

Lecture 2. New Testament Christology: Part I

This lecture is the first of two (along with lecture three) focusing on the Christologies of the New Testament. The various authors of the New Testament each have nuanced approaches and messages, with much in common, but slightly different areas of emphasis. In this lecture we will examine more broadly the nature of the task at hand, and how the life and ministry of Jesus of Nazareth and His relationship with His disciples forms the body of material from which the New Testament authors shaped their respective works.

I. Stages of Development in New Testament Christology

Stage One: Jesus and His Disciples: The gospel portraits of Jesus, "must reflect in a credible way the words and works of Jesus himself. If not, if the interpretation of later history brings us to a Jesus who does not reflect the man who walked the roads of Palestine, then the incarnation becomes a strange assertion of Christian faith." Donald Senior, *Jesus: A Gospel Portrait*, 16-17. Two extremes of perspective to be avoided: Thinking of the gospels as "videotaped" reports about Jesus. Thinking of the gospels as having little or no historical value.

"The importance of the New Testament references to history, to certain factual events of the past and certain expectations regarding the future, must not be overlooked. Christology is not an expression of timeless truths; it is an assertion of the universal significance of someone who lived and died in a particular time and place." John Calvin, "Jesus Christ" in *Systematic Theology*, 263.

Stage Two: Apostolic Preaching about Jesus: The Easter experience - a new perspective on the life of Jesus. Stories from Jesus' life and preaching were grouped together for purposes of memory and instruction. "The memories they treasured and utilized in their preaching and church life were only those words and works of Jesus that had the power to transform lives." - Donald Senior, *Jesus: A Gospel Portrait*, 19.

Stage Three: The Written Gospels - Evangelists incorporate the Jesus-material into the framework of a narrative. The four evangelists "emerge as authors, shaping, developing, pruning the transmitted Jesus material, and as theologians, orienting that material to a particular goal." - Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 110.

II. Characteristics of the Historical Jesus: Proclamation of the kingdom/reign of God: A dynamic meaning: God is drawing close and establishing God's rule over history and creation. The kingdom of God is "the sovereignty of God's love." -

Walter Kasper, *The God of Jesus Christ*, 3. "The nearness of the kingdom of God means the proximity of God's unconditional will to salvation, of reconciling clemency and sufficing graciousness and opposition to all forms of evil." Edward Schillebeeckx, *Jesus: An Experiment in Christology*, 140.

Jesus proclaims God's reign by his words. His parables "promised a radical reversal of values, bringing in a new world in a revolution wrought by God, not humans" - John Meier, "Jesus," *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, ed. 1320. The "cause" of Jesus is inextricably connected with his person. The Jewishness of Jesus he radicalized and internalized the demands of the Law. Table fellowship: "an anticipation of the eschatological in which the gracious mercy of God was already being extended" - Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to New Testament Christology* (New York: Paulist Press, 1994), 66.

The authority of Jesus' teaching stems from who Jesus is. "The source of Jesus' authority is his own experience. From his intimate life of prayer with God and from a prayerful searching of the scriptures, Jesus had forged the basic convictions that animated his life and ministry." - Donald Senior, *Jesus: A Gospel Portrait*, 122.

Jesus proclaims the reign of God through his deeds - see Mark 1:32-34 - acts of "power" (*dynamis*), but the purpose was not to evoke adulation. Jesus and his call to his disciples: "Follow me, and let the dead bury their dead" (Matt 8:22). The Twelve - reconstituting the twelve tribes of Israel.

Jesus' address of God - "Abba" - is intimate but not casual speech. Jesus had a truly human history. The mounting danger to his life, and Jesus' unshakable trust in the fidelity of God (Mark 14:25). "Perhaps as a human being he could not know the precise way in which God would vindicate the sacrifice of his life. But he trusted God, his Abba. And as formidable as death might appear, it could not quench the faith of the Son of God." - Donald Senior, *Jesus: A Gospel Portrait*, 134.

III. The Resurrection of Jesus: There are three New Testament forms of witness to the resurrection of Jesus: Creedal formulas that profess faith in the risen Jesus (e.g., Romans 10:9) Gospel stories about the finding of the empty tomb Narratives of the appearances of the risen Jesus.

It is important to keep in mind that the resurrection is an event that affected Jesus personally. Something definitive occurred through which the reality of Jesus' resurrection was communicated to his disciples. The disciples' experience of the

risen Jesus was revelatory. The resurrection of Jesus had redemptive significance. Despite the personal nature of the event, the resurrection in some way makes possible salvation of the world.

Reflection Questions

1. When you hear the phrase "the kingdom of God," what comes to your mind? What is your favorite gospel image of the kingdom (reign) of God?
2. Which of Jesus' parables means the most to you? Why?
3. What does Jesus' "Abba" address of God connote for you? What implications does it have for the prayer of Christians?
4. What does the Easter proclamation of the resurrection of Jesus reveal about Jesus? What does it reveal about God? What does it reveal about us?