Grapho : Concordia Seminary Student Journal

Volume 3 | Issue 1 Article 4

4-15-2021

Messiahship and Discipleship

Kendall Davis
Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, davisk@csl.edu

Messiahship and Discipleship in the Synoptic Gospels

Kendall Davis

Kendall Davis is a fourth-year concluding MDiv student from Houston, TX and the current chairman of Grapho. He completed his undergraduate education at Concordia University Irvine in biblical languages. He will be continuing his education in the STM program in the next academic year focusing on exegetical theology.

Introduction

The question of discipleship in the synoptics is really a question of what it means to be a faithful member of God's people of Israel. In late Second Temple Judaism the answer to this question was by no means obvious. For some, such as the Pharisees, the answer was to follow the traditions of the elders fastidiously in every area of life (cf. Matt 15:2). For others, such as the Qumran community, the answer was to escape the sinful compromise of modern Israel and create a pure community in the desert. For others, such as the zealots and other revolutionaries, the answer was to follow in the tradition of the Maccabees by fighting and potentially accepting martyrdom at the hands of Israel's Gentile enemies.

The synoptic Gospels are replete with Jesus' instructions to his disciples, such as his oft-quoted "Judge not that you be not judged"[1] (Matt 7:1) or his relativization of family ties (Mark 3:33ff). However, the centerpiece of synoptic discipleship is the imitation of Jesus. When Jesus sends out the twelve and the seventy-two, they do all the same sorts of things that Jesus has been doing in his ministry (see Matt 10, especially vv. 24–5). However, as becomes increasingly clear over the course of the narrative, this imitation means that their lives will be conformed to the pattern of Jesus' life in his suffering, rejection, death, and resurrection (cf. Luke 9:23ff). The way of Jesus' disciples is the way of the cross and empty tomb because this is the way of Jesus. All of Jesus' other instructions for his disciples find their meaning only in light of this. This is one reason why the synoptics focus so much on the disciples' struggle to understand who Jesus is (cf. Matt 8:27). The issue is not merely that the disciples must have an accurate Christology, as vital as that is. The issue is that the disciples must know who Jesus is and what it means for him to be the Messiah before they can understand what it means for them to be Jesus' disciples and therefore carry out Jesus' mission.[2] Therefore, we can see that

the synoptics have a unique answer to the question of what it means to be a faithful Israelite within Second Temple Judaism because they have a unique understanding of the nature and purpose of Israel's Messiah.

Thus, illuminating the synoptic redefinition of the nature and purpose of Israel's Messiah according to Jesus' death and resurrection will also illuminate the synoptic understanding of discipleship. To that end, this article will demonstrate how the synoptic Gospels use the death and resurrection of Jesus to subvert and redefine Second Temple expectations about the Messiah and thereby redefine what it means to be a faithful member of the people of God.

Methodology

This article will use a narrative approach to analyze the synoptics and their understanding of the nature and purpose of the messiahship of Jesus, that is, their Christology. This means that this article will build its case not from detailed exegesis of individual passages but from an analysis of the narrative dynamics of the entire gospels. This narrative approach is appropriate because the synoptic texts are narratives. As biblical scholar Frank Matera writes, "In the case of the Gospels, Christology unfolds through narrative. Each of the Evangelists tells a story of Jesus, and at the end of the narrative, the perceptive reader or listener will have learned something about Jesus and his work."[3] In particular this article will focus on the narrative role of the death and resurrection of Jesus. This is not the same thing as a focus on the passion narratives. As any perceptive reader is aware, the death and resurrection of Jesus loom over the entire narrative of each of the synoptics from the beginning. Thus this article will seek to describe how the death and resurrection function in the narrative of the synoptic Gospels and then address the implications for discipleship.

Key texts will be selected and analyzed from throughout the synoptics that demonstrate how the death and resurrection of Jesus form the narrative-Christological center of the entire story. These key texts will be treated in parallel. That is, as opposed to analyzing how the Markan narrative as a whole engages in this pattern and then Luke and then Matthew,[4] each moment as it appears in each of the synoptics will be analyzed as a single unit. These units are 1) Introductions/ Infancy narratives, 2) Peter's confession, and 3) Passion and Resurrection narratives. The purpose is not to harmonize or gloss over important differences between the synoptics. Important differences will be noted insofar as they are relevant to the present analysis. Rather, the purpose is to show how all the synoptics engage in the broader narrative strategy of subverting and recasting messianic expectations even when they do so differently.

This article will proceed according to the following outline: 1) a discussion of relevant cultural and historical contextual factors, 2) an analysis of the synoptics, and 3) conclusions regarding synoptic messiahship and discipleship.

Second Temple Messianic Expectations

It is somewhat difficult to know what exactly Jews in the Second Temple period believed about Messiah figures. Second Temple sources are rare and do not always talk about messianic expectations. Even when they do, they are not always as precise as we might like them to be. As J. H. Charlesworth writes, "Early Jewish literature...cannot be mined to produce anything like a checklist of what the Messiah shall do."[5] It is also not necessarily true that our sources reflect what average Jews believed during this period[6] because 1) these writings are inevitably produced only by those with the money and education to do so, and 2) some writings come from sectarian communities (e.g. Qumran) and may express sectarian views rather than mainstream views.

Partly because of this paucity and indeterminacy of source materials, many scholars of previous decades have downplayed the prevalence and coherence of messianic reflection in the sources available to us.[7] For example, William Scott Green writes, "In early Jewish literature, 'messiah' is all signifier with no signified; the term is notable primarily for its indeterminacy."[8] However, more recent scholars such as John Collins and Matthew Novenson have rejected this argument.[9] Novenson argues that the tendency to downplay messianism is an overreaction to nineteenth- and twentieth-century tendencies towards discussing messianism in terms of a history of ideas.[10] Collins argues that "there was no Jewish orthodoxy in the matter of messianic expectation, and so we should expect some variation.... However...variation was limited, and...some forms of messianic expectation were widely shared."[11]

Accordingly, we should be wary of having too strict a definition of "Messiah" so that we do not ignore our sources' various ways of talking about messianic hope.12 Therefore, it is unnecessary to limit ourselves to instances of the word meshiach ("anointed") and its cognates. Eschatological figures of hope are variously discussed in priestly, prophetic, or kingly terms, often without ever using "anointing" words.13 That is why this article uses the language of "broadly messianic expectations." The expectations with which this article is concerned are messianic in the sense that they fit into the literary and theological trope of eschatological figures of hope, even if they do not use "Messiah" language. This means that when identifying the synoptic tendency to elicit, subvert, and recast messianic expectations, we should avoid being too strict about what "counts" as messianic expectations. Second Temple messianic language was diverse, thus the

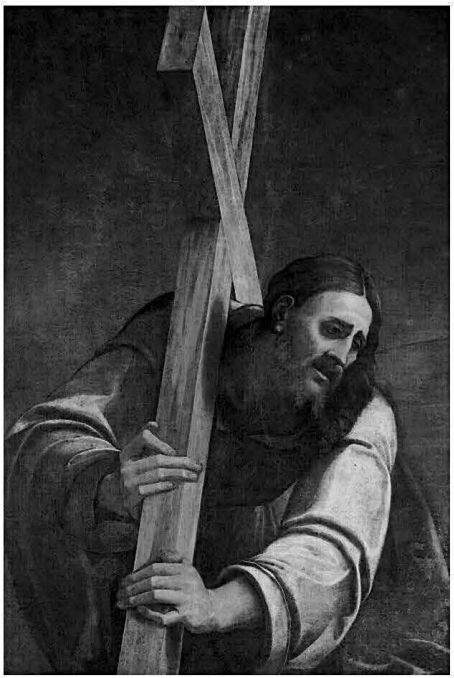
synoptic engagement with these expectations is also diverse.

Messianic expectations typically focus on a renewal and restoration of Israel's fortunes. Messianic figures are those who either effect this renewal or administrate it once the renewal has come. Therefore, these figures are commonly fulfillments of earlier biblical figures, such as kings, prophets, and priests. Sometimes the parallel with earlier figures is rather general; other times the parallel is with a specific figure, especially David (e.g., Ps 2). The hope was for God to do again what he had once done through earlier figures in Israel's history. For example, just as God was with David to give him victory over the Philistines, so also did many Second Temple Jews hope that God would give the future son of David victory over whoever was occupying Israel at the time. Accordingly, Second Temple Jews understood their role as faithful members of the people of God in terms of this future hope, whether or not it was specifically tied to a Messiah figure. For example, the Maccabees believed that their future free from Gentile rule called them to fight back against their Gentile rulers. Their hope in the resurrection gave them the courage and reason to withstand their martyrdom (2 Macc 7:14).

Second Temple messianic expectations creatively engage with the Hebrew scriptures. The Hebrew scriptures describe a variety of potential messianic figures, such as the Son of Man (Dan 7), the future son of David (Ezek 34), or the eschatological return of Elijah (Mal 4). Kingly or Davidic emphases were particularly common but not universal.[14] It is not uncommon for Second Temple texts to mix together messianic titles and motifs, for example, 4 Ezra[15] and 1 Enoch.[16] Some texts from Qumran seem to envision two Messiahs, one priestly and another kingly.[17] Thus, the New Testament's mixing together of distinct traditions of messianic figures is typical in Second Temple literature.

Finally, and most importantly, late Second Temple Jewish texts tend not to feature themes of suffering and death prominently in their messianic reflections. John Carroll and Joel Green note that "the hoped-for Davidic or royal Messiah, the priest Messiah, the eschatological prophet like Moses—these figures, each with its own history of significance in Israel's past, are attested in the literature of Second Temple Judaism, but the motif of suffering is integral to none of them."[18] Dunn argues that while figures like the suffering servant of Isaiah are "potentially messianic ideas," they do not seem to function as such in the literature before Jesus' death.[19] Instead, what is more typical are Messiahs who gloriously conquer the enemies of Israel (cf. Ps 2) and establish justice and righteousness in the land (Ezek 34:23ff). Psalm of Solomon 17 is typical in this regard: "And he will have gentile nations serving him under his yoke, and he will glorify the Lord in (a place) prominent (above) the whole earth. And he will purge Jerusalem…(for) nations to come from the ends of the earth to see his glory" (vv. 30–31).[20]

In summary, Messiah figures are not put to shame; they are the ones who put the proud and arrogant to shame. They are not rejected by the people of God; they are embraced by the people of God. They are not killed, rather they destroy those who oppress the righteous. The following statement from 1 Enoch is a representative example of this pattern: "[The Son of Man] shall depose the kings from their thrones and kingdoms. For they do not extol and glorify him, and neither do they obey him, the source of their kingship. The faces of the strong will be slapped and be filled with shame and gloom. Their dwelling places and their beds will be worms" (46:5–6). Because of this, the story of Jesus, a crucified Messiah, would seem exceedingly strange to Jews familiar with contemporary messianic expectations.



"Christ Carrying the Cross" by Sebastiano del Piombo {{PD-US}}. Photo Credit: Wikimedia Commons

The Problem of the Cross

In his seminal work on the socio-historical significance of crucifixion in the ancient Mediterranean world, Martin Hengel concludes that "a crucified messiah, son of God or God must have seemed a contradiction in terms to anyone, Jew, Greek, Roman or barbarian, asked to believe such a claim, and it will certainly have been thought offensive and foolish."[21]

The issue is that in the ancient Mediterranean world, for both Jews and Gentiles, crucifixion was deeply associated with shame. The punishment was reserved for the lowest classes, especially slaves, as well as political enemies. For Jews in particular crucifixion was not associated only with shame before human beings but also rejection by God (Deut 21:23). This means that the biggest issue with the story of Jesus is not necessarily that he suffers and dies; there were categories for the martyrdom of the righteous. The issue is that he suffers such a horribly *shameful* death because he is rejected by Israel's leaders and apparently abandoned by God (Matt 27:46). As Hengel writes:

> Jesus' death was not in itself a stumbling-block for the Jews, since it was possible that God's Messiah might also suffer martyrdom—but the form of his death was another matter, for he had not died because of his loyalty to the Jewish law; on the contrary, the tradition was that he had been arraigned before the Jewish court as a blasphemer and a law-breaker, and the judgement of that court was apparently confirmed by the fact that he had been crucified, his body exposed naked on a tree.[22]

One of the remarkable features of the synoptic witness is how the shame of the cross is not explained away. The shame, rejection, and death of the cross is not treated as a problem to be solved but as the heart and center of the Gospel. Thus, it was necessary for the synoptics to subvert and recast Second Temple messianic expectations so that the messiahship of Jesus could be seen to be constituted by his shameful suffering and death.

The Synoptic Thematic Pattern of Subverted Expectations

The synoptics tend to engage with messianic expectations by eliciting, subverting, and recasting these Second Temple messianic expectations. First, the synoptics call forward various broadly messianic expectations. Sometimes this happens through titles, such as *christos,* ("Christ") or *huios tou anthropou,* ("Son of Man"). Other times this happens through events, such as the infancy narratives or the baptism of Jesus. Elsewhere this happens through interaction with the Old Testament, whether explicit quotations or implicit echoes. Finally, the manner of Jesus' teaching and ministry and the resulting conflicts help the reader to see that Jesus is no ordinary rabbi, as does, for example, the healing and forgiving of the paralytic lowered through the roof (especially Mark's account: 2:1–12). In episodes like this Jesus exercises an authority that is not exercised by Israel's teachers, a fact pointed out by the synoptic writers (cf. Matt 7:29). This unparalleled authority and the accompanying acts of power signal to the crowds and others that somehow Jesus is a fulfillment of biblical patterns (e.g., Luke 7:16).

Secondly, these expectations are subverted and brought into paradoxical tension with Jesus. For example, the rejection of Jesus in Matthew's infancy narrative or the so-called messianic secret motif in Mark all subvert the expectations previously elicited by contradicting them or going against them in some way.

Finally, these expectations are recast according to the narrative of Jesus' death and resurrection; for example, Jesus' statements about how it is necessary for him to be rejected, to suffer, die, and rise again (e.g., Matt 16:21, Luke 17:25, 24:44) or Jesus' call for his disciples to take up their cross (Matt 1:24, Mark 8:34, Luke 9:23) both recast messianic expectations according to the crucifixion.

This pattern is not an outline for the narrative structure of the synoptics; rather, it is a recurring thematic pattern that can be found in whole or in part in individual pericopes and across the entire narrative of the synoptics. An awareness of this pattern highlights the distinctive picture that the synoptic narratives paint of Jesus' identity and mission.

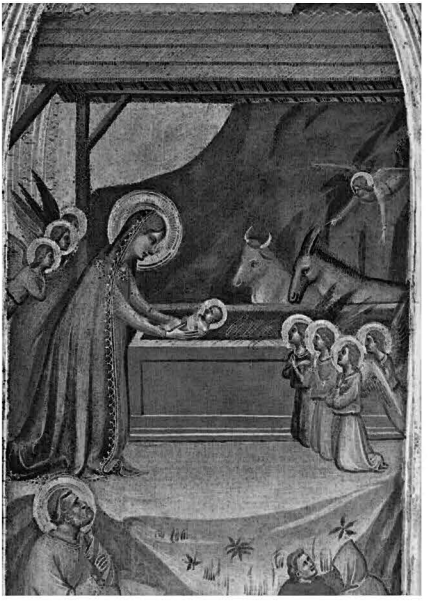
Recasting Messianic Expectations through Cross and Resurrection

Introductions and Infancy Narratives

The beginnings of the Gospels are structurally important for establishing the expectations for what the narratives will say about Jesus. For example, the prologue of John's Gospel is often recognized for serving this function and is notable for its strong Christological statements. While the synoptic beginnings take a different literary strategy, they serve a similar narrative and Christological function.

In general, the beginnings of the synoptics tend to focus on fulfilling parts one and two of the pattern discussed above. They both elicit broadly messianic expectations and subvert or question these expectations. There is not much explicit recasting toward death and resurrection at this stage of the narrative. Rather, at this stage the focus is on establishing the narrative tension regarding how Jesus fulfills and subverts messianic expectations.

"Geburt Christi" by Bernardo Daddi {{PD-US}}. Photo Credit: Wikimedia Commons



Matthew's Gospel begins with a genealogy that explicitly locates Jesus in the line of both Abraham and David. This suggests that Jesus will be the fulfillment of the covenantal promises given to both Abraham and David. The genealogy divides Israel's history into three periods of fourteen generations, the period from Abraham to David, the period from David to the Babylonian exile, and the period from the Babylonian exile to Jesus (1:17). This sets up Jesus as a figure at least as pivotal as Abraham, David, or the exile and restoration. Jesus is continually portrayed as the fulfillment of Israel's story.

Matthew's infancy narrative is uniquely filled with direct quotations of the scriptures that are said to be fulfilled by the events of Jesus' life (e.g. 1:23,

2:6, 2:15). Jesus is set up from the beginning as the fulfillment of all of Israel's scripture (cf. Luke 24:27). This is not mere proof-texting of fulfilled prophecy but has deeply messianic implications. As Novenson emphasizes, messianic expectations and reflection were largely "a vast, sprawling ancient...project of scriptural interpretation."[23] Thus, in demonstrating Jesus to be the fulfillment of scriptural texts, Matthew is demonstrating Jesus to be the fulfillment of messianic expectations, even if he has not yet made it clear what exactly this will look like.

Luke raises numerous expectations for Jesus through a series of events, songs, and characters. The angel Gabriel proclaims to Mary that Jesus "will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever" (1:32–33). Jesus is explicitly identified as the messianic son of David who will fulfill the promises given to David. Additionally, the announcement of a miraculous birth by an angel is strongly reminiscent of other birth announcements in the Old Testament, especially Samson's (Judges 13). Later, Mary's song echoes the hopes found in Israel's prophetic writings that God will overturn the social order by bringing down the proud and uplifting the downtrodden (Luke 1:46–56, cf. Ezek 21:26). At the presentation of Jesus in the temple, he is praised by two people, Simeon and Anna, who are both eagerly waiting for God to fulfill his promises to Israel (Luke 2:25 & 2:37–38). Much like Matthew, the beginning of Luke's narrative is grounded in expectations from the Old Testament scriptures. His strategy is different, but the effect is much the same.

While Mark contains no infancy narrative, the beginning of this Gospel still serves a similar narrative function to the infancy narratives of Matthew and Luke: it sets up expectations for Jesus and his significance. Mark's opening line, "the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God" (1:1) establishes two of the key titles that will be foundational for the revelation of Jesus' identity and mission throughout this Gospel. Jesus is "Christ" and "Son of God." Throughout the narrative Mark emphasizes the inability of human beings to see and understand who Jesus is. Thus the confession of Peter that Jesus is the Christ (8:29) and the confession of the centurion that Jesus is the Son of God (15:39) come at pivotal moments in the revelation of Jesus' identity and mission to the world. The first verse of Mark's Gospel establishes the terms that will be critical for this.

Yet amid the expectations set up in the beginnings of these narratives, it is clear that Jesus is not a messianic king who will be accepted and acclaimed by all of Israel. In Matthew Jesus is not worshipped by Herod or the chief priests and scribes. Herod even seeks to kill Jesus but is prevented from doing so. Unlike Matthew, Luke focuses more on how Jesus is acclaimed and accepted by many in Israel. However, the words of Simeon make it clear that Jesus will also face opposition: "Behold,

this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed" (2:34). Mark does not have the clear subversions of expectations in the beginning of his narrative like Matthew and Luke. However, a similar effect is achieved through the prevalence of the motif of the messianic secret, which first appears in 1:25. While Jesus' identity is proclaimed 1) in the title of Mark's Gospel, 2) by John the Baptist, and 3) by the voice from heaven, this identity is immediately forced into secrecy by Jesus. Thus, this Christological tension drives the plot forward into the dramatic scene at 8:27ff and the passion narrative.

Peter's Confession

The next moment in the synoptics to be analyzed is Peter's confession (Matt 16:13–28, Mark 8:27–9:1, Luke 9:18–27). This moment is critically important because it is 1) one of the clearest self-contained instances of the pattern being discussed and 2) a structurally and thematically critical turning point in each of the synoptics, especially since this pericope features the first of Jesus' several death and resurrection predictions. It is my contention that this passage is paradigmatic for how the synoptics use the death and resurrection of Jesus to engage with broadly messianic expectations.

After asking his disciples who *others* say that he is, Jesus asks his disciples what they think. Peter proclaims either, "You are the Christ, the son of the living God" (Matt 16:16), "You are the Christ" (Mark 8:29), or "The Christ of God" (Luke 9:20). In Matthew Jesus explicitly commends Peter for his confession. In Mark and Luke, Jesus' approval of Peter's confession is implied in the wording of Jesus' injunction to stay silent about this, which is shared by Matthew. Following this Jesus begins to teach his disciples that he must suffer, be rejected, killed, and raised again on the third day. In Matthew and Mark Peter then takes Jesus aside and rebukes him. In Matthew Peter says, "May the Lord be merciful to you. May this never happen to you."[24] In turn, Jesus rebukes Peter, "Get behind me, Satan" (Matt 16:23, Mark 8:33). All of the synoptics then proceed with Jesus' call for his disciples to take up their cross and follow him.

Peter's confession fulfills the pattern discussed above in the following way: Jesus' question and Peter's answer elicit various messianic expectations associated with the title "Christ." Of course, Peter does not explicitly confess anything other than this title for Jesus. But it should be kept in mind that this title is a loaded term. It is a confession not just of who Jesus is but of what Jesus will do as God's messianic agent, that is, both identity and mission.[25] In any case, Peter's reaction to Jesus' first death and resurrection prediction indicates that his understanding of the term, "Christ," is wholly incompatible with Jesus' suffering, rejection, death,

and resurrection. Because Peter's confession is kept non-specific, this episode shows the extent to which almost any late Second Temple understanding of messianic figures is confounded by the passion and resurrection of Jesus. Thus, the point of the narrative is not necessarily that Jesus is problematic for only particular kinds of messianic expectations but that Jesus is problematic for any messianic expectations that do not have room for the shame, rejection, and crucifixion of Jesus' passion.[26] This is not to say that Peter's confession is entirely wrong, but it is critically "inadequate":

> For a *brief* moment, Peter and the disciples see everything clearly, for their eyes have been opened. They finally understand what the reader already knows: that Jesus is the Shepherd-Messiah. But it will soon become apparent that even though Peter's confession is formally correct, it is inadequate. Jesus is the Shepherd-Messiah.... But he is also the Messiah who must suffer, die, and rise from the dead before he returns as God's glorious eschatological agent.[27]

In this pericope the steps of subverting and recasting messianic expectations happen simultaneously in Jesus' death and resurrection prediction and in Peter's reaction to it. The subversion is less strong in Luke's account since he does not include Peter's rebuke of Jesus. The recasting continues when Jesus proclaims to the disciples and the crowds that all who wish to be his disciple must take up their cross and follow him. The most literal meaning of this is that Jesus' disciples should be prepared to face martyrdom. Although in saying that they should take up their cross "daily" (9:23), Luke makes it explicit that this has everyday and metaphorical meanings, as well. In any case, discipleship to Jesus is redefined according to Jesus' messiahship. Jesus takes the path of shame, rejection, and death, and so will his disciples. Jesus' disciples will struggle to comprehend what this means for them throughout the rest of the synoptics (e.g., Luke 9:46ff). Time and again, however, Jesus redirects them back to this truth. However, they will not truly understand until after Jesus' resurrection.

Structurally, this episode represents a turning point in each of the synoptics. This is the first of Jesus' death and resurrection predictions, which continue as he travels to Jerusalem. While the synoptics have strongly implied that something of this nature will happen to Jesus, this is the first explicit mention of it. While Jesus has confused his disciples before, this is the first time they have been utterly confounded by the shame, rejection, and death awaiting Jesus, and it will not be the last.

Passion and Resurrection Narratives

The present section will focus on the passion and resurrection narrative starting with the trial of Jesus or, in the case of Luke, the denial of Peter (Matt 26:57–28:20, Mark 14:53–16:8, Luke 22:54–24:53). These are rich narratives with much to be analyzed; however, the focus here will be on how this narrative functions to recast messianic expectations according to the pattern of Jesus' shame, rejection, and death. This section will show how the synoptic passion narratives recast notions of Jesus' messiahship through the extensive use of irony and paradox. Jesus' crucifixion is portrayed as a mock coronation. However, because readers of the Gospel are aware that Jesus truly is the Messiah and that suffering, rejection, death, and resurrection are all part of the divine plan for Jesus' messiahship, they are able to see that this is actually a real coronation.

In the trial scenes numerous expectations are flipped upside-down. In Matthew the allegedly scrupulous leaders of Israel seek false testimony against Jesus (26:59). Jesus' enemies are the ones who unwittingly speak the truth about him while Peter, Jesus' most zealous disciple, is too ashamed to admit that he even knows him. The representatives of the Gentiles (Pilate, Pilate's wife, the centurion) believe Jesus to be an innocent or perhaps even a righteous man while Israel's leaders reject him as a blasphemer. This is the exact opposite of typical messianic expectations where the Messiah crushes the wicked Gentile kings who oppose him while he is acclaimed by righteous Israel (cf. Psalm 2, 1 Enoch 46, Psalm of Solomon 17:21ff).

Kingly language and imagery dominate the trial scenes and later mockery of Jesus. In Matthew 27:27–30 Jesus' kingly claims are mocked when he is crowned with a crown of thorns, given a scepter of reed in his right hand, and clothed in a scarlet robe. The sign put above Jesus' head that proclaims him to be the King of the Jews makes it clear that Jesus has earned the ultimate public shame of the cross precisely because of his claim to be Israel's king.

The taunts Jesus endures during his crucifixion focus on his apparent inability to save himself: "He saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel; let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him" (Matt 27:42). Jesus' fate as the crucified one is seen as proof positive that he is not any of the things he claimed to be. Yet for readers who know that the rejection and crucifixion are part of the divine plan, the taunts, accusations, and mocking all speak the truth unwittingly. As Morna Hooker writes, "The truth about Jesus is found in the mouth of Jesus' accusers, who refuse to accept that it is the truth."[28] Jesus refuses to save himself not because he is powerless but because he exercises his power in weakness. The shame, rejection, and death of the crucifixion in the synoptic narratives are not an obstacle to Jesus' messiahship but the heart and center of it; they are the means by which Jesus lives out the path of shame and rejection that he spent much of the synoptic narratives

teaching his disciples.

This is made abundantly clear when at the death of Jesus, the sky darkens, the earth shakes, and the curtain of the temple tears from top to bottom. When this happens, the centurion overseeing Jesus' crucifixion proclaims either "This man was the Son of God" (Matt 27:54, Mark 15:39) or "This man was innocent" (Luke 23:47). In the context of the Gospel narratives, the centurion's confession highlights "the necessary correlation between Jesus' identity and his crucifixion. Without the passion, Jesus cannot be understood."[29] While no one watching Jesus' crucifixion is able to see what is really going on, immediately after his death, a pagan Gentile is able to see Jesus for who he really is. This narrative point is particularly strong in the Gospel of Mark, where this is the first time that a human character has proclaimed Jesus to be the Son of God, the title used to describe Jesus in both the opening verse of that Gospel and Jesus' baptism.

The synoptic resurrection narratives vary considerably in content and length. All include the empty tomb story with the announcement made by one or two figures. Luke and Matthew both include resurrection appearances, whereas Mark records none. In Luke's account Jesus must open the minds of the disciples so they can see how it was "necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory" (24:26). Matera is helpful on the implications of this:

> That the risen Lord must open the minds of his disciples to understand the fuller meaning of the scriptures suggests that there is something unique about Jesus' messiahship that goes beyond Israel's messianic expectations. As a result, the early church and the New Testament writers began a process of defining messiahship in terms of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection.[30]

One detail shared in some way by all three accounts is that Jesus is referred to by the angel at the tomb as "Jesus the crucified" (Matt 28:5, cf. Mark 16:6, Luke 24:7).[31] Jesus' identity cannot be separated from the crucifixion. The risen Jesus is still the crucified Jesus. Resurrection does not nullify or reverse the crucifixion as if it were an aberration from the messianic plan. Rather, resurrection is the next step in the messianic plan that necessarily includes crucifixion as a crucial step.[32] The resurrection narratives make it clear that the crucifixion was not an accident overcome by the resurrection but that the resurrection is the fulfillment of Jesus' crucifixion.

Thus, the passion and resurrection accounts show that whatever is good and true about the synoptic readers' prior messianic expectations, they must be reinterpreted within the story of Jesus as the one who is rejected, suffers, dies shamefully, and is resurrected by his Father.

Messiahship and Discipleship

As has already been explored, the synoptics are quite explicit that the path taken by Jesus' disciples is to follow in the path that Jesus himself takes. Because Jesus does not reject the shame and rejection that await him at the cross, his disciples are to stand strong when they undergo persecution and suffering for Jesus, something they failed to do when Jesus was arrested. Because Jesus comes as a servant, the disciples are to reject jockeying for position and power and instead of seeking to become the greatest of all, they are to seek to become the servant and lowliest of all (cf. Luke 22:24ff). Other instructions that Jesus gives to those who would follow him, such as the instructions from the Sermon on the Mount, fit into this paradigm of letting go of personal honor and accepting shame and rejection (e.g., Matt 5:38ff, 5:43ff). Jesus teaches his disciples to live according to the new social logic of his kingdom. Those on the outskirts of Jewish social life, such as tax collectors and prostitutes, are brought into the center when they repent at the hearing of the good news. Those held in the highest esteem such as the teachers of the law or even one's own family are pushed to the margins when they fail to listen to the Word of God made flesh (Mark 3:35, Matt 23). The kingdom takes its shape from the king of the kingdom: Jesus. And Jesus is defined first and foremost as Jesus the Crucified. Thus, the pattern of Jesus' life becomes the pattern for his disciples' life.

However, the disciples do not immediately understand this. They understand rightly here and there, yet still imperfectly and insufficiently. They fail to understand who Jesus is and the power available to them through him (Mark 8:1ff), and they reject those whom Jesus would bring close (Matt 19:13ff). Their hard hearts have not yet been softened by the ministry of their Lord. Moreover, when the disciples object to the women anointing Jesus at Bethany shortly before his death, they fail to understand the situation precisely because they do not understand that her act prepares Jesus for his death and burial (Matt 26:12). The disciples embark on a similar journey to that which the synoptics invite their readers. The disciples' expectations of the Messiah shatter when they come crashing against Jesus, who resolutely takes the path of suffering, rejection, and death. Their shattered expectations cause them to lose hope and scatter when Jesus is arrested. It is only once they are confronted with the resurrected and crucified one that they are able to reconstruct their notions of what sort of Messiah Jesus is and thereby what sort of disciples they are. As Jack Dean Kingsbury observes in Matthew's Gospel:

> the conflict Jesus has with the disciples becomes intense. It has to do with the disciples' imperceptiveness, and at times resistance, to the notion that servanthood is the essence of discipleship. Not until the end of Matthew's story is this conflict

> resolved. When Jesus appears to the disciples atop the mountain in Galilee, he finally leads them to adopt his evaluative point of view on discipleship.[33]

This evaluative point of view is no less vital for those who are part of Jesus' church today. We too are surrounded by competing notions of what it means to be a faithful member of Jesus' church. The only way to cut through this confusion is to be confronted with what sort of savior Jesus is. Every false or insufficient answer that falls on this cornerstone will be shattered to pieces. Yet the crucified and resurrected one is still able to guide his disciples and reorient them to the path that leads to both the cross and the empty tomb. And he reminds us that we cannot have the one without the other.

Endnotes

1 All translations of the Old and New Testaments will be taken from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

2 Cf. the fundamental misunderstanding of James and John when a Samaritan village rejects them in Luke's Gospel: 9:51ff.

3 Frank J. Matera, *New Testament Christology.* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1999), 3.

4 This sequential methodology is generally the norm for analysis of Christology in the New Testament, e.g. Morna D. Hooker, *Not Ashamed of the Gospel: New Testament Interpretations of the Death of Christ.* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994); John T. Carroll and Joel B. Green, *The Death of Jesus in Early Christianity,* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1995); and Matera, *New Testament Christology.*

5 J. H. Charlesworth, "From Messianology to Christology: Problems and Prospects," in *The Messiah: Developments in Earliest Judaism and Christianity.* Ed. James H. Charlesworth. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992): 6.

6 John J. Collins, *The Scepter and the Star: Messianism in Light of the Dead Sea Scrolls.* 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 18.

7 For example, Morton Smith, "What Is Implied by the Variety of Messianic Figures?" *Journal of Biblical Literature* 78, no. 1 (1959): 66–72 or Charlesworth, "From Messianology to Christology."

8 William Scott Green, "Introduction: Messiah in Judaism: Rethinking the Question," in *Judaisms and Their Messiahs at the Turn of the Christian Era.* Ed. Jacob Neusner, William Scott Green, and Ernest S. Frerichs, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 4.

9 Collins, *The Scepter and the Star* and Matthew V. Novenson, *The Grammar of Messianism: An Ancient Jewish Political Idiom and Its Users,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

10 Novenson, *The Grammar of Messianism,* 6.

11 Collins, *The Scepter and the Star,* 18.

12 Novenson, *The Grammar of Messianism,* 28.

13 Collins, *The Scepter and the Star,* 17. See also Novenson, *The Grammar of Messianism,* 273.

14 N. A. Dahl, "Messianic Ideas and the Crucifixion of Jesus," in *The Messiah: Developments in Earliest Judaism and Christianity.* Ed. James H. Charlesworth. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992): 386.

15 Michael E. Stone, "The Question of the Messiah in 4 Ezra," in *Judaisms and Their Messiahs at the Turn of the Christian Era.* Ed. Jacob Neusner, William Scott Green, and Ernest S. Frerichs. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987): 213ff.

16 George W. E. Nickelsburg, "Salvation without and with a Messiah: Developing Beliefs in Writing Ascribed to Enoch," in *Judaisms and Their Messiahs at the Turn of the Christian Era.* Ed. Jacob Neusner, William Scott Green, and Ernest S. Frerichs. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987): 63.

17 Shemaryahu Talmon, "Waiting for the Messiah: The Spiritual Universe of the Qumran Covenanters," in *Judaisms and Their Messiahs at the Turn of the Christian Era.* Ed. Jacob Neusner, William Scott Green, and Ernest S. Frerichs. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987): 125.

18 Carroll and Green, *The Death of Jesus in Early Christianity,* 171.

19 James D. G. Dunn, "Messianic Ideas and their Influence on the Jesus of History," in *The Messiah: Developments in Earliest Judaism and Christianity.* Ed. James H. Charlesworth. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992): 369.

20 All translations from the Pseudepigrapha are from ed. James H. Charlesworth, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha,* 2 vols. (Garden City: Doubleday, 1983).

21 Martin Hengel, *Crucifixion: In the Ancient World and the Folly of the Message of the Cross.* Trans. John Bowden. (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977), Chapter 1: "The 'Folly' of the Crucified Son of God." Kindle.

22 Hooker, *Not Ashamed of the Gospel,* 12.

23 Novenson, *The Grammar of Messianism,* 17.

24 My translation. The first clause, "Ἱλεώς σοι κύριε," is often translated "Far be it from you, Lord" based on a handful of instances of this phrase in the LXX. For an explanation of the relevant issues and a defense of the translation used here, see Jeffrey A. Gibbs, *Matthew,* vol. 2. *Concordia Commentary.* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2018), 830ff.

25 Gibbs, *Matthew,* vol. 2, 814.

26 Cf. Gibbs, *Matthew,* vol. 2, 838.

27 Matera, *New Testament Christology,* 17.

28 Hooker, *Not Ashamed of the Gospel,* 87.

29 Carrol and Green, *The Death of Jesus in Early Christianity,* 29.

30 Matera, *New Testament Christology,* 244.

31 My translation.

32 Cf. Edwin K. Broadhead, "Jesus the Nazarene: Narrative Strategy and Christological Imagery in the Gospel of Mark." *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 52 (1993): 14.

33 Jack Dean Kingsbury, *Mathew as Story,* 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988), 130.