism, Mark 9.7. We see both times: you are my Son whom I love, or this is my Son whom I love. The centurion at the crucifixion proclaims, surely this man was the Son of God. We have what are very sympathetic statements.

We also have hostile statements. The demons frequently address Jesus as the Son of the Most High. The high priest during Jesus' trial asks him, are you the Son of the Blessed One? When we look at the Son of God language in the Gospel of Mark, we see it both on the lips of those who would positively assert it, but also on those who would deny it.

Of course, as we discussed throughout our study of Mark, there is a building towards the centurion's confession. There is a building towards that moment when, on the cross, one can truly say, surely this man was the Son of God. Mark really stresses the centurion's confession.

The literary style of Mark has moved towards this. The messianic secret motif of a continual dampening or silencing of the proclamation of Jesus as the Son of God creates a literary tension that prepares for the moment when one asks, when is it okay to say Jesus is the Son of God? To which Mark answers, it is in the realization of the cross. Peter's confession in Mark 8 is incomplete because it lacks an understanding of Jesus' death.

Of course, as we discussed, the centurion's proclamation that Jesus is the Son of God is linked directly to the baptism in Mark. We notice that the verb to split or to tear is included in both stories, both the baptism and the centurion's confession. In baptism, it is the tearing of the veil that separates the heavens from the earth.

In the centurion's confession, it is the tearing of the veil that separates the holy temple from the outside. In a lot of ways, this baptism and the centurion's confession are bookends of the earthly ministry of Jesus in the Gospel of Mark. Interestingly

enough, in Mark 10:38-39, Jesus identifies his death with baptism, again strengthening the conclusion that the two should be held simultaneously, that the proclamation by God that Jesus is his Son at the baptism and the proclamation by the centurion that Jesus is God's Son are held together.

Jesus himself implicitly, at least, takes upon the role of Son of God and identifies himself as such in the parable of the tenets in Mark 12:1-12. The parable, as you recall, as we discussed, was an overview of the history of Israel, if you will, of the religious leaders of Israel and their rejection of God. How God had sent to the tenets servants after servants who were abused until in the parable, it reaches its climax when he sends his beloved, and the farmer sends his, the landowner sends his beloved, no accidental reference there, I believe, since beloved is the terminology God has used to speak of his Son, sends his beloved who is then killed by the tenets.

In light of this parable, alongside Jesus' own predictions that he will be killed by the religious and political leaders, this means in the parable of the tenets, Jesus himself is putting, implying that he should be understood as God's very own Son. Other markers of the Son of God include Jesus' reference in Mark 13, 32 that the Son of the Father does not know the time of the end events, Jesus' use of Abba in Mark 14, his even his assertion to the high priest's question if he is the Son of the Most High, of the Blessed One, Jesus' assertion that he is, of course brings us to note. One of the things in Mark, though, is the Son of God; there's a strong connection between the truth of Jesus' Sonship and the truth that he must suffer and die.

Closely related to the title of the Son of God is the title of Messiah or Christ. The Messiah was frequently referred to in the Old Testament as God's Son, especially in Coronation Psalms, much in the same way that Israel is also referred to as God's Son. This makes sense, given the idea of corporate headship where the Messiah, the King, represents the people.

And so, it's not surprising that we see an overlap between Son of God and Messiah language. Jesus is, of course, identified as the Messiah in the opening verse of the Gospel of Mark. The interesting though, though the title is important to Mark, it does seem that Messiah is a problematic title, if you will, in the Gospel.

Five of the other six times that Messiah is used, it comes from people who are either hostile to Jesus or misunderstand his mission. Jesus himself, though he does not outright reject this title, he does not take it up for himself. The Messiah we see comes into important moments, such as Mark 8, when Peter confesses that Jesus is the Messiah.

We see it again when the high priest asks Jesus if he is the Messiah. And, of course, we find it connected with a blind Bartimaeus, who refers to Jesus as the Son of David, which would be a Messianic connection. In Mark 12, Jesus comments on

Psalms 110:1 by noting how the one who is to come is actually greater than David, not simply a descendant of David.

Perhaps that is the best way to begin to understand the use of Messiah in the Gospel of Mark if it isn't simply a descendant of David, but Jesus is the one who is greater than David and different than David. The sense, then, is that the reason the title is problematic is because the understanding of the title has become problematic. Jesus agrees with the affirmation that he is the Messiah, yet holds at arm's length the understanding of what that meant.

I believe that Jesus embraces the Messiah title, which is evident in the triumphal entry. When he comes into Jerusalem on an animal that has not been ridden, the Zechariah 9 reference, which we talked about in length, I believe makes clear that Jesus is deliberately choosing to enter into Jerusalem as a king. Even Pilate's own charge against Jesus, that he is king of the Jews and therefore guilty of sedition, suggests that there was something in Jesus' own mannerisms that produced the legitimacy of a claim to be king of the Jews.

But if we are looking at the titles that Jesus himself espouses in the Gospel of Mark most overtly, we come immediately, of course, to the Son of Man. Son of Man only appears from Jesus. Mark does not call him Son of Man in his editorial comments.

The other people in the Gospel do not address Jesus with this title. For example, when Jesus asks the disciples who others say that he is, or even who they say that he is, no one answers, Son of Man. The high priests do not charge Jesus with claiming to be the Son of Man.

They ask him if he is the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed. Though interesting enough, Jesus' response, in which he affirms that he is the Son of Man, leads to accusations of blasphemy, indicating that there was some idea of a title or statement being made. As we discuss throughout our look at Mark, I am convinced that the Son of Man title that Jesus uses has its origin, its background, its backdrop, if you will, from Daniel 7, from the figure of the one like the Son of Man.

For example, there are ties between what we see in Daniel 7 and Jesus' own words. Jesus says of himself that he is the Son of Man who will come in his Father's glory with holy angels, Mark 8:38. Jesus says that he will come in the clouds with great power and glory in Mark 13:26. That he is coming on the clouds of heaven in Mark 14:62. Each of these draws to mind and echo the one like the Son of Man passage in Daniel 7. Though the Son of Man may not have been as fixed as the Messiah title, it is certainly a high Christological title. Jesus uses himself, meaning that he identifies himself as that great eschatological, apocalyptic figure.

In fact, it may be the very vagueness of the title or its unfixed nature that Jesus found most appealing. Whereas the understanding of Messiah had now drawn away from how Jesus wanted it to be understood, and thus Jesus was resistant to the political fervor that might accompany embracing Messiah, the very vagueness of the Son of Man title allowed him to define it in a way without much worry or such hesitancy. Of course, Jesus uses the title of the Son of Man to capture the dichotomy that he is the stronger one who will suffer.

As the Son of Man, Jesus presents himself as one of great authority. He speaks of himself as the Son of Man, having the authority to forgive sins in Mark 2. Having the authority over the Sabbath in Mark 2. Having the authority in judgment, Mark 8, Mark 13, Mark 14. So, in a lot of ways, Jesus' use of the Son of Man fits the Daniel 7 motif of the one who is at the side of the Most High.

But yet, then this is juxtaposed with Jesus' use of the Son of Man title in suffering. He is the Son of Man who will be rejected, suffer, and die in Mark 8, Mark 9, and Mark 10. Garland, in his book, also describes what he calls an enacted Christology in Mark.

I really like this term. It fits with what we've been doing throughout the study of Mark, and that is how, in addition to specific titles, Mark presents Jesus' identity in action and in words, with many of those actions and words carrying overtones to the Scriptures. We've pointed out this much along the way, and here's a good summary of this enacted Christology, of these deeds that Jesus did that also speak about who he is.

First, we see Jesus' power in his voice. He has the power to call. One of his first actions is to call the disciples to follow him.

And in this call, there was an immediate response. We saw it with Andrew and Peter and James and John. We saw it with Levi, son of Alphaeus.

It's interesting in Mark, Mark does not give us a lot of backdrop about what occurs before Jesus actually calls his disciples. Unlike the other Gospels, we don't have a lot of information about how some of these were following John the Baptist, and then John the Baptist instructed them to follow Jesus, so we don't have ongoing conversations that occur. In Mark, what we simply have is Jesus saying, follow me, and the immediacy.

The stress then, I believe the reason Mark has it this way is for us to understand that Jesus calls much in the same way that God calls, that there is an authority in his voice. It's hard not to see a similar connection between Jesus' call to the disciples and God's call to Abram in Genesis 12, where he says, follow me, and obedience is immediate. Notice that the stress is not on the disciples' response per se but on the authority of Jesus' summons.

We see also the power of this voice over the demonic world. We've traced this throughout our study. Jesus' word presents him as the supreme authority over spirits.

In his voice, he commands them to be silent, and they are immediately silent. In his voice, he commands them to leave their host, and they immediately leave their host. There is an immediate submission.

Notice, the stress has always been on the divine power. There is no special phrasing, no special technique. There is no ongoing battle between Jesus and the demons.

The authority is Jesus alone, and it is in his voice. In fact, the authority is of such a nature that one of the constants in the Gospel of Mark was the amazement of his ability to speak to the demons and have them obey. We notice as early as that first day in Capernaum how the crowds marveled at his authority over the demons.

We also saw in Mark 3 how the religious leaders, in trying to understand Jesus' authority to speak over demons, accused Jesus of being possessed and in league with Beelzebul, to which Jesus' response was to say a parable, a parable of a strong man who comes and raids the house of Satan. Jesus is the one who is stronger in his sin. He is able to raid the fortress and free the captives.

Of course, the authority over the demonic world and Jesus' voice is most obvious in the destruction of Legion. The full expression of the extent of Jesus' authority over demons, where we have this pitiful man who was possessed by hundreds of demons, the extent that Legion is an apt description, and to this also there was immediate judgment and immediate command. We see also, in addition, this enacted Christology of the power to heal.

We saw it in his power to heal a fever, which brought immediate restoration. We saw it in his power to heal leprosy, a disease thought to be without cure except by God alone, a disease that symbolized living death. We saw it in his ability to hear the paralytic, not just hear the paralytic, but use that healing as a symbol for his ability to forgive sins and even greater healing.

We saw with Jairus' daughter that Jesus had the power to raise the dead. It's interesting enough that in the miracles of Jesus, we see the healing of the blind, the healing of the deaf, the healing of the lame, and the healing of the mute. It is not too far-stretched to see this as Mark's way of saying Isaiah 35:4-6, has come to pass when God, who is the one who opens the eyes of the blind, unstops the ears of the deaf, makes the lame leap like a deer, and makes the mute shout for joy.

In other words, the power of healing is not simply the power of a healer in the Gospel of Mark, but it is a presentation of Jesus' own divine authority, of Jesus' ability to not only address the results of the fall but to even undo its cause. The divine miracle is another aspect of this enacted Christology. By that, I refer to the miracles that show divinity at work.

The feeding of the thousands comes to mind. There were two feedings, one given to the Jews, for they lacked a shepherd, and another given to the Gentiles, for they were in such desperate straits regarding hunger. In both of these, there seems to be an eschatological banquet in view, that great banquet that God hosts at the end of all things.

Ezekiel 34, God as the good shepherd giving good grazing land, seems to be echoed here, as we talked about, and so is Psalm 23. In other words, the banquets don't simply show Jesus' care but actually demonstrate a divine feast that occurs. Mark 4, the power over the storm is creative power.

Genesis, Psalms, and the prophets, especially Isaiah, speak to the power over creation as something God does. For example, in Isaiah 43, God's people should not feel fear, for God has called them by name. When they pass through waters, God will be with them.

When they pass through rivers, the rivers will not sweep over them. The healing of the storm, in many ways, is a demonstration that Jesus not only has a unique power, but actually has the power that belongs to God. We talked about walking on water.

Only God is able to tread the waves, says Job 9, Job 38, Psalm 77, Isaiah 43. Jesus walking on water is not simply a wonder to behold but is evidence that God is in their midst. The authority of Jesus in teaching was evident in the Gospel of Mark.

He teaches with an authority like no other. Comment on the crowds. He teaches with authority, unlike the scribes.

Jesus' teaching included rulings about the Sabbath and its purpose, rulings about purity laws and their purpose, rulings about dietary laws and their purpose, rulings about divorce and its purpose, and declaring the greatest commandment. One of the things we noted is that Jesus' authority was unlike the scribes and that it simply did not interpret, but actually, Jesus took the posture of divine intent, would give the meaning and the reason for the law, not simply how it should be understood. All of these, in other words, point to an active, muscular Christology that Jesus is one who has the authority that God has and acts as God does, which sets in contrast then the atonement message of Mark.

The Christology of Mark is one of strength, yet this is held also within the necessity of Jesus' suffering, the one who must suffer and die. I'd like to finish this overview of the Gospel of Mark with a discussion about the atonement theology. I feel that Christology and atonement theology are what bridge together the message of who Jesus is.

Atonement is intimately linked to Mark's understanding of who Christ is. We have what Garland aptly describes as the divine must. Jesus' first prediction in Mark 8.31, after eight chapters of establishing the authority of Jesus, the power of Jesus, the Christology of Jesus, and the enacted Christology of Jesus, Jesus then asks the question of who people say that he is and who the disciples say that he is.

At this seeming climax, Peter confesses that Jesus is the Messiah, to which Jesus responds, saying that the Son of Man must suffer many things, must be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the teachers of the law, and must be killed. The use of must here connotes a divine will, a divine plan. In each of the three predictions, Mark 8, Mark 9, and Mark 10, there is a note of providence behind Jesus' coming suffering and death.

Jesus' death is not simply the result of evil men conspiring against a threat, but is the predetermined plan of God being carried out. Indeed, Jesus says similarly of John the Baptist when after the transfiguration the disciples question about Elijah, and if Elijah must come first, Jesus says that it is true, referencing Elijah there as John the Baptist, that John the Baptist has come first, Elijah has come first, and then notes how he being the forerunner and his suffering indicates what must happen to the Son of Man. If we look at the Last Supper, Jesus says that the Son of Man will go just as it is written about him, which is a fascinating statement because there is no specific scripture referenced here.

Indeed, there is no specific scripture that speaks of the Son of Man going through such suffering. But we do have scripture speaking about the suffering servant, especially in Isaiah, especially Isaiah 53, and it might be useful to hear the words of Isaiah 53 here. Who has believed our message, and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? He grew up before him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground, he had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.

He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering and familiar with pain, like one from whom people hide their faces. He was despised, and we held him in low esteem. Surely, he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him and afflicted, but he was pierced for our transgressions; he was cursed for our iniquities. The punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds, we are healed.

We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way, and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth, he was like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before his shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth. By oppression and judgment, he was taken away, yet who of his generation protested? For he was cut off from the land of the living, for the transgression of my people he was punished.

He was assigned a grave with the wicked and with the rich in his death, though he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth. Yet it was the Lord's will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and the Lord makes his life an offering for sin. He will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the Lord will prosper in his hand. After he has suffered, he will see the light of life and be satisfied.

By his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities. Therefore, I will give him a portion among the great, and he will divide the spoils with the strong, because he poured out his life unto death and was numbered with the transgressors. For he bore the sin of many and made intercession for the transgressors.

I think this is the scripture that Jesus is referring to, of how it is written that he must go. Since Jesus' death fulfills scripture, it must be under divine providence. The crucifixion then is not simply a disgrace, but is the great and simultaneous display of God's justice and his mercy.

It is the display of God the Father's will and God the Son's obedience. It is far from a picture of defeat. It is a display of victory.

It is indeed the coronation moment of Jesus, and it brings with it salvation. Though Jesus says he must die, there are only two explicit statements regarding the salvific benefit of his death, but these two are critical to understanding Mark's atonement theology. First is Mark 10.45. This is the third passion prediction.

Jesus concludes that the Son of Man came to serve, to give his life as a ransom for many. This is this picture of violence, this suffering, this death that will be done upon Jesus as an exchange price for others. Something that purchases the freedom of others.

Of course, this immediately draws to mind Isaiah 53 and what we just read about the many who are delivered, who are rescued, who are forgiven. Then again, in Mark 14:24, the Last Supper, Jesus links his coming suffering and death with the great salvific act of the Exodus narrative. It is in his statement, this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many, that Jesus' atonement, or Mark's atonement theology, comes to the front.

It recalls, I believe, Jeremiah 31:31-34, where God says he will give them a new covenant, and he will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more. When God delivered the Israelites from slavery in Egypt, the first covenant was sealed by the blood of a sacrificial animal. Here, Jesus' blood seals the new covenant, making the old covenant and the need for its sacrificial system now no more.

On the cross, Jesus, as we discussed, received the full wrath of God. Recall the cup imagery of the Garden of Gethsemane, and he prays that this cup will pass for him. He also says that this cup is a symbol of God's wrath being poured out. So that's on the cross, Jesus receives the full wrath of God, and in so doing, achieved the divine will to remove the wickedness of the sinners by the vicarious suffering and death of Jesus.

The verdict of God, his holy justice, was poured out so that those who believe that Jesus is the Son of Man, who suffered as a suffering servant, that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, the Stronger One, might now enjoy the new covenant sealed by his blood. The irony is that as Jesus suffered on the cross, those around him mocked him, saying he saved others, but he could not save himself, failing to realize that by choosing to endure the cross, Jesus was indeed still saving others, as only the Stronger One can. There is so much more we could cover here on the theology of Mark, but I hope in this last discussion, as well as this entire walk through the Gospel, that it has been a blessing to you.

In Mark's Gospel, we have a powerful explication of who Jesus is and what his coming meant. He is the Stronger One who suffered. I want to thank you for your time and your study, and I want to thank you for considering the life and death of Jesus through the Gospel of Mark.

May the Lord deepen our faith. May we be able to say, like the centurion, surely this man was the Son of God. May God bless you.

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