

The Teachings Of Jesus

(The Sermon on the Mount)

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"Never a Man Spoke as This Man!"

The title most commonly ascribed to Jesus of Nazareth is "the Christ or the Messiah." Throughout the NT writings, however, we find an array of titles by which he was designated or confessed. He most often identified himself "the Son of Man," a self-designation found on his lips in over eighty occurrences. He is called by others: the Son of God, the Savior, Lord, Prophet, Priest, King, the Last Adam, and even God. In one in one occurrence, he is called our Great God and Savior. All of these messianic or christological titles tell us something of who the earliest Christians believed Jesus of Nazareth to be. But, the designation by which he was first called was "*Rabbi*/teacher."

He Was First Called Teacher/Rabbi

The "Rabbi" in First Century Judaism

The term "Rabbi," in Hebrew and Aramaic, was a term used to address the one learned in the Jewish teaching of the first century. The term, as used by a disciple or *talmid* of a given teacher, literally meant, "My Superior / One Greater than I," and was considered a term of great respect (i.e., respect for one's knowledge). The Hebrew "*Rabboni*" is simply an intensive form of the term Rabbi, usually reserved for the most respected rabbis (cf. Mark 10:51; John 20:16). It is clearly the title for a religious teacher in Judaism;

specifically, a scholar in matters of religion (cf. Vincent Taylor, *The Names of Jesus*, 12-14; G. Dalman, *Jesus-Jeshua*, 13; L. Sabourin, *The Names and Titles of Jesus*, 14).

It is significant that the earliest title ascribed to Jesus by those who followed after him was "Rabbi/Teacher;" as is seen with John, Andrew, and Nathaniel:

*Turning around, Jesus saw them following and asked, "What do you want?" They said, "**Rabbi**" (which means Teacher), "where are you staying?" (John 1:38)*

*Then Nathaniel declared, "**Rabbi**, you are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel," (John 1:49)*

So also is this the case with Nicodemus, himself a religious teacher in Israel: He came to Jesus at night and said, "Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him," (John 3:2)

Throughout his ministry in Palestine he was addressed by the title, "*rabbi*" by his disciples (or *talmudim*) and those of the crowds alike (cf. Mark 9:5; 10:51; 11:21; John 4:31; 6:25; 9:2; 11:8). Jesus, however, never called himself by this title; rather, he called himself by the more function title "teacher," or "the one teaching," (*yarah*), a term given significant recognition in the Hebrew Scriptures, with God as the teacher (Exod 4:12, 15; 24:2; 1 Kings 8:36; 2 Chron 6:27; Job 36:22; Psalms 25:8-12; 32:8; Isaiah 2:3; Eze 4:2); the prophets and priests as teachers (Exod 24:12; Deut 17:11; 24:8; 33:10; 1 Sam 12:23; 2 Kings 12:2; 17:27; Ezek 44:23); and angels (Judges 13:8; Isaiah 9:15, as occurs in most apocalyptic revelations as in the Major Prophets, Daniel, Revelation).

The title "teacher" is used of Jesus twelve times in Matthew, twelve times in Mark, sixteen times in Luke, and eight times in John. Jesus speaks of this title as a prized designation

by the religious teachers of his time, and goes so far as to say that only the one called the Messiah was truly worthy of this title:

*They (the scribes and Pharisees) love to be greeted in the marketplaces and to have men call them 'Rabbi.' But you are not to be called 'Rabbi,' for you have only **one teacher** (didaskalos) and you are all brothers (Matt 23:79).*

This was, however, a title he freely received. In fact, the first designation he received when seen by one of his disciples after his resurrection was "*Rabboni*," "Jesus said to her, 'Mary'. She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, *Rabboni* which means Teacher)." (John 20:16) It was, no doubt, a title of significance to him.

Also of significance here is the parenthetical comments of the NT writers concerning the equivalent Greek word for the Hebrew/Aramaic "*rabbi*"/"*rabboni*," which is *didaskalos*. This term is the word used throughout the Greek-speaking Mediterranean world for "teacher." Especially in Israel these terms (in Hebrew/Aramaic and Greek) were ascribed to the teachers of the synagogues, the scribes, the members of the Sanhedrin, and anyone who had distinguished himself as possessing a superior knowledge of God.

Jesus the Teacher

There was a strong Messianic expectation in Palestine during the first century period, and numerous messianic concepts. One of these was the expectation/concept of a messianic figure who would be, not only a /redeemer figure, but a prophetic figure as well, who would teach all things to Israel (i.e., he would be a teacher come from God). This was a very dominant Messianic concept to the people of the Dead Sea scroll (cf. Michael Grant, "Prophet and Teacher" in *Jesus: A Historian's Review of the Gospels*, 78-94, and Matthew Black, *The Scrolls and Christian Origins*, 145-63) and appears to have been a wide spread concept in the Gospels. In John 4:25

when the woman at the well in Samaria realized that the man with whom she was talking was someone extra-ordinary, she said:

The woman said, "I know that Messiah (called Christ) is coming. When he comes, he will 'explain everything to us. Then Jesus declared, "I who speak to you am he," (John 4:25-26).

Nicodemus, himself a teacher in Israel, realized that this Jesus of Nazareth was no ordinary teacher, and expressed this to Jesus himself:

He came to Jesus at night and said, "Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him (John 3:2).

Jesus' role as a teacher of God appears to have been an essential part of his messianic agenda. As expressed by one scholar:

*Teaching was his chief business. He was often a healer, sometimes a worker of miracles, frequently a preacher, but always a teacher. He did not teach when he was not doing something else, but when he was not teaching he was doing something else. He made teaching the chief agency of redemption. (J. A. Marquis, *Learning to Teach from the Master Teacher*, 76-77.)*

Although Jesus is designated with numerous Messianic titles throughout the Gospels, it is clear that the most common title used to refer to him or address him was "teacher" (or more specifically, "the teacher;" cf. John 11:28). This is the case in over forty-seven instances in the four Gospels. In over forty-five, instances he is referred to teaching in only eleven as preaching, and these are most always connected with teaching (e.g., Matt 4:23). His role and function as a teacher appears to have overshadowed every other role down to the final days of his Messianic ministry.

His Teaching Activity

Jesus saw in the activity of teaching the opportunity of shaping the ideas out of which the faith of the people of the first century developed. Out of these teachings developed that had the power to impact character and, in turn, to impact behavior. Moral character was the end result of what Jesus was all about and teaching was the means by which he would bring it about. Jesus used education rather than power politics or military campaign to bring about his revolution; and he every waking hour was consumed with teaching. As J. M. Price observes:

He taught everywhere and at all times - in the Temple, in the synagogues, in the mountain, by the seaside, by the road, by a well, in the homes, at social gatherings, and in private. (J. M. Price, *Jesus the Teacher*, 7.)

Reading through the Gospels, one is readily impressed with the level of teaching activity on the part of Jesus:

Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people (Matt 4:32)

And he was amazed at their lack of faith. Then Jesus went around teaching from village to village (Mark 6:6)

When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So he began teaching them many things (Mark 6:34)

Jesus went through all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness (Matt 9:35)

After Jesus had finished instructing his twelve disciples, he went on from there to teach and preach in the towns of Galilee (Matt 11:1)

Coming to his hometown, he began teaching the people in their synagogue, and they were amazed. "Where did this man get this wisdom and these miraculous powers?" they asked (Matt 13:54)

Each day Jesus was teaching at the temple, and each evening he went out to spend the night on the hill called the Mount of Olives (Luke 21:37)

At dawn he appeared again in the temple courts, where all the people gathered around him, and he sat down to teach them (John 8:2).

But they insisted, "He stirs up the people all over Judea by his teaching. He started in Galilee and has come all the way here," (Luke 23:5).

Every day I was with you, teaching in the temple courts, and you did not arrest me. But the Scriptures must be fulfilled," (Mark 14:49).

His Teaching: Form and Content

The Form of His Teaching

In form and content, Jesus taught as did the Rabbis of his time. He used lecture or sermon (monologue), discussion (dialogue) stories (parables), and questions and answers. As well as simple conversations which contained sayings or insightful utterances called logia. He often engaged in debate, denounced or rebuked antagonists, used object lessons, dramatization, and, in several instances, gave prophetic or apocalyptic utterance. The forms of his teaching with which

we are primarily concerned in this study are the sermon (as in the Sermon on the Mount), the stories (as in his parables), and in his sayings (logia), discussions, and parables which contain teaching about the reign of God. Other of the forms of teaching he used will be considered as they present themselves in our studies. The primary emphasis, however, will be on these three forms of teaching.

The Content of his Teaching

The themes of the teaching of Jesus are numerous and varied. There are three primary areas, however, which were of major concern to him. Most of his teaching can be gathered under the following headings: (1) the nature of God, (2) the will of God, (3) the rule / kingdom of God, and (4) the redemption of mankind.

(1) "The Nature of God" has, primarily, to do more with God's revelation of himself (i.e., who he was), than the theistic descriptions. In John 1:18 we are told: "No man has seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known." The term in the Greek text translated, "has made him known" is *exegeomai*, from which the technical term "exegesis" is drawn. Jesus is the exegesis of the Father (i.e., the interpretation, explanation, or revelation of the Father). He came to show us the Father. In that we have seen him, we have seen the Father. This is precisely the meaning of his words in John 14:8-9,

Philip said, "Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us." (9) Jesus answered: "Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, Show us the Father'?"

(2) "The Will of God" has to do with God's intention for us in creation. He created man in his image (i.e., his moral image). Man, when he is all that he was created to be, is a

moral reflection of God. In order for man to know what he` is supposed to be, he must know his Creator. God has revealed his will to man as well as himself to man; n the teaching of Jesus of Nazareth, God is continually revealing his will - as well as himself.

(3) "The Rule/Kingdom of God" has to do with a world wherein the moral rule of God is in control. Motifs within this larger theme have to do with the conflict between good and evil, the free moral agency of man, the reign of the power of sin in man, the deliverance of man by the power of God's grace, and, ultimately, the reign of man with God as a free moral being.

(4) "The Redemption of Mankind" is, in his own words, why he came. In Matt 18:11, he said, "For the Son of Man has come to save that which was lost." The word for "lost" is *apollumi*, meaning, "to destroy," and that which has been destroyed is man as he was created to be, a bring created in the image of God (Gen 3:1-24; Matt 1:21; Luke 2:11; 19:10; John 5:34; 12:47; Acts 5:31; 13:23 12:47; 1Tim 1:15; Titus 2:11-14.

These are the primary themes in the teaching of Jesus. They are not independent themes but are all interrelated. They essentially have to do with the fact that "**God is**" (the nature of God), "**he has spoken**" (the will of God), and "**there is eternal significance in what he has said,**" (the reign of God).

The Uniqueness of His Teaching

The primary distinction between Jesus and the other teachers of his time, especially, those of the Rabbinic community, was that what they taught they derived from the traditional authority of the great Rabbis of tie past. What Jesus taught, however, he believed to be drawn out of the very midst of God. This is precisely what he states in the following:

I have revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world. They were yours; you gave them to me and they have

obeyed your word. (7) Now they know that everything you have given me comes from you. (8) For I gave them the words you gave me and they accepted them. They knew with certainty that I came from you, and they believed that you sent me (John 17:6-8).

For I did not speak of my own accord, but the Father who sent me commanded me what to say and how to say it. I know that his command leads to eternal life. So whatever I say is just what the Father has told me to say (John 12:49-50).

Conclusion

Our distinction as a people centers in our beliefs concerning this person Jesus of Nazareth, and in the specific belief that in him we have seen God and we have heard God. We believe that in him God was revealed, God's will was revealed, and the reign of God was revealed.

Our faith centers in this person Jesus of Nazareth and his claims as to who he was. His Christological claims stand at the center of our whole belief/disbelief system. This is why we are called Christians - because of who we believe him to be "the Christ" - and because of who that belief makes us. Who he is and who we are (and are to be) lie - has revealed to us asks our teacher. And because of this, we, as his disciples, must ever set ourselves to the task of hearing his teaching.

Questions for Discussion

1. When you think of a title for Jesus, what title(s) first come to mind? Name and discuss the meaning of these titles.

2. Where on the list does the title "teacher" fall? Close to the top or close to the bottom?

3. Did you know that the title "Rabbi/teacher" was the title by which he was first called by his disciples and one of the

titles by which he was most addressed in the Gospels. Discuss the significance of this title as applied to Jesus; especially in light of the fact that the primary term used in the NT to identify his followers is "disciples" (Greek - students), which occurs 268 times in the four Gospels and Acts.

4. We can understand why his disciples called him "Rabbi/Teacher" or "the teacher," but why would someone like Nicodemus, himself a teacher in Israel, call him "Rabbi/Teacher," or "a teacher come from God?"⁵ What do you make of the fact that in Matt 23:7-9 Jesus tells his followers that they are not to be called "Rabbi," and that only the Christ was to be their teacher; yet, he allows his disciples to address him with that title?

5. Discuss the paragraph under the heading "His Teaching Activity." What do you think of the idea that our behavior is directly linked to the concepts/ideas that have influenced our thinking and/or beliefs?

6. Why do you think Jesus undertook such an excessive level of teaching activity as is reflected in the Gospels (see material on page 4)?

7. Why do you think Jesus used the teaching methods and forms commonly employed by the Rabbis of his time?

8. Discuss the three primary themes of Jesus' teaching under the heading "The Content of His Teaching" on pages 5-6.

9. How was the teaching of Jesus different from the teaching of the Rabbis of his time?

10. How does the genuineness and truth of our Christianity relate to the way we see Jesus of Nazareth, especially the way we see him as "The Teacher?"