

The Quotations Bible Study: Series I: The Person of Jesus

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Week 5. Who is Jesus: the Evangelists on Jesus

Prayer: Father, we seek your face in Jesus. As we study your word, lead us closer to your Son, we pray, in Jesus' Name, amen.

The evangelists were practical writers, and their purpose in writing is obvious from the very beginning of their books: to proclaim, not merely to report, Jesus Christ. The Gospels are works of advocacy, not passive accounts. They demonstrate this by the material the Evangelists selected for publication, probably taken from a much larger body of available information about Jesus. John the Evangelist even remarked about the world not being big enough to hold all the books that could be written about the things Jesus did (John 21:25).

The evangelists selected the material they wanted their audience to know. And that selection tells us something about what the evangelists thought was important. The topic that came highest on the list was "Who Jesus is." The evangelists took distinct approaches to arrive at the same answer.

All four evangelists recorded the events surrounding the baptism of Jesus. It is the place to which each Evangelist, with his distinct point of view and literary aims, is eventually drawn. This event marked the beginning of Jesus' public ministry. All the evangelists thought it to be of the utmost importance—but for what?

In this study, we will examine these passages and some statements made on that occasion. First, some background.

I. The Servant

Focus passage:

"Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him and he will bring justice to the nations."—Isa. 42:1

Background: Isa. 42:1-4

Three times already in this short series of Quotations Bible Studies, we have encountered quotations from the prophet Isaiah, and with this passage we introduce the Suffering Servant theme in Isaiah. This subject will loom large as the series progresses. There are no less than 99 quotations in the New Testament drawn from the latter half of Isaiah. By the time we are done, the Isaiah pages in your Bible will be worn out!

Who is the Suffering Servant? Let us find out.

Q1: The LORD is speaking to Isaiah: who is the Servant, chosen? (Isa. 41:8,9)

Q2: But is the LORD speaking about a group or a particular person? (Isa. 42:1)

Q3: How does the LORD feel about the Servant? (Isa. 42:1)

Q4: What will the LORD send the Servant? (Isa. 42:1)

Q5: The descriptions in Isa. 42:2,3 concern the obedience of the Servant to the LORD's will. What four behaviors will mark the Servant?

Q6: What will be the result of the Servant's faithfulness? (Isa. 42:3)

Q7: Is the Servant immune to ordinary failings? (Isa. 42:4)

Q8: Is the Servant's calling just to Israel? (Isa. 42:4)

Q9: How will the "islands" (Scofield says the Hebrew word means "coasts"; does this mean the whole Mediterranean world? it might) look on the Servant? (Isa. 42:4)

The Suffering Servant has numerous interpretations, but the one that should dominate our thinking is the one prescribed by the New Testament—that the Suffering Servant is a prophetic picture of Jesus. To

Quotations Bible Study—Series 1, Week 5, Who is Jesus

the extent that the Suffering Servant is also a symbol of Israel's suffering in captivity, so Israel is also a type of Christ.

II. The Son

Focus passages: Matt. 3:17; Mark 1:11; Luke 3:22; John 1:34 (see below)

Background: Matt. 3:13-17; Mark 1:9-11; Luke 3:21,22; John 1:29-34

It is somewhat inappropriate to call Matt. 3:17, Mark 1:11, and Luke 3:22 quotations of Isaiah 42:1. It is the same person speaking (the LORD) and saying the same thing (that the LORD is pleased). C. H. Toy affirms that the words owe nothing to the Septuagint and that the words recorded in Matthew, Mark, and Luke match the Hebrew of Isa. 42:1 reasonably well. This remark applies particularly to the longer quotation in Matt. 12:18-21 (see below).

There is one important difference. Isaiah's word is Servant. In the Gospel accounts, the Voice from heaven says "Son." That the Suffering Servant is God's Son is an idea that Isaiah never quite gets to, in so many words (unless you try to apply Isa. 9:6,7, "Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given" to the Servant). We may also be hearing an echo of Ps. 2:7b, "You are my Son; today I have become your Father." But it was the Voice from heaven that first fused these two ideas together.

A. Matthew's account

And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased."—
Matt. 3:17

Matthew (evidently the apostle and therefore an eyewitness) seems practically out of breath with all the Messianic prophecies he believed Jesus had fulfilled (at least 15). Matthew's vision of who Jesus is begins with incidents that we have already mentioned in this study (see lesson 1). They support Matthew's presentation of Jesus as rightful king. In Matt. 3, John the Baptist actually announces the kingdom. And at the end of chapter 3, the Voice from heaven at Jesus' baptism pronounced Jesus to be the Son of God.

Let us look at the passage.

Q10: When we last saw Jesus, His family had settled in Nazareth. (Matt. 2:23). Now He appears before John the Baptist as a full-grown adult. Is the Gospel of Matthew a biography?

Q11: John the Baptist soothed his listeners with comforting words and gentle sayings—true or false? (Matt. 3:7-10)

Q12: John distinguishes himself from the one to come. What four distinctions does John cite? (Matt. 3:11,12)

Q13: Where did Jesus come from? (Matt. 3:13)

Q14: John at first refused to baptize Jesus. Why? (Matt. 3:14)

Q15: On what grounds did Jesus persuade John to baptize Him? (Matt. 3:15)

Q16: What three signs of Jesus initiation into His divine mission followed His baptism? (Matt. 3:16,17)

The descent of the Spirit of God onto Jesus fulfilled the words of Isaiah 42:1. Miraculously, John was allowed (and perhaps others as well) to see this manifestation of the Spirit, that demonstrated that Jesus' baptism was more than a formality or a sign of the nation's repentance. Then the Voice from heaven, the Voice of God Himself, made His statement to the world concerning Jesus. In recording all this, Matthew had definitively answered the question, who is Jesus, for all time. Peter recognized this in his confession in Matt. 16:16.

Matthew recorded another incident in which the Lord spoke of Jesus in the same terms—the Transfiguration. (Matt. 17:5) Matthew was so impressed by these statements that he actually quoted the whole passage, Isa. 42:1-4, to demonstrate Jesus' fulfillment of the Servant role in Matt. 12:17-21.

B. Mark's account

And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."—Mark 1:11

Quotations Bible Study—Series 1, Week 5, Who is Jesus

Mark wasted no words in saying who Jesus is, declaring Him to be the Son of God at the very beginning of his Gospel. (Mark 1:1)

Mark the Evangelist was Peter's translator and companion John Mark, according to ancient tradition. His terse, tightly-packed Gospel often seems as abrupt as a pamphlet. It tosses out tantalizing hints right and left about other stories and episodes in the life and ministry of Jesus, some of which the other evangelists pick up. Typically of Mark, he only devoted three verses to Jesus' baptism, but they are packed, emphasizing, as Mark so often does, not what other people did, but what God did.

Q17: Where did Jesus come from? (Mark 1:9)

Q18: What three signs were given immediately after Jesus' baptism? (Mark 1:10,11)

Throughout Mark's Gospel, Jesus referred to Himself as the Son of Man, probably a reference to the same usage in Ezekiel. But two other parties in Mark spoke of Jesus as the Son of God: unclean spirits over whom Jesus asserted authority (Mark 3:11) and the centurion at Jesus' crucifixion. (Mark 15:39) Mark's account of the Transfiguration also includes the same form of words. (Mark 9:5)

C. Luke's account

...and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."—Luke 3:22

Luke, like Matthew, began his Gospel by lingering over stories of Jesus' early life, as though he had been talking with Mary, who had hidden the facts of Jesus' growing up "in her heart." (Luke 2:19) Luke, of course, was not an eyewitness, and he obtained all his Gospel accounts from others, investigating them carefully. (Luke 1:3)

[Enrichment: Others answer "Who is Jesus?"]

Luke treated this material with great respect by including Mary's Song (Luke 1:46-55), Zacharias' Song (Luke 1:68-79), and the Song of Simeon (Luke 2:29-32) in his account. This created an atmosphere in which the question, "Who is Jesus," could be answered by the confessions of an abundance of witnesses, beginning with the first stirrings of the Spirit in the Messianic age:

Gabriel: "He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High" (Luke 1:32)

Gabriel: "So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God." (Luke 1:35)

Elizabeth: "...that the mother of my Lord should come to me" (Luke 1:43)

Mary: "From now on all generations will call me blessed." (Luke 1:48)

Zacharias: "... for [John] will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him..." (Luke 1:76)

The angel to the shepherds: "Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord." (Luke 2:11)

Simeon: "For my eyes have seen your salvation..." (Luke 2:30)

Anna the prophetess immediately recognized Jesus and spoke of Him to others. (Luke 2:38)

And finally, Jesus Himself gave us a tantalizing look at what the young Messiah was like, when He amazed the teachers in the Temple, and then told His parents, who had been searching for Him, "Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?" (Luke 2:49) Already, His Sonship had emerged.]

Let us look at the text:

Q19: John the Baptist presented an agreeable manner—true or false? (Luke 3:7-9)

Q20: John distinguishes himself from the one to come. What four distinctions does John cite? (Luke 3:16,17)

Q21: John, like the legendary old preacher, had "quit preaching and gone to meddling." What happened with Herod? (Luke 3:19,20)

Q22: What three signs of Jesus initiation into His divine mission follow His baptism? (Luke 3:21,22)

Q23: How old was Jesus by then? (Luke 3:23)

Quotations Bible Study—Series 1, Week 5, Who is Jesus

Luke's account of the Transfiguration also includes the same form of words. (Luke 9:28) Others addressing Jesus as the Son of God in Luke include the unclean spirits in Luke 4:41 and Luke 8:28, and the unbelieving examiners at Jesus trial in Luke 22:70.

D. John's account

I have seen and I testify that this is the Son of God.—John 1:34

John the Evangelist is different (not unusual; his Gospel is often distinctive). John's answer to the question, who is Jesus, is complex, poetical, and mystical, beginning with his first verses. For John started his Gospel with a prose poem that takes the reader into the mysteries of the Godhead. (John 1:1-14)

Then John the Evangelist turned to the ministry of John the Baptist, mainly with the contention that he, John the Baptist, is not the Christ, but that John the Baptist knows who is.

Q24: What three important points about who Jesus is are recorded in the mouth of John the Baptist? (John 1:15,17,18)

Q25: John the Baptist distinguishes himself from the one to come. What distinctions does John cite? (John 1:26,27)

Q26: John the Baptist gives what reason for water baptism? (John 1:31)

Q27: John records John the Baptist's testimony as though he had been talking directly to him (which he might well have done). What happened at Jesus' baptism? (John 1:32,33)

Q28: Who informed John the Baptist of Jesus' identity and the meaning of what he saw? (John 1:6,34)

John the Evangelist also affirmed Jesus' identity as the Son of God in the words of John the Baptist, which he received from the Holy Spirit. A few verses later, the Apostle Nathanael said the same thing, (John 1:49) as did Martha (John 11:27) and the man born blind (John 9:35-37). Jesus Himself also said the same thing in His conversation with Nicodemus (John 3:18) and again in John 11:4. Moreover, John the Evangelist put the case bluntly, "Therefore the Jews sought the more to kill him, because he ... said also that God was his Father, making himself equal with God." (John 5:18)

This explains clearly what being called "the Son of God" means. To be the Son of God is to *be* God. Like begets like, and the Son was begotten by the Father. For once, the Pharisees and teachers of the Law had it right: for a man, the title "Son of God" is blasphemy—*unless it is true*.

One more comment that we cannot overlook: John the Baptist twice called Jesus, "the Lamb of God," one of those times extending the image with, "who takes away the sin of the world." (John 1:29,36) We need to examine this for a moment.

III. The Sacrifice

Focus passages:

The animals you choose must be year-old males without defect, and you may take them from the sheep or the goats. Take care of them until the fourteenth day of the month, when all the people of the community of Israel must slaughter them at twilight.—Ex. 12:5,6

Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted.—Isa. 53:4

Background: Ex. 12:1-14; Isa. 53

The passage in Isaiah 53 renders the most finely-drawn picture of the Suffering Servant.

Q29: What was the people's attitude towards the Servant? (Isa. 53:3)

Q30: What did the Servant bear? (Isa. 53:4,5)

Q31: What is the Servant likened to? (Isa. 53:7)

Q32: What did the Servant's life become? (Isa. 53:10)

The Servant bore the sins of the world, at the LORD's direction (Isa. 53:6), but as predicted in Isa. 42:2, He made no complaint. It is from this passage that the New Testament writers may have received, in large part, their doctrine of Christ.

This was not the first portrait of innocent sacrifice. The mention of the lamb in Isa. 53:7 reminds us the Passover lamb, selected for its purity, another portrait of innocent sacrifice. (Ex. 12:5) It was a symbol

of God's deliverance from bondage (Ex. 12:5,12), and it was the first ceremonial ritual commanded of the children of Israel (Ex. 12:2,6). The Passover, which the festival commemorated, was the means by which God freed the Israel and made them a nation. Because of Passover, the lamb was at the core of Israel's national identity, a vital symbol of family and of nationhood.

But it was more than that.

IV. The Lamb of God

Focus passage:

The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"—John 1:29

When he saw Jesus passing by, he said, "Look, the Lamb of God!"—John 1:36

Background: John 1:26-36

When John the Baptist declared (John 1:29) that Jesus was the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world, he fused together two ideas never before explicitly joined: the Paschal Lamb (to be sacrificed) and the Suffering Servant (who bears away sins). This expressed the meaning and purpose of the once-for-all sacrifice of the one-and-only Messiah for the sins of the world.

Q33: How important was the One to follow, in John's opinion? (John 1:27,30)

Q34: Why was John baptizing? (John 1:31)

Q35: Where did John get his information? (John 1:33,34)

Jesus stood up from the water of His Baptism at the confluence of many strains of prophecy that made Him the personal representative of Israel. He was the ultimate sacrifice for sin, not just for Israel but for the whole world, Gentiles included. Paul affirms the image, "Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us." (1 Cor. 5:7) As the lamb was at the center of the Passover festival, which was at the center of Israel's national life, so Jesus, the Lamb of God, is the center of it all.

Jesus instituted a new commemorative meal, similar in many ways to Passover. But in His meal, because the sacrifice has already been made through Jesus' death, the blood became wine for refreshment and the body became bread for nourishment and strength. After Jesus, blood sacrifices will never again be needed.

V. Conclusion

The terms we encountered in this study are more than symbols. "Son of God" and "Lamb of God" are titles for the reality of Christ.

Let us return to the question posed at the beginning—why did the Evangelists all suppose that Jesus' baptism was so important. It was because Jesus' identity was clearly and unequivocally revealed in that episode. By recording the witness of John and the Voice from heaven, the Evangelists left no doubt as to who Jesus is. He is the Messiah, the Lamb of God, the Son of God, equal with God Himself. It is not just the Evangelists who said so. God Himself, in the Voice from heaven, said so.

From the confluence of prophecy at Jesus' baptism sprang another stream of prophecy, beginning with Jesus Himself, seen throughout the New Testament, and culminating particularly in Revelation. Jesus was the Perfect Sacrifice. When He comes again in glory, He will be the Perfect Judge (Matt. 25:31-46; John 5:22), the God-man whose Word is Truth (John 1:12-14), the Perfect Priest who speaks to the Father on behalf of His church, His bride, (John 17) and the Perfect Ruler (John 1:49). Revelation says, "Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!" (Rev. 5:12)

Israel ate the Passover meal in readiness for travel. (Ex. 12:11) Believers, too, when we eat at Jesus' table, must be ready for service, ready to follow Him, ready to go "into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature." (Mark 16:15)

Can we pray this **prayer** together?

Father, we are blessed in the knowledge of Jesus. We are as weak as bruised reeds, Lord, and we seek shelter in your infinite care. Thank you for your precious Son, whose gentleness protects us, as we look forward to His return, in Jesus' Name, amen.

Quotations Bible Study—Series 1, Week 5, Who is Jesus