

GE 2125: The Bible: Its History, Literature, and Influence

Jesus' Identity in the Gospel of Mark

Term Paper



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Introduction about the Gospel of Mark

In around 65-95 CE, which is after the death of Jesus, the Gospels were written. Everything that were written after the death of Jesus was covered in the New Testament. The Gospels itself consists of four books which were written by Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. It tells us about the portraits of Jesus, founder of the Christianity. Gospel of Mark was concluded as the shortest (16 chapters only) and earliest gospel (first gospel to be written- *Markan Priority*).

According to 1 Peter 5:13, it is believed that Mark was under Peter's ministry and he got the eyewitness information about Jesus from Peter. Mark was known with his close relationship with Peter and also as a travel companion of Peter (to Asia Minor and Rome). Thus, his writing was reflected about Peter's discourses.

The Gospel of Mark focuses on telling the story of Jesus' identity. It is divided into two parts, which portrayed Jesus as the Powerful Messiah (1:1- 8:26) and a suffering servant (8:27- 16:8). In this paper, I will discuss about how Jesus portrayed Himself and how the others depict Him, also about people's reaction towards Jesus that led to the conclusions about Jesus's identity.

Jesus as the Powerful Messiah

This section mostly discussed about how Jesus performed miracles and healings, also about the controversies and conflict that appeared, and parables that was used by Jesus to portray the kingdom of God.

At the beginning of the gospel, Mark directly proclaimed Jesus identity whom he referred as "Jesus the Messiah, Son of God." (1:1). "Messiah" in Hebrew or the word "Christ" in Greek means the anointed one. John the Baptist appeared and performed baptize to people as his preparatory for God and His kingdom to come.¹

Before Jesus began His work, He let Himself be baptized by John the Baptist and God Himself declared His sonship with Jesus as He was anointed by the Holy Spirit, similar to the anointing of oil for Israel's kings.²

As Jesus walked through the Sea of Galilee, He saw Simon and his brother Andrew who were fishermen, also James son of Zebedee and his brother John, asked

¹ ... "After me comes the one more powerful than I, ... I baptize you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit." (1:7-8)

² Just as Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased." (1:10-11)

them to follow Jesus as His disciples. They started their journey to Capernaum. When the Sabbath came, Jesus went to the synagogue and began to teach. Suddenly, a man who possessed by an unclean spirit cried out and called Him as the “Holy One of God”.³ Jesus then drives the unclean spirit out of him, made people amazed with Jesus’ deeds.

Jesus then appointed the “Twelve” to be His disciples on His Own Messianic mission. Jesus was usually addressed as “Teacher” by His disciples (4:38) and by those who sought for his help (5:35), or in Hebrew word “Rabbi” (9:5). Together with His disciples, He continued to preach about the kingdom of God by using parables (4:1-20,26-29,30-34).

As He went back to His hometown, He began teaching in synagogue and people were amazed at Him. They were wondering who Jesus was and they took offense at Him. In this case, Jesus identified Himself as “Prophet”. The climax of the first part of the gospel is that Jesus sent his disciples on their own mission (6:7-12).⁴

His popularity and credentials led to a conflict with the elites (Pharisees and Herodians) for they felt anxious, so they began thinking for a plan to accuse Jesus.⁵ The rejection from the elites did not abandon Him from His mission. He kept on performing miracles instead; healed the man who possessed by demon (5:1-20), resurrected a dead girl (5:35-43), healed a sick woman (7:24-30), and multiplied loaves of bread to feed five thousand people (6:30-45). Besides, He also had the power over the nature which was performed by Jesus through stilling the storm on the lake (4:35-40) and he walked on the water (6:45-52). These also signify Jesus as the Son of God, since he had done all things that are impossible to be done by mankind.

³ ...an impure spirit cried out, “What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? ... I know who you are—the Holy One of God!” (1:23-24)

⁴ See Köstenberger, A. J., Kellum, L. S., & Quarles, C. L. (2009)

⁵ Mark 3:6

Jesus as the Suffering Servant

The “Messianic secret” about Jesus was gradually lifted, at least for His disciples. It began by Peter’s confession about Jesus the Messiah.⁶ Then, it continued with the three phases of the passion prediction which were mentioned in Mark 8-10 about the prediction of Jesus’ death, discipleship failure, and the instruction regarding the true discipleship. In predicting his death, He acknowledged Himself as the Son of Man, who must suffer, be rejected, dead, and rose again on the third day.⁷

Prior to his arrival at Jerusalem, Jesus reached a place called Jericho where He healed the blind Bartimaeus and was given a title “Son of David”.⁸ Jesus’ entry to Jerusalem, followed by his action in cursing the fig tree and in the temple court, resulted in a rejection by the Jews, especially by the chief priest, the teachers of the law (scribes), and the elders.⁹ The climax of the conflict was discussed in the 12:1-11, as Jesus had spoken a parable against them. Later on, some Pharisees and Herodians came to Jesus. They called Jesus as a “Teacher” and tried to trap Him in His words, but Jesus knew it and made them even amazed (12:13-17).

The last major section of this gospel began with the anointment of Jesus and the Lord’s Last Supper at Bethany. An important point that was raised in this chapter was the betrayal of Judas Iscariot, which would lead to Jesus’ arrest. As He was arrested, He was questioned by the high priest if he claimed Himself as the Messiah, Son of the Blessed One.¹⁰ Peter was there, below in the courtyard. He was asked by the servant girl whether he knew Jesus but he denied (14:66-68). Later on, Jesus was dispatched to Pilate by the high priest, whom sentenced him to death. Pilate asked Him whether he is the King of Jews, but He refused to answer.¹¹ Finally, His death revealed his true identity until a Roman Centurion exclaimed “Surely this man was the Son of God!” (15:39)

⁶ ... “Who do you say I am?” Peter answered, “You are the Messiah.” ... (8:29-30).

⁷ Mark 8:31

⁸ ... he began to shout, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” (10:47)

⁹ ... Jesus entered the temple courts and began driving out those who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers ... (11:15-16)

¹⁰ Mark 14:60

¹¹ Mark 15:2-4

Conclusion

Gospel of Mark talked a lot about Jesus's identity. As mentioned in the above paragraph, different characters gave different title to Jesus. Some people addressed Him as the Son of God, Messiah/Christ, Holy One of God, Teacher/Rabbi, Prophet, Son of David, Son of the Blessed One, and The King of Jews. But, the most common title that appeared in this gospel are Son of God, Messiah/Christ, and Son of Man. While Jesus referred himself as a Son of Man.

From lots of characters that have been discussed, not all of them successfully recognized Jesus. The most ironic one was Jesus' disciples. His disciples had a very close relationship with Jesus, yet turns out, they did not fully understand who He Was, especially Peter as he denied of knowing Jesus and Judas Iscariot who betrayed Him. The rest that failed to recognize Jesus were the high priest, the Pharisees, the Herodians, the scribes, and the elders. They had conflicts with Jesus because they did not believe that Jesus was the Messiah and tempted Jesus for several times. On the other hand, there was also people who recognized Jesus along with His identity, such as the unclean spirit, the blind man Bartimeus, and all of the sick people.

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