



PERSON OF CHRIST

LESSON 5

NAMES AND TITLES OF JESUS

Aside from his given name of Jesus, the Lord was known by and took upon himself, several titles. These emphasised one or other aspects of his work. To a selection of these we now turn.

THE SON OF MAN

Jesus' favourite self-designation was "The Son of Man". Over 80 times in the Gospels this term occurs, and the intriguing thing is that it is always on the lips of Jesus. In Acts 7:56, Stephen uses the title, but that is the only exception. It is found in the four Gospels, and no other self-designation seems to have appealed to him so much.

The passages in which "The Son of Man" occurs divide into three classes.

1. It is used in the place of the personal pronoun "I". E.g.; "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head." (Matt 8:20).
2. The second group speaks of the Son of Man as suffering. (Mark 8:31; 9:31; 10:33,34).
3. The third group, by contrast, speaks of a heavenly Son of Man, and of the glory of Christ at his second coming. (Mark 13:26).

What is the origin of this title? Our point of reference here is the Old Testament scriptures. The prophet Ezekiel is addressed as "Son of Man", and some Psalms use the same expression. But the emphasis is on man's weakness and dependence. When we turn to the book of Daniel, however, light is thrown on Jesus' use of this term. In (Daniel 7:13), a Son of Man is spoken of. He is depicted as one who exercises Divine authority. He is a ruler. The dominant idea is that of sovereignty. This needs some emphasis for, in our day, "Son of Man" is often used to show Christ's humanity over against "Son of God", which refers to his deity. The truth is, that "Son of Man" is a title pointing to deity, as well as humanity.

Why did Jesus adopt this term? There are several points worthy of our notice.

1. This term had no nationalistic associations and would lead to no political complications.
2. It had overtones of divinity.
3. It had undertones of humanity. He took upon himself our weakness.

MESSIAH

This is a Hebrew word meaning "anointed one". "CHRIST" is the Greek equivalent.

In the Old Testament, the word Messiah came to mean more than just an anointed one, but one who would be in the line of David and be a great deliverer of His people (e.g. Psalm 2:2; Mic 5:2-5; Is 9:6, 7).



Jesus used this Jewish title of expectation most sparingly, and it is important to note that Jesus insisted on the lowly aspect of his Messiahship.

The temptation narratives at the beginning of his ministry show him rejecting the temptations to use his miraculous powers to make stones into bread, to perform miracles that were merely spectacular, and to set up an earthly kingdom. He discerned the voice of Satan in each of these suggestions, and he turned from them. What Messiahship meant for him is clearly brought out in the account of Peter's great confession at Caesarea Philippi. Jesus had asked the disciples who men thought him to be, and, after various answers, asked them who they thought he was. Peter replied: "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God" (Matt 16:16, Mark 8:29, "You are the Christ" and Luke 9:20, "The Christ of God"). This is the first time any of his followers had penetrated into the secret of his person, and Jesus attributed it to nothing less than a revelation from God the Father (Matt 16:17). The immediate sequel is important. From the time that they knew Him to be the Messiah (Christ), He began to instruct them in the necessity for His death. Far from Messiahship meaning the path of eminence and authority and ease, it meant for Jesus the way of suffering and shame and death. He had come to perform the function of seeking and saving the lost (Luke 19:10) and that involved death, the death which would be a ransom for many (Mark 10:45). Jesus thought of Messiahship as following a lowly path, but this should not mislead us into thinking that He thought little of His Person. Rather, the reverse is the case. Petty human minds might think in terms of earthly empires and material glory. The divine mind of Christ thought in terms of the salvation of men through the way of the Cross.

THE SERVANT

The suffering servant of the latter part of the prophecy of Isaiah adds a new dimension to our understanding of Jesus. This concept, which finds its greatest expression in Chapter 53, was used by Jesus in describing his person and work. He does not often apply this passage explicitly to himself (Luke 22:37 is an exception), but it was frequently alluded to by him. (e.g. Mark 8:31; 10:45; Luke 19:10; and 22:27).

The essence of the mission for the suffering servant is not that he suffers, but through his sufferings others are blessed. It would seem that the combination of the heavenly Son of Man with the suffering servant presents a paradox. Jesus did not yield in the slightest his claim to the highest position of all, but, he understood that involved being the servant of those he came to save. This point we see highlighted in Mark 10:43,45.

SON OF GOD

We have come to take the Fatherhood of God so much for granted that we tend to forget this deeply personal, child-parent relationship was a revolutionary concept given first by Jesus. It was Jesus who taught men to think of God in an intimate way. Yet at no time did he give any indication that he and others are in the same sense, "Sons of God". The Jews understood him in the way he claimed God as Father, to mean he was making himself "equal with God" (John 5:8). It was only rarely that Jesus used this title: it never occurs in Matthew, Mark or Luke, but it is clear that he thought of himself as "the Son". (Matthew 16:27 and Mark 8:31 are examples).

That Jesus knew himself to be the Son of God in a unique and special way, is strongly implied by the temptation narratives in Matt 4:1-11. If he didn't have this realisation, the temptations would have had no significance. Alongside of this, we can place the experience of the transfiguration of Jesus ...



(Matt 17:1-9). The only incident recorded of the boyhood of Jesus, (Luke 2:42-52), also emphasises this unique relationship of Jesus to his Father "did you not know that I must be in my father's house?"

The Divine voice at the baptism of Jesus is not, then, a revelation made to Jesus for the first time. Vincent Taylor in his commentary on Mark 1:11 says, "the words are best understood as an assurance or confirmation of this relationship, rather than a discourse or revelation."

In one of his parables, that of the labourers in the vineyard (Mark: 12:1-12), Jesus implies a relation of sonship, where we read, "he still had one other, a beloved son" (v 6), who is also described as "the heir" (v 7). Also, "the Kingdom of Heaven may be compared to a king who gave a marriage feast for his son" (Matt 22:2). These statements are in the language of parables, and therefore, must not be pressed unduly but neither should they be overlooked.

The term, Son of God, is seldom used by the disciples (Matt. 14:33; 16:16). Although they avoided the term, we find, somewhat surprisingly, the enemies of Jesus using it. The High Priest and his associates asked him whether he was the Son of God (Matt. 26:63; Mark 14:61; Luke 22:70). The accusing Jews informed Pilate that he had claimed to be the Son of God (John 19:7); and the crowd mocking at the cross said much the same (Matt 27:40,43).

The impression made by the whole body of the teaching of Jesus and his attitude to God was such that his hearers felt him to be claiming a special position for himself. This was quite apart from specific words which might be quoted. Son of God was a title which recognised he could not be described in purely human terms.

LORD

We turn from the Gospels to the apostle Paul. That his preaching and teaching is firmly embedded in the early faith is seen in several ways. The common faith is used in his sermons - outlines of which are found in the Acts and the Epistles and his use of what was possibly the earliest statement of faith, "Jesus is Lord".

Often, he refers to the Lord Jesus. (1 Cor. 11:23; 1 Thess. 2:15).

He includes this early confession in Romans 10:8-10. 1 Cor. 1:22 has the interesting word "Maranatha". This is an Aramaic word (Aramaic was the language of the common people in Palestine: many were bi-lingual and also spoke Greek, the language in which our New Testament was originally written). It meant "Our Lord come", and its use in the letter to the Corinthians indicates it was a common New Testament church word to express the faith.

"Lord" was a most significant title. A non-Jew using the word would apply it in the sense of a title for royalty. Rulers east of the Roman Empire used it, and these rulers were often venerated as gods. Lord was the title of Kingship.

By New Testament times the Jews had spread over much of the mediterranean world. Many of them did not learn Hebrew, the language in which the Old Testament scriptures were written. A Greek translation was made that proved to be very popular and was soon in common use. When God was spoken of in the Old Testament, the translators used the title "Lord". Christians began using this title for Jesus, and poured into that title all the significance they could find. Paul, with his training as a



Pharisee, coupled with his acquaintance at least with Greek and pagan thought, added even greater depth of meaning to it.

So "Jesus is Lord" means "Jesus is the King who is God".

Christians could worship him and him alone.

Paul's understanding of Jesus was never static. It developed over the years. This development did not take place in the quietness of a scholar's retreat, but rather in the crucible of recurring crisis. He lived with danger looming over him for over 30 years. Churches with pressing problems clamoured for his attention. New fields with new challenges beckoned him. His faith and understanding was fully tested day after day. He grew **IN CHRIST** and in his Epistles we can trace this development.

His experience of meeting Jesus as Lord on the Damascus Road (Acts 9:1-19), stayed with him throughout his life. At the end, he was still worshipping Jesus as Lord (2 Tim. 4:8).

The titles discussed do not anywhere exhaust the titles used of our Lord. We have selected some of the more significant for our study.

Question 1:

What does Jesus call himself in Mark 9:31? What does he mean by it?

Question 2:

What do you learn about the term, "Son of Man" in Daniel 7:13-14 (RSV). (NB This term is not used in all versions of the Bible but a similar description is given.)

Question 3:

What does "Messiah" mean? Jeremiah 23:5,6 is an OT passage predicting the Messiah's coming. Does Jesus fulfil this prediction? How?

Question 4:

What title does Jesus imply for himself in Mark 10:43? What does it mean and what is the greatest reference to it in the OT?

Question 5:

How does the story in Matt 17:1-9 show that Jesus is the Son of God? What does this title mean?

QUESTION FOR GROUP STUDY:

What was the meaning of "Jesus is Lord" for Christians in New Testament times? What is the result of believing that "Jesus is Lord" in 1 Cor. 10:9? What do you see as the most logical steps for putting this belief into practice?