

## **Jesus: Christ, Savior, Redeemer, Etc.**

Mark 8:27-31

July 13, 2008

What words do you use when you refer to me? I mean, do you talk about me as your pastor, your senior pastor, your lead pastor, preacher, minister, reverend?

As I was pondering this idea this past week I started to think of persons I relate to outside the field of my vocation. I am quite confident that my nieces and nephews wouldn't think of greeting me with: "Good to see you, Rev. Croy!" There's a special warmth that flows between us when they say "Uncle Bill," not unlike that which I feel when you refer to me as your pastor, but yet different.

And when Corinne and Evan, my grandchildren, scream as they run and jump into my arms, "Pa, Pa," well, that's pretty special let me tell you.

And my mom, my aunts, uncles, and cousins, "Billy" is still pretty special coming from their lips. (Don't even think about it!) And there's nothing quite like "Bill" from Dorothy; or, "dad" from Megan, Jeremy and Meladie, my children and daughter-in-law. Oh, they all know I am a minister – a preacher – a pastor – those just aren't the titles that come into their mind when they think of me. Those words/titles don't describe the relationship I have with them.

Oh, and yes, there are those nicknames. Some of you know the one that most people used for me during my teen years. (Dare I say it outloud?) Toots. It developed from a day of rhyming our names during recess in the 5<sup>th</sup> grade: "Tootsie Toy, Billy Croy" was what came out of my friend, Paul Quint's mind and mouth and Toots stuck. (Again, don't even think of it!)

I'm not sure anyone has had as many words/titles associated with them as Jesus has - Christ, Redeemer, Savior, Friend, Alpha & Omega, Light of the World, Word, Son of Man, Son of God, Bread of Life, Lord, Messiah.

Now, the use of these words when we talk about Jesus has become so commonplace we forget that there were reasons these words became associated with him and many of them had to be redefined in order to refer to him because what they meant when Jesus walked this earth was something quite different. There's no way we can look at all of the words I've just mentioned, but I want to consider a couple of them at least.

First, let's look at his birth name – his proper or common name – Jesus. In the days when the Bible was being written names were chosen for babies for lots of different reasons. Often it was because of some characteristic noticed early on: Esau meant "hairyone" and Korah meant "bald." Sometimes something significant happened when a child was borne or the parents had some hope or prayer for their child: Zechariah's name, for example, stood for "God has remembered." Sometimes everyday objects motivated the naming of some children: Tamar meant "palm tree" and Tabitha meant "gazelle."<sup>1</sup>

The scriptures inform us that Joseph was told in a dream that he was to name his son Jesus because he would save his people from their sins. It was understood that this was to fulfill a prophecy. In Matthew 1:20 and following it is recorded that Joseph (after considering quietly divorcing Mary) was approached by an angel and told that he shouldn't be afraid to marry Mary and that he should give his new son the name of Jesus signifying that he would save his people from their sins. The passage ends with: "All this took place to fulfill what the

Lord had said through the prophet: ‘The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel – which means, *God with us.*’<sup>2</sup>

Now, probably the word we most often use when talking about Jesus is the word Christ. As a result it’s sometimes hard to remember that this is not Jesus’ surname. Jesus Christ is not the same as Bill Croy or Greg White or... Christ is a title meant to identify Jesus’ messianic nature. *Christos* was the Greek word for messiah. The word was meant to refer to a ruler or king who was going to come and usher in God’s kingdom on earth.<sup>3</sup>

Obviously there were political implications associated with the word. It’s interesting to note that Jesus never referenced himself as the promised political messiah. His messiahship was going to be in the hearts of people and redemptive in nature and it was not going to result in his becoming a political power. People had a mistaken image of him when they referred to him as messiah when he walked among them. Its meaning was filled with new meaning as a result of his death and resurrection and thus we use the word rather freely and intimately in our day.

The next title I want us to think about is Lord. This one’s a little tricky because it’s sometimes used as a form of polite address like sir or mister. But it’s also used as a sort of confession, especially after the resurrection. “His earthly life was viewed as the time of humiliation; the Resurrection was his exaltation as Lord.”<sup>4</sup> While there’s little question that when the disciples used the word when talking with or about Jesus they were just politely addressing him, today we use it more to describe the authoritative relationship he has in our lives. When we refer to him as Lord we are referencing that he has power, control, influence in our lives.

Another title associated with Jesus is the phrase “Son of God.” In Jesus’ day government leaders were understood to be God’s sons. In fact, there was a ceremony held on the first day of the New Year when the king was acclaimed as God’s son – “the one chosen and empowered by God to rule in his behalf over his People.”<sup>5</sup>

Some think that this title affirms the idea that Jesus possessed a divine nature derived from God. The Greeks thought of a god-man this way. The term really gets its validation for us as a result of the reference in Luke 3:22 where a voice announced following Jesus’ baptism by John: “Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee.”

Again, while Jesus spoke of God as Father and did so with an intimacy never thought of before, thus offending his fellow Jews, there’s no evidence that he ever referred to himself as “son” or “Son of God.” It’s a reference history has filled with meaning that allows us to more freely use it about him without all the baggage that was associated with it in his own day.<sup>6</sup>

“Lamb of God” is another reference used of Jesus. It is used in the Gospels primarily by John. It’s a concept picked up in Paul’s letters. While the most common understanding is that it is a reference to the fact that Jesus’ was crucified for our sins similar to the way lambs were sacrificed to appease the gods, there are some who believe that is not necessarily the case. They argue that the Galilean Aramaic had a word for lamb which had the additional common meaning of a male child. Thus “lamb of God” could have been a slang means of saying “Son of God” or “God’s Kid.”<sup>7</sup> While interesting, I would say to you that the most common understanding is really what most have on their minds when we use it in our liturgies: “O Lamb of God, that takest away the sins of the world, have mercy on us.”

Well, I didn't get near as many titles examined this morning as I had hoped. The one we dare not skip though is "Son of Man."

William Barclay has a chapter in his book The Mind of Jesus entitled "The Self-chosen Title of Jesus." It's probably one of the most authoritative summaries on the concept of the "son of man" there is. Much of the chapter presents the different views of why Jesus used the term "son of man" about himself. It explains the development of the term based on the prophetic book of Daniel which reveals how the Israelites never ceased expecting and hoping the Messiah would come despite all the hardships they endured. In Daniel this coming one is referenced as "one like unto a son of man."<sup>8</sup>

Barclay then noted that if that was the only reference to the Son of Man the picture would have been that the Son of man was gentle and humane and kind and nothing like the savage world rulers known up until that time. But, he went on to write about the book of Enoch and its images of the Son of Man as "a divine, superhuman, apocalyptic figure, ready to descend in victorious power from heaven, breathing out slaughter and destruction, exalting the righteous but smashing the enemies of God, and bringing in the end all things to judgment."<sup>9</sup> The book of Enoch was believed to have been written around 70 BC.

Then Barclay summarized various ways Jesus used the title in the Gospels. He noted that Jesus used it as a substitute for "I" ("Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man has nowhere to lay his head."). He used it when he was making great claims or declarations ("The Son of Man came to seek and save the lost"). He used it in connection with the Resurrection. He used it when referencing the glory which was to come. He used it when referencing his coming again. He used it when referencing coming judgment.

And then Barclay commented: "If we pause here, we see that there is nothing in these uses of the term Son of Man which does not fit into the picture which we have already found in Enoch. This was a way of speaking of the Son of Man which was perfectly intelligible to popular Jewish thought. The majestic glory, the stern judgment, the ultimate triumph could all have come straight from the picture in Enoch."<sup>10</sup>

What was different and new was that Jesus repeatedly used the term when he referenced his sufferings and death. This had never before been associated with the Son of Man or Messiah. The Jewish people had to have been shocked by this thought.

Which brings us to the Caesarea Philippi exchange between Jesus and his disciples. It explains, for example, Peter's lashing out at Jesus when Jesus followed Peter's statement of faith in him as the Christ with talk about his suffering and death. It explains Jesus' violent reaction to Peter's outburst. It explains why the disciples so often appeared to fail to understand.<sup>11</sup>

Barclay ended his chapter with: "Jesus took and used the term Son of Man, not because he wished to enact and fulfil it as men understood it; not because it was so colourless that he could insert any meaning he chose into it. He took it that he might use it in such a way that those who heard him might be shocked and startled into listening and thinking. Even then it required the events of the Cross and the Resurrection to interpret it to the dull minds of men. But by his use of it Jesus expressed his own certainty that as the Suffering Servant he must accept the Cross, and that as the Messianic King he must enter into glory."<sup>12</sup>

There are at least two things we need to keep in mind because of this passage. The first is that Peter's discovery was simply that none of the human categories, even the highest ones known in that day, were or are adequate to

describe Jesus. Elijah, Jeremiah, John the Baptist, one of the prophets – these are great people to be like – but in the end they don't hold a candle to who Jesus is.

The second thing this passage teaches us is that our discovery of Jesus must be a personal one. The question directed at the followers is directed to each one of us as well and each one of us must respond for ourselves as well. There comes a time when our knowledge of Jesus can no longer be second hand – what our parents or friends or church tells us it should be. Christianity ultimately can never simply be about knowing about Jesus. There comes a time when we must know Jesus for ourselves. Jesus asks us the same question he asked his followers at Caesarea Philippi: “And you, who do you say that I am?” “Who do you think I am?” What do you think about me and my teachings?”

The Invitation to Christian Discipleship this morning is an invitation for us to consider where we are in our relationship with Jesus Christ. Are any of us in need of acknowledging him as Lord and Savior in a new way this morning? Are any of us in need of recommitting ourselves to that relationship?

Let us pray: Oh, Lord, our hearts are fluttering with the revelation that You are the Christ – but still our minds fight us – our intellect doesn't want to give in to such unbelievable titles – and besides, once we allow you to be known as the Christ – our Savior, Redeemer, Lord, the Son of Man, Your Son – belief becomes our own and we have to live it out and defend it. Oh, Lord, help our hearts to win out – so that our minds might see more clearly. In your name we pray. Amen.

1. [www.allaboutjesuschrist.org/names-of-jesus.htm](http://www.allaboutjesuschrist.org/names-of-jesus.htm).
2. Ibid.
3. Howard Clark Kee, Franklin W. Young, & Karlfriend Froehlich, Understanding the New Testament (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1965), p. 102.
4. Ibid., p. 103.
5. Ibid., p. 101, #19 (See S. Mowinckel, *He That Cometh* (New York: Abingdon, 1956), especially pp. 56-95.)
6. Ibid., p. 101.
7. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Name\\_of\\_Jesus\\_in\\_the\\_Old\\_Testament](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Name_of_Jesus_in_the_Old_Testament)..
8. William Barclay, The Mind of Jesus (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1961), p. 145.
9. Ibid., p. 146.
10. Ibid., p. 147.
11. Ibid., pp. 147-148.
12. Ibid., p. 149.