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## WHO DID JESUS THINK HE WAS?<sup>1</sup>

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*Don Garlington*

There are several ways in which one may seek to assess what Jesus of Nazareth thought of Himself and of His role in history. As Robert Stein notes, in the past attention was focused mostly on the various names used to describe His person and mission. However, today this method is not as popular as it once was. As a result, more emphasis is placed on the indirect or implicit claims of Jesus rather than on His direct or explicit ones. There is good reason for this, Stein says, because people reveal their conception of who they are not merely by the titles they use to describe themselves but also by the way they act and what they say.<sup>2</sup>

Therefore, even though the Christological titles approach, in my view, should not be discarded as altogether antiquated,<sup>3</sup> we shall investigate the self-disclosure of Jesus as it is revealed in representative (hardly exhaustive) examples of His works and words. The separation of the actions from the sayings, to be sure, will be somewhat arbitrary, just because His works were not performed in silence, and His words were not uttered without powerful corroboration by deeds. To choose two examples at random, significant indications of the unity of the deed/word complex in Jesus' self-disclosure can be found in Mark 1:21-28 and Luke 24:19. The former pericope commences with the notice that Jesus entered the synagogue in Capernaum and began to teach. The teaching process was immediately interrupted by an exorcism, the result of which was that people were com-

pelled to pose the question, "What is this? A new teaching!" For them, teaching and healing were of a piece. According to the latter verse, the disciples on the way to Emmaus depict Jesus as "a prophet mighty in *deed* and *word* in the sight of God and all the people." Perhaps this equivalence of doing and speaking is attributable to the fact that the Hebrew word for "word" (*debar*) simultaneously means speech and action (cf. Heb. 1:1-2). Nevertheless, for the purposes of organization we shall differentiate between the two on the basis of whether the works or the words receive the primary emphasis.<sup>4</sup>

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### THE WORKS OF JESUS

A great deal can be learned of Jesus' self-consciousness by noting how He acted. Frequently, (over) familiarity with Christian tradition impairs our recognition of the staggering claims Jesus made by His actions, claims to a unique authority and to prerogatives belonging to God alone. Given the startling impact that these doings must have had on His contemporaries, it is understandable, from the human point of view, why such antagonism was aroused against

Him by the Jewish religious leaders, particularly when His actions, such as the cleansing of the temple and the cursing of the fig tree (as symbol of Israel), threatened their power-base. From this vantage point, most of what He did could be (and was) construed as deeply subversive to Israel's dreams of nationalistic independence and dominance.<sup>5</sup>

### JESUS' UNIQUE AUTHORITY

In Mark 11:27-33, the following incident is related:

And they came again to Jerusalem. And as He was walking in the temple, the chief priests, and scribes, and elders came to Him, and began saying to Him, "By what authority are You doing these things, or who gave You this authority to do these things?" And Jesus said to them, "I will ask you one question, and you answer Me, and then I will tell you by what authority I do these things. Was the baptism of John from heaven, or from men? Answer Me." And they began reasoning among themselves, saying, "If we say, 'From heaven,' He will say, 'Then why did you not believe him?' But shall we say, 'From men'?"—they were afraid of the multitude, for all considered John to have been a prophet indeed. And answering Jesus, they said, "We do not know." And Jesus said to them, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things" (Cf. also John 2:18).

Although this passage in its present location is associated with the cleansing of the temple, it is quite likely that the question of the opponents of Jesus involved not only Jesus' claim of authority to cleanse the temple but His other actions as well. The plural "these things" in verses 28 and 33 seems to indicate that whereas the cleansing of the temple was the primary question at hand, the claim of authority in Jesus' other actions forms at least a background for this question. This authority differed from that of His contemporaries not only in degree but in kind. Thus, the ques-

tion, "By what authority are you doing these things?" naturally arose. Worded differently, the question can be interpreted, "Who are You, Jesus, that You think You can do these things?" (cf. Mark 4:41). It is evident that the antagonists of Jesus saw in His actions a claim to a unique (divine) authority which could not go unchallenged.

Jesus' understanding of His authority extends to several other areas besides the cleansing of the temple. In His casting out of demons, Jesus revealed that He had authority over the demons (Mark 1:27, 32-34; 5:1-13; Luke 11:20). This authority He was even able to bestow upon His disciples (Mark 3:15; 6:7-13; Luke 10:17). Yet Jesus claimed authority not merely over the demons but over the Prince of Demons himself: "But no one can enter the strong man's house and plunder his property, unless he first binds the strong man, and then indeed he will plunder his house" (Mark 3:27).

In the parallel account in Luke this claim is sharpened, and Jesus claims to be "stronger" than Satan: "When a strong man, fully armed, guards his own homestead, his possessions are undisturbed; but when someone stronger than he attacks him and overpowers him, he takes away from him all his armor on which he had relied, and distributes his plunder" (Luke 11:21-22; cf. Luke 10:17-18).

Jesus here claims a unique authority. Others may also cast out demons, but Jesus possesses authority over Satan himself. His plundering of the house of Satan, i.e., His casting out of demons, indicates that He is "stronger" than Satan!

Jesus also possessed authority to perform miracles of healing. While it is true that others in the past, as well as in the present, could heal, the unique ability of Jesus to heal was recognized on numerous occasions. After He healed the paralytic we read that the bystanders "were all amazed and glorified God, saying, 'We have never seen anything like this'" (Mark 2:12; cf. also Mark 1:27; 7:37; Matt. 9:33; John 9:32).

It is evident that by all standards of comparison, Jesus

possessed a unique authority to heal, exceeding by far any such ability on the part of His contemporaries. Even His opponents had to acknowledge grudgingly this ability and authority to heal, but they sought to discredit this by attributing His authority to Satan (Mark 3:22; Matt. 9:34) or to sorcery which He had learned in Egypt.<sup>6</sup>

### THE ASSUMPTION OF DIVINE PREROGATIVES BY JESUS

At times Jesus claims authority to perform actions that are the exclusive prerogative of God. One example of this is the forgiveness of sin, as illustrated by Mark 2:5-8:

And Jesus seeing their faith said to the paralytic, "My son, your sins are forgiven." But there were some of the scribes sitting there and reasoning in their hearts, "Why does this man speak that way? He is blaspheming; who can forgive sins but God alone?"

Although some scholars maintain that the words "Your sins are forgiven" are simply an example of the "divine passive," which, if placed in the active voice, would make God the subject of the verb and thus attribute to Jesus no unique assertion of authority, these words are more than a simple statement by Jesus that God had forgiven the paralytic his sins. The reaction of the scribes is proof of this; they see in this statement of Jesus not a mere declaration that God has forgiven this man his sins but an effectuation of his forgiveness. The scribes rightly interpret Jesus' actions as the exercising of a divine prerogative, the power actually to forgive sins! His actions profess the ability to perform a spiritual as well as a physical miracle in the life of the paralytic. A similar incident and reaction are found in Luke 7:36-50. In vv. 48-49 we read: "And He said to her, 'Your sins have been forgiven.' And those who were reclin-

ing at the table with Him began to say to themselves, 'Who is this man who even forgives sins?'"

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*The three parables of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son (or "the gracious Father") are not merely examples of God's great love for the lost but are both an apology for Jesus' behavior in associating with the outcasts of Israel and a Christological proclamation.*



That Jesus is personally and directly forgiving the woman's sins is evident not only from these verses but from the pericope as a whole. In the passage, the woman performs loving acts upon Jesus (vv. 37-38, 43-46), and in return Jesus defends her actions by a parable. In the parable, He describes two debtors loving the one who has forgiven them their debts. In so doing, He defends the woman's love of Him because of His forgiveness of her. The analogy of the parable indicates that the debtors (or sinners) who have been forgiven love the one who forgave them. From this it is clear that the woman is performing acts of love upon Jesus because she believes that Jesus has forgiven her. Jesus likewise understands her actions in just this way: "Simon, this woman loves Me a great deal because I have forgiven her much." It is difficult to inter-

pret these words to infer that since God has forgiven this woman much, she, as a result, loves Jesus much. It seems, therefore, most logical to interpret these passages as indicating that Jesus assumed that He possessed the authority to forgive sins. This is confirmed by the fact that His audience instinctively interpreted the situation in this manner. It is they who put the question, as paraphrased by A. M. Hunter: "Who then is this who can come forward as the divine pardon incarnate, proclaiming His power to lead sinful men there and then into God's presence?"<sup>7</sup>

On several occasions Jesus equated His own actions with the actions of God Himself. In Luke 15 we have a trilogy of parables which are introduced as follows: "Now all the tax-gatherers and the sinners were coming near Him to listen to Him. And both the Pharisees and the scribes began to grumble, saying, 'This man receives sinners and eats with them'" (Luke 15: 1-2).

The three parables of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son (or "the gracious Father") are not merely examples of God's great love for the lost but are both an apology for Jesus' behavior in associating with the outcasts of Israel and a Christological proclamation. Jesus is claiming that His offering of forgiveness and pardon to the tax collectors and sinners is in reality God's reaching out and pardoning them. He explains His behavior by professing to stand in God's stead and acting on His behalf with His authority.

It is also clear that Jesus spoke to tax collectors, who were excluded from the people of God because of their frequent contact with pagans and questionable business conduct, summoning them to fellowship at his table and thus to fellowship with God; in other words, he offered forgiveness as though he stood in the place of God. It is also certain that he promised men the kingdom of God as though he had authority to grant it.<sup>8</sup>

### THE WORDS OF JESUS

In the words of Jesus, as well as in His actions, we find that He discloses what He thought of Himself and His mission. The words of Jesus reveal that He thought He possessed an authority such as no other man had, for whereas the prophets and Moses spoke what God had revealed to them, Jesus spoke His own words which were nevertheless the Word of God. In contrast to those who had come before and proclaimed, "Thus says the Lord," the even more authoritative word of Jesus went out, "But I say to you."

### AUTHORITY OVER THE LAW

Once again, our familiarity with the sayings of Jesus and Christian tradition tends to blunt the impact of Jesus' attitude toward the Law. It is, however, scarcely possible to exaggerate the degree to which Moses and the Law were held in veneration in the time of Jesus. The Law was the embodiment of the will of God. It was one of the few central unifying factors of Israel, for all the sects of Israel held the Law as sacred. To minimize or contradict the most minute detail of the Law was damnable.<sup>9</sup> It is quite possible that in no other area does the authority which Jesus claimed stand out more clearly than in His freedom to intensify, to revise, and even to reject the Law.

You have heard that it was said, "An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth." But I say to you, do not resist one who is evil (Matt. 5:38-39a).

And it was also said, "Whoever sends his wife away, let him give her a certificate of divorce"; but I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except for the cause of unchastity, makes her commit adultery (Matt. 5:31-32; cf. Mark 10:2-12).

Although Jesus at times spoke of the divine origin of

the Law (Matt. 5:17-19; Mark 7:9-10), it is clear that He, on His own authority, felt free to abolish certain aspects of the Law. There is no necessary justification at times for this claim, such as a reference to the purpose of God in creation (as in Mark 10:6) or to an imminent *parousia*, but simply a "But I say!"<sup>10</sup> Jesus claimed therefore to speak with an even greater authority than Moses, who received the stone tablets from the hand of God, for Jesus believed Himself to possess authority not merely to interpret the Law but to abolish it. The rabbis of His day might seek to twist the Law to fit their own interpretative scheme, but Jesus saw no such necessity. He simply placed His personal authority above it. Surely those who heard Him speak thus must have been forced to ask the question, "Who is this who claims such authority over the very law of God?" Martin Hengel summarizes the issue well:

Jesus' claim to authority gains its ultimate sharpness from the simply sovereign attitude he adopts towards the Law of Moses. This is where we find the fundamental point of distinction over against Pharisaism and the charismatic, apocalyptic trends within Judaism, including Essenism and the Baptist movements. For him the Mosaic Torah no longer constituted the focal point and the ultimately valid standard. Jesus did not stand under the authority of the Torah received at Sinai by Moses—as all his Jewish contemporaries did—but stood above it. His sayings, "Behold, a greater than Solomon is here" and "Behold, a greater than Jonah is here" . . . could be supplemented in the light of this by "Behold, something greater than Moses is here." This is proved by the antitheses of the Sermon on the Mount. . . . Deeply conscious of the in-breaking of God's rule, Jesus for the first time in Judaism looks behind the Law of Moses towards the original will of God.<sup>11</sup>

In short, "Here is a Torah-teacher who says in his own name what the Torah says in God's name."<sup>12</sup>

### JESUS' USE OF "AMEN"

Frequently, we find on the lips of Jesus the formula, "Truly (lit. "Amen") I say to you."<sup>13</sup> For example:

Jesus said, "Truly I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or farms, for My sake and for the gospel's sake, but that he shall receive a hundred times as much now in the present age, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and farms, along with persecutions; and in the age to come, eternal life" (Mark 10:29-30).

And when you pray, you are not to be as the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners, in order that they may be seen by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full (Matt. 6:5).<sup>14</sup>

The manner in which Jesus used this expression is completely new and has no parallel in Jewish literature or in the rest of the New Testament.<sup>15</sup> Its use by Jesus can be called "a christology in a nutshell,"<sup>16</sup> for by His use of the term Jesus claims not only the certainty of what is being said but its divine origin as well. The "Truly" implies a finality and authority to the words that follow which is quite unparalleled and transcends that of any of the religious leaders of His day. But upon what does Jesus base the finality and reliability of His statement? Is it a new, Scripture-like, revelation that He has received from God, as though He were merely one of the prophets of old? Is it some new, undeniable logic? No, it is the "I say so!" The truly indeed points to the certainty of Jesus' words, but the reason it is certain is that Jesus is saying it. In other words, His sayings are to be believed and received just because He says so. "When therefore you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be honored by men. Truly

I say to you, they have their reward in full" (Matt. 6:2).

Perhaps the force of Jesus' assertion can be better grasped by rendering it as follows: "Amen, you can be certain that they [already] have their reward, because I say so!" It is not surprising that such teaching brought the following response from the crowds: "The result was that when Jesus had finished these words, the multitudes were amazed at His teaching; for He was teaching them as one having authority, and not as their scribes" (Matt. 7:28-29).

T. W. Manson, followed by J. Jeremias, is right in supposing that it was Jesus' desire to use this in order to replace the authoritative prophetic formula, "Thus says the Lord."<sup>17</sup> This is a startling, not to say staggering, claim, not simply because Jesus places Himself on a par with the prophets of old, but more especially because He goes beyond the prophets. Again as Hengel discerns:

As Jesus here substitutes his "I say unto you" for an address by God, he will have not merely replaced the prophetic formula, but consciously have sought to surpass it. It would be possible to speak in this connection of the "immediacy of his relation to God," his "certainty of God," and those loath to use such "psychologising" terms may speak of his unique, underivable claim to authority, grounded in God himself. Quite certainly Jesus was not a "teacher" comparable with the later rabbinical experts in the Law, and he was a great deal more than a prophet. Even within the characterization we have preferred, of an "eschatological charismatic," he remains in the last resort incommensurable, and so basically confounds every attempt to fit him into the categories suggested by the phenomenology or sociology of religion. Consequently, the centrality, in recent discussion, of the phenomenon of the underivable nature of Jesus' authority, is fully justified. One can find no better adjective than "messianic" to describe it.<sup>18</sup>

### THE TOTALITARIAN CLAIMS OF JESUS

Although the term "totalitarian" has certain negative connotations, A. M. Hunter's use of this term is an accurate one and describes well the total commitment that Jesus demanded of His followers.<sup>19</sup> On the lips of anyone else, the claims of Jesus would appear to be evidence of gross egomania (called by psychologists "Narcissistic Personality Disorder"), for Jesus clearly implies that the entire world revolves around Himself and that the destiny of all is dependent on their acceptance or rejection of Him.

Everyone therefore who shall confess Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever shall deny Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven (Matt. 10:32-33).

And blessed is he who keeps from stumbling over Me (Matt. 11:6).

If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's shall save it. For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will also be ashamed of him when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels (Mark 8:34-35, 38; cf. also Matt. 10:40 and Mark 9:37).

According to Jesus, the fate of individuals centers around Him. Rejection of Him means eternal judgment; acceptance of Him means acceptance by God. The pivotal point of history and salvation, Jesus claims, is Himself. To obey Him is to be wise and escape judgment, but to reject His words is to be foolish and perish, for His words are the only sure foundation upon which to build (Matt. 7:24-27). Commitment and obedience to Him must therefore take priority over all other relationships, even those of the family (Matt. 10:35-37; Luke 14:26).

Closely related to the above sayings are various other sayings. These can be classified as follows.

1) The "I" Sayings. For example: "Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28). "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill" (Matt. 5:17).<sup>20</sup> "I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners" (Mark 2:17; Luke 19:10). "I have come to cast fire upon the earth; and how I wish it were already kindled!" (Luke 12:49).

2) The "I Am" Sayings of John. These are derived from Isaiah 40-55, where Yahweh declares Himself to be the only God and Creator.<sup>21</sup> Jesus thus stands in the place of Yahweh as the sole and unique God of Israel and the nations. The English "I Am" thus reproduces the Hebrew of Isaiah, *ani hu* ("I am He"), as translated into Greek as *ego eimi*, which in turn is carried over into John's gospel.

3) The "I came" or "I have come" Sayings (e.g., Matt. 5:17; 10:34; Mark 1:38; John 5:43; 6:38; 9:39; 10:10; 12:46). These sayings all refer to Jesus' descent from heaven into the world. As such, they speak clearly of His preincarnate existence.<sup>22</sup>

Numerous other examples could be given in which we find similar statements, but the above are sufficient to demonstrate the "self-centered" aspect of the teachings of Jesus.<sup>23</sup> Such an ego-centered message can be viewed in several ways. It may be viewed as a repulsive egomania, but the claims of Jesus are simply too great, too all-encompassing to be interpreted as a case of a man who thinks "more highly of himself than he ought to think" (Rom. 12:3). There seem to be only two possible ways of interpreting the totalitarian nature of the claims of Jesus. We must assume either that Jesus was deluded and unstable, with unusual delusions of grandeur, or we are faced with the realization that Jesus is truly the one who speaks with divine authority, who actually

divided all of history into B.C.-A.D.,<sup>24</sup> and whose rejection or acceptance determines the fate of every individual. Regardless of what a person may decide, the words of Jesus reveal a unique and all-encompassing Christological claim.

#### JESUS' COMPARISON OF HIMSELF WITH OLD TESTAMENT PERSONALITIES AND INSTITUTIONS

We find several places in the Gospels where Jesus expressly compared Himself to several great men of the Old Testament and expressed His superiority over them. It has already been mentioned that Jesus professed to be greater than the prophet Jonah and the king Solomon. It is also evident that Jesus by overruling the commands of Moses was claiming that He was greater than Moses as well, for each of the "You have heard that it was said . . . But I say . . ." statements in Matthew 5 can also be understood as saying "Moses said, but I say." Thus, in comparing His words to the words of Moses, Jesus was asserting His superiority over Moses. In the gospel of John we find two other comparisons. In John 8:53, after Jesus spoke of the importance of keeping His word, the response is: "Surely you are not greater than our father Abraham, who died? The prophets died too; whom do You make Yourself to be?"

In John 4:12 the contrast is between Jacob and Jesus: "You are not greater than our father Jacob, are You, who gave us the well?" By the reply it is evident that Jesus did consider Himself greater than Jacob, because the "water" He provides is greater than the water Jacob provided in his well. In a similar kind of comparison Jesus professes to be greater than the temple: "I tell you, something greater than the temple is here" (Matt. 12:6). In its present context it is evident that the "something" which is greater refers to the one who is "Lord of the Sabbath."

#### TITLES ACCEPTED BY JESUS

In this segment, we refer not to sayings of Jesus as such but to sayings of others who assess Him in one way or another. The following survey of materials, drawn in particular from John's gospel, builds upon the common sense notion that what one thinks of oneself cannot normally be dissociated from what others think of one. In other words, the following titles attributed to Jesus were readily accepted by Him with no hint that He differed with the assessment of those forwarding the titles in question. Thus, what others thought of Jesus, as received by Him, provides an invaluable historical index to what He thought of Himself.<sup>25</sup>

1) "Savior of the World." John's presentation of the episode in Samaria, which culminates in Jesus' being acclaimed as "the Savior of the world," is a remarkable presentation indeed. However, before giving specific attention to that episode, it should be noted that the image of Jesus as saving the world is not limited to the Samaritans' acclamation of Him as Savior but is also extensively portrayed in other sections of the gospel. In His dialogue with Nicodemus (3:17) and within His farewell discourse (12:44), Jesus Himself describes His mission as involving a "saving" of the world. In addition, this image is present in a number of other passages (1:29; 3:16-17; 6:33; 6:51).

Nevertheless, our present focus is on the Samaritan woman's progression in understanding the different aspects of Jesus' identity. As John describes her encounter with Jesus (4:7-26), there is a remarkable development in her own understanding of who He actually is.

The woman begins with the recognition that Jesus is a Jew (4:9). Then as the dialogue with Jesus continues and as He leads her forward by His responses, she sees Him as someone perhaps greater than Jacob (4:12), as a prophet (4:19), and as the Messiah (4:25, 29). Indeed, she gradual-

ly becomes so convinced of His exalted identity that she eventually proclaims Him to her townspeople (4:28-29).

John then portrays these other Samaritans as being so impressed and persuaded by the woman's testimony that they come out to Jesus and beseech Him to remain with them (4:40). The evangelist thereafter supplies two further notes: (a) Jesus actually remained with them for two days, and (b) that because of Jesus' word during this time, even more of the townspeople came to believe in Him.

It is just at that juncture that John reports the Samaritans' culminating confession of Jesus. Note that in the verses now cited the element of strong personal belief is a prelude to the dramatic confession then given: "And they were saying to the woman, 'It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves and know that this One is indeed the Savior of the world'" (4:42).

What, then, are the dimensions of meaning attached to this title as it now stands within John's account? The first observation to be made is that, as used within this context, "Savior of the world" connotes an extremely high level of sovereignty. This observation follows from the fact that the title is bestowed at the conclusion of Jesus' encounter with the Samaritans, an encounter in which several other significant titles have already been bestowed upon Him. "Savior of the world" in effect tends to gather the aspects of meaning associated with such previous titles as "Prophet" and "Messiah" and indicates that Jesus' real identity is still greater. The title itself states that Jesus is Savior not of any particular people but rather of the entire world. Significantly this acclaim is given to Him, a Jew, by townspeople who are Samaritans. It is nevertheless clear that the saving work being attributed to Him extends far beyond the territories of Judea and Samaria and Galilee.<sup>26</sup>

Other elements in the scene portrayed by John also

contribute to the impression that this is a confession made uniquely with respect to Jesus. The townspeople have arrived at such a point of conviction after Jesus has remained with them for a period of two days. And thus their avowal to the woman that, over and beyond her words encouraging them to believe, "We have heard for ourselves, and we know." In this statement, every pronoun, phrase, and clause indicates that the Samaritans' solemn judgment about Jesus' identity has not been spoken casually.

2) "Lord." Within the gospel of John, "Lord" (*kurios*) is the preeminent title of address used by those who truly believe in Jesus. This pattern holds for the time of Jesus' public ministry and also characterizes the interval of His postresurrection appearances. In addition, after Jesus' resurrection, Mary Magdalene, the beloved disciple, and others use the term "the Lord" (*ho kurios*) in speaking of Jesus objectively.

In addition to these types of uses by disciples, "Lord" is also used by a number of other persons within the gospel who are in the process of coming to belief in Jesus. This is particularly true for those involved in situations in which Jesus heals. In addition, John himself as narrator occasionally uses "Lord" in reference to Jesus. And finally, when He washed His disciples' feet, Jesus Himself explicitly accepted this term in self-designation: "You call Me Teacher and Lord; and you are right, for so I am. If I then, the Lord and Teacher, washed your feet . . ." (13:13-14a).

From the standpoint of the present study, what is particularly significant in respect to many of these occurrences of "Lord" is that they serve unmistakably to convey and enhance the meaning that Jesus is a figure of exalted standing, someone whose sovereign power extends even to the limits of death and life. In order to illustrate this point, an analysis will now be made of the use of this title in three settings: (a) as it is used in Martha and Mary's interactions

with Jesus at the time of Lazarus' death, (b) as it is used in the postresurrection appearances of chapter 21, and (c) as it is used within the resurrection and postresurrection scenes of chapter 20. This last-mentioned will, in turn, prepare the way for the acclamation "my Lord and my God" at the end of chapter 20.

Initially, when Martha and Mary seek out Jesus, Lazarus is seriously ill. In contacting Him they address Him as "Lord," and their message also evidences their trust that Jesus has the power to restore Lazarus to health (11:3-4). By the time Jesus arrives on the scene, Lazarus has died. However, Martha (again addressing Jesus as "Lord") expresses a trust that even now Jesus can intervene with power (11:21-22). In a beautiful exchange, Jesus asserts that He has sovereign power over death and asks Martha if she believes this (11:23-26). In her response, Martha expresses her faith in Jesus' exalted, sovereign standing: "Yes, Lord; I have believed that You are the Christ, the Son of God, even He who comes into the world" (11:27).

Before proceeding to the tomb, Jesus next meets with Mary, who, like her sister, addresses Him as "Lord" and with Martha's exact confession (11:32b). Arriving at the site, Jesus reassures Martha of His power to intervene and then prays aloud to the Father. Remarkably, He prays not in petition but rather for the purpose of indicating to those assembled His own close relationship with the Father (11:41b-42). Jesus, the one hailed and addressed as "Lord" throughout this episode, then authoritatively and sovereignly bids Lazarus to come forth from the tomb (11:43-44).

John 21 contains a remarkable cluster of occurrences of "Lord." Considerably more could be said about these materials. However, for the present purposes it suffices to consider briefly that "Lord" is the sole title by which Peter and the beloved disciple address or refer to Jesus within that chapter. In this regard there are five occurrences to be noted.

When the beloved disciple first recognizes the risen Jesus on the beach, he exclaims to Peter, "It is the Lord" (21:7a). Subsequently, when Peter makes his threefold confession of love for Jesus, he addresses Jesus in each instance reverently as "Lord" (21:15, 16, 17). Finally, when Peter, the beloved disciple, and the risen Jesus are walking along the beach, Peter asks of Jesus, "Lord, and what about this man?" (21:21).

Again, what is significant about this usage (especially when a similar pattern of usage is observed for John 20) is that Jesus, the one who has risen to a glorified state, the one who is now sovereign beyond the limits of space and time, is consistently addressed and referred to as "Lord." This title is thus one used by His intimate disciples to express their sense of who He is and how He is to be named.

With respect to chapter 20, it can be said that even apart from its culminating scene containing Thomas' unsurpassed acclamation of Jesus, this chapter attests remarkably to two other aspects of Jesus' identity as Lord. First, in a striking pattern Mary Magdalene and then Jesus' other disciples refer to Him as "the Lord" (20:2, 18, 25). Second, Mary is also now shown to refer to Jesus with emphatic personal allegiance as "my Lord." For, in reply to the angels' question about her weeping, she states, "Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him" (20:13b).

It is interesting to reflect for a moment upon these two forms of usage. In the first case there is a note of objectivity, a note of absoluteness, conferred by the article. Jesus is *the* Lord. In contrast, the second use stresses a subjective and personal entering into relationship with Jesus as sovereign. Here Jesus is for Mary *her* Lord. He is the sovereign one to whom she is personally committed by reason of her belief, allegiance, and love.

Clearly these two aspects are complementary. For it is one and the same Jesus who is at once Mary's Lord and the Lord. Parenthetically it should be noted that a somewhat comparable subjective aspect in Jesus' disciples' relationship with the Father is also now adverted to. For with particularly poignant words Jesus asks Mary to share with His other disciples that "I ascend to My Father and your Father, and My God and your God" (20:17b).

3) "Lord and God." Keeping in mind the foregoing considerations relative to the usage of "Lord," the way is now open to a consideration of the memorable "my Lord and my God" confession made by Thomas at the end of chapter 20. With respect to the setting in which Thomas' confession occurs, it should be noted that the risen Jesus' powers are clearly in evidence in the scene John portrays. Jesus has already appeared to His disciples, passing freely through their locked door, and now, one week later, with Thomas present, He appears in their midst in a similar fashion. Seemingly this very fact is sufficient to engender Thomas' response of belief. In addition, the risen Jesus also indicates to Thomas that He is fully aware of the unbelieving comment that Thomas has made to the other disciples.

Faced with this experience of Jesus now transformed and sovereign beyond the limits of space and time, what is Thomas' response? In John's Greek, Thomas' outcry consists of six words, "*kurios mou kai ho theos mou*" (20:28). In English this confession is rendered powerfully as: "My Lord and my God!" Upon a moment's reflection, it is soon apparent that Thomas' words wonderfully affirm Jesus' majestic standing and at the same time express a now deeply held personal allegiance. In these aspects it is reminiscent of Mary Magdalene's use of "my Lord." Yet clearly Thomas' final words now express an even greater range and solemnity.

There are several important dimensions of meaning

attendant to Thomas' confession, three of which can be singled out. First, Thomas' confession unmistakably conveys an unsurpassed Christological meaning and thus serves as a fitting summit point for a gospel that is so manifestly concerned with Jesus' exalted status. Thomas' acclamation is indeed reminiscent of John's prologue statements that Jesus was with God and was God. And thus John approaches the conclusion of his gospel with an acclamation that attests to Jesus' divine standing in a way that is fully comparable to what he himself stated at the beginning.

Second, Thomas' words also have meaning in terms of the theme of belief. Reluctant to believe without a direct experience of the risen Jesus, Thomas' confession now indicates his complete and unqualified belief in Jesus. Yet as Jesus' words in response to him make clear, Thomas' faith is one that has been arrived at on the basis of seeing. And blessed even more are those who believe without seeing (20:29).

Third, of particular interest in the perspective of the present study is the fact that Thomas' confession expresses in the strongest possible way his personal allegiance to Jesus. This point has already been mentioned above but is deserving of further emphasis here. It is the double presence of the first-person possessive pronoun, "my," with the words of exalted identity, "Lord" and "God," which accomplish this effect. Jesus has surpassed objective status as the Lord and God of the universe. However, He is more than that in relation to Thomas. For Thomas, in addition, Jesus is indisputably "my Lord and my God." Jesus' sovereign status is not to be limited to a day, a week, a year. Nor is there any limit expressed for Thomas' allegiance to Him. For, just as Jesus is unendingly Lord and God, so must Thomas' (and our) confession of Him be unending.

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*We have posed the question, "Who did Jesus think He was?" The answer, in brief, is that He thought of Himself as no less than one who assumed the prerogatives of God. That is to say, He thought He was God.*

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### CONCLUSION

We have posed the question, "Who did Jesus think He was?" The answer, in brief, is that He thought of Himself as no less than one who assumed the prerogatives of God. That is to say, He thought He was God.<sup>27</sup> That such was His attitude is demonstrable by both His doings and His sayings. In every instance, there are unmistakable signposts to His uniqueness and deity.<sup>28</sup> Jesus did indeed have a Christology, and that was a Christology "from above" and not "from below." O'Neill is precisely right that there is no good evidence anywhere in the New Testament that God looked around and found a worthy man He could adopt as His Son. Rather, He has exalted the one who is His unique Son and has given Him the name which is above every other name.<sup>29</sup> This means, therefore, that confession of this Son is tantamount to the confession of Yahweh Himself in the *shemah* (Deut. 6:4).<sup>30</sup> For this reason, the worship of the Son is altogether appropriate.<sup>31</sup>

But even apart from Jesus' actions, words, and the titles ascribed to Him, we may say that He lived a "Christology." R. H. Fuller is exactly right:

An examination of Jesus' words—his proclamation of the Reign of God, and his call for decision, his enunciation of God's demand, and his teaching about the nearness of God—of his conduct—his calling men to follow him and his healing, his eating with publicans and sinners—forces upon us the conclusion that underlying his word and work is an implicit Christology. In Jesus as he understood himself, there is an immediate confrontation with "God's presence and his very self," offering judgment and salvation.<sup>32</sup>

In addition to the data presented above, there are other significant indicators of His sense of Godhood, which we can only mention in closing. For one, His entry into Jerusalem at the conclusion of the public ministry is represented by the Gospels as the return of Yahweh to Zion, in accordance with the ancient prophecies.<sup>33</sup> Another is the linkage of Matthew 4:4 (Deut. 8:3) with Matthew 5:1: He is the God from whose mouth the Word proceeds and by which one is to live.<sup>34</sup> Yet another is the Emmanuel Christology ("God with us"), or the theology of the divine presence. The theme marks a kind of *inclusio* in Matthew (1:23; 28:20). The one introduced as "God with us" at the beginning of Matthew, opens His mouth at the end of the gospel and declares His presence with the church, analogously to Yahweh, who promised to be present with His people Israel.<sup>35</sup>

In sum, what else can one say than "My Lord and my God" (John 20:28), and "Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift" (2 Cor. 9:15).

### Author

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### Notes

1. The title of this essay is an adaptation of that of an article by J. D. G. Dunn, "Who Did Paul Think He Was? A Study of Jewish Christian Identity," *New Testament Studies* 45 (1999), 174-93. Later I came upon the work of J. C. O'Neill, directly relevant to this study, actually titled *Who Did Jesus Think He Was?* (Leiden: Brill, 1995). That Jesus had a Christology is likewise demonstrated in full by B. Witherington, *The Christology of Jesus* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990); idem, *The Many Faces of the Christ: The Christologies of the New Testament and Beyond* (New York: Crossroad, 1998), 24-72. Among the plethora of works supportive of the thesis herein presented, particular mention may be made of H. Rowden, ed., *Christ the Lord: Studies in Christology Presented to Donald Guthrie* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity, 1982); J. B. Green, et al., eds., *Jesus of Nazareth: Lord and Christ. Essays on the Historical Jesus and New Testament Christology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994); M. Hengel, *Studies in Early Christology* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1995); idem, *The Son of God: The Origin of Christology and the History of Jewish-Hellenistic Religion* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976).
2. R. H. Stein, *The Method and Message of Jesus' Teachings* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978), 112.
3. Still valuable, for example, are the titular studies of G. Vos, *The Self-Disclosure of Jesus: The Modern Debate About the Messianic Consciousness* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954); O. Cullmann, *The Christology of the New Testament*, 2nd ed. (London: SCM, 1963), and F. Hahn, *The Titles of Jesus in Christology* (New York: World, 1969).
4. Witherington devotes two chapters of his *Christology of Jesus* (3 and 4) to Christology as it relates to Jesus' works and words, the whole of which is very valuable.
5. A point repeatedly made by N. T. Wright's brilliant *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996). Especially telling is Wright's notice of Jesus' renunciation of "Israel's idolatrous nationalism" (p. 462).
6. See Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, 69; Origen, *Against Celsus*, 1.28; *Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin* 43a.
7. A. M. Hunter, *The Work and Words of Jesus* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1950), 87-88.
8. E. Schweizer, *Jesus* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1972), 14; cf. also J. Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus*, 3rd ed. (London: SCM, 1963), 132.
9. *Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin* 99a, probably based on Deuteronomy 4:2; 123:32.
10. See my "Oath-Taking in the Community of the New Age (Matthew 5:33-37)," *Trinity Journal*, ns 16 (1995), 139-70.
11. M. Hengel, *The Charismatic Leader and His Followers* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1981), 70.
12. Jacob Neusner, as quoted by Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 646 (italics mine).
13. Translated "verily" by the KJV, "truly" by the RSV, "very truly" by the NRSV, and "I tell you the truth" by the NIV.
14. See further J. Jeremias, *New Testament Theology: The Proclamation of Jesus* (New York: Scribners, 1971), 35.
15. Ibid., and H. L. Strack and P. Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrash*, 6 vols. (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1924-28, 1956), 1.243.
16. H. Schlier, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 10 vols.; eds. G. Kittel and G. Friedrich (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964-76), 1.338.
17. T. W. Manson, *The Teaching of Jesus*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963), 207; J. Jeremias, *Abba: Studien zur neutestamentlichen Theologie und Zeitgeschichte* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1966), 149 (see the whole discussion of pp. 148-51).
18. Hengel, *Charismatic Leader* (italics mine), 69.
19. Hunter, *Work and Words*, 88.
20. This verse has been interpreted in several ways. The most common are: (a) Jesus lived in perfect obedience to the Law; (b) Jesus fulfilled the promises of the Old Testament in His coming; (c) Jesus brings the Law to its fuller and ultimate meaning as revealed in Matthew 5:21-48; and (d) Jesus came to bring the Law to its completion or end. Regardless of how one interprets this verse, there is still present a strong Christological claim.
21. See E. Stauffer, *Jesus and His Story* (New York: Knopf, 1970), 174-95.
22. See B. B. Warfield, "Jesus' Mission According to His Own Testimony," in *Biblical Doctrines* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1929), 255-324.
23. Cf. also Matthew 10:16; 23:39; 16:18-19; Mark 14:27, 58.
24. See especially O. Cullmann, *Christ and Time: The Primitive Christian Conception of Time and History* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1964); idem, *Salvation in History* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967).
25. Witherington is on the right track in his chapter titled "Christology and the Relationships of Jesus" (*Christology of Jesus*, 33-143). An acknowledgment of Jesus' relationships is indeed a promising avenue to get a fix on His self-conception (p. 33, notwithstanding what Witherington considers to be problems).
26. C. Koester rightly emphasizes that this title transcends the traditional meanings associated with Samaritan or Jewish messianic expectations

and attributes a universal significance to Jesus like that of Caesar ("The Savior of the World (John 4:42)," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 109 [1990], 668). Koester's marshaling of references from Josephus demonstrates that the welcome and title accorded Jesus by the Samaritans contrasts effectively to the comparable welcomes and titles accorded to Vespasian and Titus at the time of the Jewish War (p. 666). When viewed as a whole, John's gospel can be seen to operate regarding Roman titles much in the same way that it operates relative to Jewish titles and practices. In effect, the gospel of John presents Jesus as fulfilling the prevailing Roman titles such as "lord," "savior of the world," and "lord and god," just as he definitely fulfills such Jewish titles as "Son of Man," "King of Israel," and "Messiah." See R. J. Cassidy, *John's Gospel in New Perspective: Christology and the Realities of Roman Power* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1992).

27. See the detailed exposition of the theme of Jesus as God by M. J. Harris, *Jesus as God: The New Testament Use of Theos in Reference to Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992).
28. I have explored the relation of Jesus' uniqueness and deity in "Christ in the Wilderness," *Reformation & Revival Journal*, 2 (1993), 67-84. A lengthier version appears as "Jesus, the Unique Son of God: Tested and Faithful," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 150 (1994), 284-308; and an even more detailed study was published as *Jesus the Unique Son of God: Tested and Faithful* (Richmond Hill, Ontario: Canadian Christian Publications, 1995).
29. O'Neill, *Who Did Jesus Think He Was?*, 74. O'Neill's discussion of the Trinity and the incarnation in the New Testament is excellent (pp. 74-93).
30. See N. T. Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 120-36.
31. See Witherington, *The Many Faces of the Christ*, 73-102.
32. R. H. Fuller, *The Foundations of New Testament Christology* (New York: Scribners, 1965), 106; cf. G. Bornkamm, *Jesus of Nazareth* (New York: Harper, 1960), 178.
33. See Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 612-53.
34. R. H. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Literary and Theological Art* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 56, 67.
35. See D. D. Kupp, *Matthew's Emmanuel: Divine Presence and God's People in the First Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996). Paul's application of Yahweh texts to Jesus is explored by D. B. Capes, *Old Testament Yahweh Texts in Paul's Christology* (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1992).