

STUDY 17

The Revelation of Jesus as Messiah

1. When did you first hear about Jesus and how did you come to understand who He is and then put your trust in Him ?

It is remarkable, when listening to people's stories that no two are exactly the same. Though they all share elements in common, each one is unique.

Enjoy listening to each other's stories and learn from them.!

2. If Jesus had been open and public about His identity as the Jewish Messiah, what difference would that have made?

It would, almost certainly, have provoked a popular attempt to crown Jesus as a Jewish king together with His premature rejection by the Jewish authorities. Jesus needed a three year period to proclaim and explain His kingdom and to prepare His disciples to continue His mission. To avoid that, Jesus spent far more time in the early stages of His ministry in Galilee in the north away from the Jewish capital of Jerusalem. At the end of this period, in His final visit to Jerusalem, He intentionally provoked the authorities to make a decision, leading to His rejection and crucifixion. *Isaiah 53:7* spoke of God's servant being led '*...like a lamb to the slaughter.*' Jesus understood that this was a picture of His vocation. It was God's purpose but in God's time.

3. Why did Jesus refer to Himself the Son of Man?

We have no recorded account of Jesus being asked this question with His answer. So, we have to rely on a careful and prayerful reading of the gospels. Theologians have written books on the subject, many of them technical, requiring a knowledge of New Testament Greek and Aramaic which Jesus spoke. Here we think about the matter in a more straight-forward manner.

The first and simplest answer could be that He wanted to stress His humanity. Christians came to appreciate Jesus' divinity after the resurrection when they reflected more on the things Jesus did and said during His lifetime. But it is clear that Jesus did not want to put His *Godness* at the front and centre of His proclamation. He came as a man to suffer for mankind.

But those more perceptive and reflective would have been prompted to think of the one '*...like a Son of Man*' in *Daniel 7:13-14* who:

*'...came like a Son of Man,
and He came to the Ancient of Days
and was presented before Him.
And to Him was given dominion
and glory and a kingdom,
that all peoples, nations, and languages
should serve him;*

*his dominion is an everlasting dominion,
which shall not pass away,
and His kingdom one that shall not be destroyed...'*

As Michael Eaton has explained, Jesus did something that had not been thought of before, by combining the image of a suffering servant in Isaiah with the vindicated figure of Daniel to refer to Himself. But the Daniel part could only be fully appreciated after His resurrection and ascension

Is knowing this helpful or merely of academic interest? Here are three things to think about.

First, it is helpful to understand that Jesus had a very clear understanding of His identity and mission grounded in scripture. Likewise, we should also find our identities and mission in scripture and then align ourselves with God's purposes. This is not simply a matter of cherry-picking comforting and encouraging verses, but seeking to understand the big picture of God's purposes and ways of working. It includes the message of costly discipleship as well as joyful blessings.

Second, it is also helpful to appreciate that some things in the Christian life are really only understood when looking backwards. Things that were not clear at the time often make sense with the benefit of hindsight.

Third, it is helpful too to consider that the notion of a dual identity (human / divine, Son of Man / Son of God) is also relevant to us. On one hand, we are fallible and frail human beings with weaknesses and faults, and on the other hand we are, as Paul explains, '*...united with Christ*' and '*seated with Him in the heavenlies*' (Ephesians 2:6). We need to keep both of these in mind as we approach life and ministry.

4. Can you think of any other Bible words that might be misunderstood today by the people you meet and talk with? What can we do to avoid being misunderstood?

There are many words used in the Bible that need explanation and clarification. Some examples are:

The word **God** means different things to different people, especially in this multi-faith generation (polytheism - many gods, pantheism - God in everything).

The word **church** - often used for the building where God's people meet, is in the New Testament a word for the assembly of God's people. It can be used in a local sense or a worldwide sense. The concept of denominations did not exist in Bible days.

Sons, and in many cases **man**, in the New Testament would be better understood to mean sons and daughters and man and woman. The world in Bible days was very patriarchal and male-dominated. Jesus was quite exceptional and His teaching and actions opened the door for women to be freed to fulfil their potential. When Jesus spoke to the woman at the well, He was doing something a typical rabbi would never have done. Paul, appreciating the radical nature of Jesus' teaching, wrote:

*'There is neither Jew nor Gentile,
neither slave nor free,
nor is there male and female,*

for you are all one in Christ Jesus.'

The word **bishop**, for many, has connotations of grandeur and authority. In the first century it applied to a local elder with spiritual oversight (the word means *overseer*). From the second century onwards its meaning began to change.

The word **sin** needs some explanation. It covers intentional wrong things such as are mentioned in the *Ten Commandments*, but also the failure to do good. When the good Samaritan helped the Jewish man who had been robbed he was showing love to his neighbour, unlike the priest who simply walked by. Jesus, especially in His *Sermon on the Mount*, taught that it applies to attitudes and thoughts and not just rules of conduct.

The Bible has many words which are not really part of most people's everyday vocabulary such as salvation, redemption, prophet, apostle and a good Bible dictionary is a very useful resource of explanation.

To avoid misunderstanding it is good to explain such words when we use them or use them with an alternative synonym.

Many words have a range of meanings and it is important to take the one which best fits the context because not all possibilities are equally suitable. It is best, if in doubt, to consult a variety of translations or a commentary if possible.

The King James (Authorised) version of the Bible was translated in 1611 and since then the English language has moved on considerably. So, users of this version should be aware of possible pitfalls. There are four verses in the New Testament using the word *quick*. The modern meaning of the word quick is *fast*. But in the 1600s it meant *living* or *alive*. This is how it should be understood in *Acts 10:42*, *2 Timothy 4:1*, *Hebrews 4:12*, *1 Peter 4:5*: '**...the living and the dead.**' When the Authorised version speaks about our conversation, it means our way of life rather than what we say to each other. Similarly, when it tells us to be '**...careful for nothing**' the Authorised version means don't be anxious about anything. It is not recommending that we should be careless with knives, wet floors or hot objects.

Etymology (the origin of words) is not a good guide to meaning and sometimes less well informed preachers misrepresent what the Bible text actually means. This is because words change over time. An example of such a change is the word *prevent* which comes from the Latin meaning to *come before*. Nowadays the word means to *hinder* or *stop something happening*. There is an old prayer used in some liturgies which asks God to 'prevent us in our going out and coming in', which is asking God to go before us and not stop us moving, as it sounds to a modern ear. Similarly, the word translated '**witchcraft**' in *Galatians 5:10* is translated from a Greek word which is the root of our word *pharmacology* or *pharmacist*. The text is not condemning modern scientific practices and absolutely cannot be used to say that medications are sinful as has been claimed in some extreme teachings on divine healing.

5. When you read through this section of Mark's gospel, what does it say to you?

An opportunity to share what members of the group find helpful. It is good to find ways to allow everyone to have a voice either by turn-taking or directed questions.