



A YEAR IN THE LIFE OF JESUS THE TITLES OF OUR LORD: THE SON

Mark 1:4-11

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For the entirety of 2018 we will be taking a year to explore the life of Jesus. We will look at the scores of names that apply to him, the miracles performed by him, the lessons he taught, and the ways in which he treated other people.

Hopefully, through exploring his character, we can eliminate some of the overly pious conceptions that tradition has built up around him. For example, I am almost positive that Jesus never spoke like some of those TV actors with their lofty inflections, “Blessed are the *poor*. For they will be *comforted*.” After all he was a carpenter.

My hope is, by the end of this series, we will all have an idea of what it might have been like to sit and chat with him in your living room. I want us to get the sense of his personality. How would we feel after meeting him? Lifted up? Guilty? Would it be a one-sided conversation? Would he take time to laugh and joke with us? Or would he be so driven by his mission that any conversation would be strictly business? His teachings and actions in the Gospels will be the basis for this exploration. This week, we will explore the role his baptism played in shaping his identity. After all, the Gospels have almost nothing to say about his 30 years preceding this moment. In many ways, it begins with his baptism.

As part of this series, we will explore a few of the many titles for Jesus, especially ones he used for himself. Today’s text brings the most often used title “The Son”.

But rather than Jesus, it is God above that is the first to apply this title.

Jesus is the fulcrum of God’s dealing with humanity. We know that, up to this point, God’s long history with Israel has taken various turns.

But, as Hebrews tells us, “On many past occasions and in many different ways, God spoke to our

fathers through the prophets. But in these last days, He has spoken to us by His Son.”

According to the Catholic Encyclopedia:

The title "son of God" is frequent in the Old Testament. The word "son" was employed among the Semites to signify not only filiation, but other close connections or intimate relationship. Thus, "a son of strength" was a hero, a warrior, "son of wickedness" a wicked man, ...Angels, just and pious men...were called "sons of God" (Job 1:6; 2:1; Psalm 89:7; Wisdom 2:13; etc.).

Perhaps the most important use of “son of God” in the Old Testament was for King David, for David or his heir would be the *eternal* king on the throne of Israel. In some sense, this term *son* meant God’s special representative on earth, since sons in those days had the job of carrying on their father’s heritage.

But Jesus is elevated from being “a son of God,” somewhat like David was, to being *The Son of God*. Specifically, in our text, God calls him the “Beloved Son.” Perhaps this was the seminal moment in which Jesus came to understand his own identity, just how special his relationship to God the Father was, because it is here that his ministry begins.

If Jesus is *the Son* it makes sense that his most frequent name for God is *Father* and sometimes, perhaps, even “Daddy”. In fact, Jesus almost exclusively uses the phrase “*My Father*” when referring to God in heaven. Connoting that his Sonship is on a different order than we are, though we too refer to God as Father and we are known as children of God. Thus, no other identity within Jesus himself is stronger than that of Son of God.

His understanding of his connection with God was not connected to power but to relationship. The appropriateness of this title not only is seen in his

miraculous abilities, but in his humility and servanthood.

The title of “Son” also marks Jesus’ particular role in the Trinity as that of servant. The Son is not the master, not the man in charge. A son takes marching orders from his father and even the Son of God does the same. Never in his life – not once – do we have the sense that Jesus goes off script from the Father’s plan. Never does he seek to make his own path.

In fact, it was the Holy Spirit that gave him the orders from the Father, so he does not even receive his marching orders directly. The Holy Spirit descends upon him as he emerges from the waters. We have to assume that this Spirit did not reside within him in the same way prior to this moment (otherwise the story is pointless) which means the Spirit’s presence now within him played a fundamental role in his life going forward, in a way it had not before.

I think we have to believe the Spirit’s anointing upon Jesus actually gave him his power, because he had no reputation before this, no stories of healing from years before, he appears to be unknown until this time.

Though it is a new turn, Jesus is not a new thing. The Biblical authors go to great lengths to demonstrate Jesus’ connectedness to Israel’s history.

John the Baptist’s witness does that by connecting him to the wilderness, the setting of which is the prelude for entering the Promised Land. Only, this time, they would not be entering into a new land, that is an exterior blessing, but a baptism of Holy Spirit, that is an interior blessing.

And this title of Son is not simply an honor. It is dangerous – deadly dangerous.

The unclean spirits who know Jesus is the Son are commanded to keep it secret. The time is not yet for all to be revealed. People are not yet ready to know.

And when it is disclosed more fully, it is this title that is used to convict him of blasphemy. This clearly shows that the title was not simply an honorary one; it had deep implications for his core nature. Colossians declares the “Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of [over all?] creation.” This Son is not simply an offspring, the way the sons of Olympian gods were. We are told he is the exact imprint of God’s very being, therefore holy and filled with power.

But perhaps this aspect of his Sonship, that is his power, is the least important as far as Mark is concerned. The core aspect of what it means to be the Son is discovered at the dramatic climax of Mark’s entire Gospel: when the crucifixion is finished, the centurion declares for us all what this title means. When he sees the manner in which Jesus died, he exclaims, “Truly this man was God’s Son.” It is Jesus’ servant love that marks him most clearly as the Son of God.

At that point, the curtain of the temple is torn. Curiously, it is the same word, the same rending action of great power, that occurred when the heavens were rent open at his baptism in the descending of the dove. The rending of the heavens is key to understanding him. God does not and will not remain hidden in ivory towers, but tears through the heavens to reach us in the Son.

You might be wondering what this means for all of us.

As readers of Mark’s Gospel, we know who Jesus is, but for the people in the story it is a gradual revealing, which is only seen fully in the end by the centurion. Whether we realize it or not, our entire life is a moment-by-moment discovery of Christ’s nature. We may know the facts from when we were children, but that does not mean we *know*. It took the disciples years of intense time with him to discover what being the Son of God truly meant for him and for us.

It takes a search filled with passion and longing to discover who Christ is. Peter could answer that

question early on, but still did not know a thing. We know a lot but each of us is far from knowing.

In our world, there are so many that are sure. There are so many who think they have it all figured out. They shout down people; they spew hatred and judgement. They claim Jesus for their own private crusade with little concern for the broad, and sometimes inscrutable, will of God in Jesus Christ. If there is one thing new you learn this year as we explore Jesus let it be this – There is always more to know about the infinite and eternal God in Jesus Christ.