

# **Who was Jesus of Nazareth?**

## **6. Views of Jesus in the Early Church Based on His Public Ministry**

# Christology

## Meaning

“Christology:” the study of:

- who was Jesus?
- what role did he play in the God’s divine plan?

# Christology

## Revelation

**325 AD:** Council of Nicaea

**451 AD:** Council of Chalcedon

Jesus:

- fully God and fully Human
- equal to God the Father
- existed from all eternity

# Christology

## Revelation

We believe this 4<sup>th</sup> century understanding was a divine revelation about Jesus  
Early believers did not fully comprehend this revelation: Christian religious understanding, like any human understanding, developed and grew

# Earliest Views of Jesus in the Church

Were based on the Second Coming and the Resurrection

Likely from before the 50 AD.

## **Second Coming Christologies**

- Jesus would return as “Messiah” (in the way expected by most first century Jews) in the Second Coming.

## **Resurrection Christologies.**

- “Two-step Christology” of lowly service during his life, then exaltation to Messiah, Son of God in the Resurrection.

# **Gospel Writers' Views of Jesus**

## **Apparent in Their Narratives of Jesus' Public Ministry**

Not a “two-step” Christology

Mark, Matthew, Luke, and John (writing 65 to 95 AD) all clearly present Jesus as the Messiah, Son of God, and Son of Man during his public ministry

- At the start of Jesus Public Ministry, at his baptism by John, God speaks from heaven “My Beloved Son.” (Mark 1:11, Matt 3:17, Luke 3:22)

# **Gospel Writers' Views of Jesus**

## **Apparent in Their Narratives of Jesus' Public Ministry**

“My Beloved Son, with you I am well pleased.”

- Ps 2:7 (“...You are my son; today I have begotten you.” (NRSV))
- Isa. 42:1-2 (“Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights. . . He will not cry or lift up his voice. . .” (NRSV))

# **Gospel Writers' Views of Jesus**

## **Apparent in Their Narratives of Jesus' Public Ministry**

Jesus is both:

- Messiah and Son of God
- the Servant who did not cry out (Isa. 42:2)  
and who was pierced for our offenses,  
bearing the guilt of all (Isa. 53)

Tension: how to present Jesus' servanthood  
(status as fully human) with his status as  
Messiah, Son of Man, Son of God

Each of the four gospels differ in how they  
emphasize Jesus as Messiah/Son of God  
versus lowly Servant

# Mark

Places the greatest emphasis on Jesus as the lowly Servant, Jesus' limitations as human

No human being recognizes or acknowledges Jesus as Son of God during his ministry:

- Readers know from Jesus baptism; demons know (Mark 1:24, 3:11, 5:7)
- Only through Jesus' suffering on the Cross can Jesus' full identity be understood by his disciples (or by future believers). Only then do they acknowledge him as Son of God (Mark 15:39)

# Mark

## Full Understanding Can Come Only Through Jesus' Suffering on the Cross

Mark 8:27-33: Peter's confession:

- Peter confesses Jesus as Messiah, but does not understand messiahship as involving suffering

Mark 9:2-8: Transfiguration

- God's voice again: "This is my beloved Son."
- Disciples still do not understand

# Mark

## Emphasis on Jesus' Humanity

Mark's Jesus often does not know  
everything

- Only the Father knows the future events  
affecting the earth's fate (Mark 13:32)

Jesus asks the Father to spare him from the  
suffering / crucifixion

On the cross: "My God, my God, why have  
you forsaken me." (Mark 15:34)

# Matthew

Allows the disciples to recognize Jesus' exalted status in rare moments of faith.

Tones down some scenes in Mark that portray Jesus' limitations and disrespect/rudeness of the disciples.

In general: clears up some of the ambiguous (Jesus as human vs. Jesus as God) events of Jesus' ministry by supplying "post-resurrectional" answers

# Matthew

## Disciples Recognize Jesus' Exalted Status in Moments of Faith

Jesus Walking on Water (Mark 6:47-52 vs. Matt. 14:23-33). When Jesus calms the wind:

- Mark, “they were utterly astounded, for they did not understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened.” (NRSV).
- Matt: they worship Jesus “Truly you are the Son of God.” (NRSV)

# Matthew

## Disciples Recognize Jesus' Exalted Status in Moments of Faith

Peter's Confession (Mark 8:27-33 vs Matt. 16:13-23)

- Mark and Matt. both affirm Peter does not understand messiahship involves suffering
- Mark: "You are the Messiah."
- Matt: "You are the Messiah, *the Son of the Living God.*" And Jesus answers "Flesh and blood have not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven."  
(NRSV)

# Matthew

## Tones Down Portraits of Jesus' Limitations, Disciples' Disrespect / Rudeness

On the way to healing the daughter of Jairus, when Jesus is touched by the woman with hemorrhage (Mark 5:30-34 vs Matt 9:20-22)

- Mark: Jesus asks who touched him; disciples rebuke him for a foolish question
- Matt.: Jesus turns, sees the woman, and heals her

# Matthew

## Tones Down Portraits of Jesus' Limitations, Disciples' Disrespect / Rudeness

Jesus asleep in a boat during a storm (Mark 4:35-41 vs Matt. 8:23-27)

- Mark: Disciples wake him and accuse  
“Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?” (NRSV)
- Matt: Disciples wake him and pray:  
“Lord, save us! We are perishing!”  
(NRSV)

# Matthew

## Tones Down Portraits of Jesus' Limitations, Disciples' Disrespect / Rudeness

Jesus' Cursing of the Fig Tree (Mark 11:20-21 vs Matt. 21:19-20)

- Mark: withers the next day
- Matt.: withers immediately

Two-stage healing of the blind man (Mark 8:22-26) – Jesus must lay his hand on twice to fully heal – omitted by Matt.

- Matt. includes the stories from Mark before the healing (Matt 16:5-12) and after (Matt. 16:13-20)

# Luke

Like Mark, does not have the disciples recognizing Jesus' exalted status during his ministry

- perhaps because Luke can document fully the disciples' post-resurrectional faith and understanding of Jesus in "Luke II" – Acts of the Apostles. (Matt. had to superimpose his "Acts of the Apostles" onto his gospel narrative.)

Tones down even more than Matt. scenes that portray Jesus' limitations and disrespect/rudeness/lack of faith of the disciples.

# Luke

## Disciples Do Not Fully Recognize Jesus' Exalted Status During Jesus' Ministry

Peter's Confession (Mark 8:27-33 vs Matt.  
16:13-23 vs Luke 9:18-22)

- Mark: "You are the Messiah."
- Matt: "You are the Messiah, *the Son of the Living God.*"
- Luke: "The Messiah of God." (Later Peter will confess a full understanding in Acts 4:11-12)

(Disciples however do refer to Jesus as "Lord," reminding reader of Jesus' exalted status)

# Luke

## Tones Down More Than Matt. Portraits of Jesus' Limitations, Disciples' Disrespect / Rudeness / Lack of Faith

Gethsemane:

- Luke's Jesus, unlike Mark and Matt. not "sorrowful unto death," falling to the earth on his face."
- Disciples' lack of faith not foretold; they are not rebuked for falling asleep three times; there is no mention of them fleeing (Jesus finds them asleep once "out of grief")

On the Cross: Jesus does not cry out "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

# Luke

## Tones Down More Than Matt. Portraits of Jesus' Limitations, Disciples' Disrespect / Rudeness / Lack of Faith

“The noble Lucan Jesus . . . is at peace with God and himself (23:46) [and] has disciples who remain with him in his trials (22:28)”

- Luke 23:46: Jesus' last words on the cross: “Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.”
- Luke 22:28: Jesus words to his disciples at the Last Supper: “You are those who have stood by me in my trials.”

# John

In the tension between:

- Jesus' lowly servanthood, Jesus' humanity
- Jesus' exalted status

John weighs so heavily on Jesus' exalted status that his human weakness almost disappear

Jesus clearly states during his ministry that he is the Son of God

Jesus' disciples recognize him to be the Son of God from the beginning of Jesus' ministry

# John

## Disciples Recognize Jesus as Son of God from the Beginning of Jesus' Ministry

First time a human being professes Jesus as the “Son of God:”

- Mark: Roman centurion after Jesus dies on the cross
- Luke: no one
- Matt: middle of Jesus' ministry in a rare moment of faith
- John: within days of the disciples encountering Jesus (John 1:41, 49)

# John

## Jesus Claims to be Son of God During His Ministry

Jesus:

- frequently speaks of himself as the Son of God
- claims unity with the Father (John 10:30, 38; 14:9)

# John

## Jesus' Human Weaknesses Almost Disappear

John's Jesus knows all things:

- When Jesus asks where shall they buy bread (John 6:5-6), John tells reader Jesus asked not because he did not know, but to test the disciples
- At first mention of Judas Iscariot, John tells reader Jesus knew he would betray him (John 6:70-71)

# John

## Jesus' Human Weaknesses Almost Disappear

Jesus approaching burial place of Lazarus:  
no sense of petition / uncertainty in his  
prayer (John 11:41-42):

- “Father, I thank you for having heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me.”

# John

## Jesus' Human Weaknesses Almost Disappear

John's passion account: Jesus in control:

- John 10:17-18: “. . . I lay down my life in order to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it up again.” (NRSV)

# John

## Jesus' Human Weaknesses Almost Disappear

John's passion account: Jesus in control:

- Jesus does not pray as in Mark 14:35 that this hour might pass from him, but muses (John 12:27-28):

“Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say – ‘Father, save me from his hour’? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name.” (NRSV)

# John

## Jesus' Human Weaknesses Almost Disappear

John's passion account: Jesus in control:  
Disciples do not flee; Jesus arranges for them to be let go so none are lost (John 18:8-9):

“Jesus answered, ‘I told you that I am he. So if you are looking for me, let these men go.’ This was to fulfill the word that he had spoken, ‘I did not lose a single one of those whom you gave me.’” (NRSV)

# John

## Jesus' Human Weaknesses Almost Disappear

Jesus does not die alone and abandoned:

- the Father is with Jesus
- his beloved disciple and his mother are at the foot of the cross

Last words a far cry from Mark and Matt.:

- John 19:28-30: “After this, when Jesus knew that all was now finished, he said (in order to fulfill the scripture), ‘I am thirsty.’ . . . When Jesus had received the wine, he said, ‘It is finished.’ Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.” (NRSV)

# Summary

All four gospel writers agree that Jesus during his ministry was Messiah and Son of God (no two-step Christology)

Each gospel gives a different emphasis in the tension between Jesus as fully human vs. Jesus as fully God.

- Jesus' servanthood and humanity, in decreasing order of emphasis: Mark, Luke, Matthew, John
- Jesus' divinity the most important message in John

# Summary

“No one Gospel would enable us to see the whole picture, and only when the four are kept in tension among themselves has the church come to appreciate who Jesus is.”

- Father Brown

# Reference and Source

**An Introduction to New Testament  
Christology.** Raymond Edward Brown,  
Paulist Press, New York, 1994. Chapter  
8.