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Jesus as the Son of God in Matthew's Gospel

Jack Dean Kingsbury calls attention to the importance of a “Son of God” Christology in Matthew.¹

Structure

Matthew uses the formula “From that time Jesus began . . .” (4:17; 16:21) to organize his Gospel into three parts. The first part (1:1–4:16) contains material that answers the question “Who is Jesus?” and the answer that this material provides is invariably “the Son of God” (see 1:16, 18; 2:15; 3:17; 4:3, 6). Thus the divine sonship of Jesus is emphasized in that section of this Gospel specifically devoted to establishing his identity.

Chiasm

The central theological motif of the Gospel of Matthew (“In the person of his Son Jesus, God has come to dwell with his people”) is expressed through a chiasm involving 1:23 and 28:20. These verses enclose the entire Gospel with the thought that God is with us and will remain with us forever through Jesus. Both passages that comprise this chiasm present Jesus as the Son of God. The context for 1:23 is the virginal conception of Jesus; the context for 28:20 is Jesus’s commission to his disciples to baptize in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (28:19).

The Voice of God

It is clear that, of all the characters in Matthew's narrative, God is the one whose point of view is normative: God's opinion counts more than the opinion of anyone else. Yet God speaks only twice in the narrative, and both times it is in reference to the identity of Jesus (3:17; 17:5). The only time that God ever enters Matthew's narrative as a character in the story is to declare that Jesus is God's Son.

The Passion

The climax of Matthew's story of Jesus comes in the passion narrative; this is the point to which the entire Gospel builds. The passion in Matthew is organized around the motif of Jesus's divine sonship:

- Jesus claims that the reason his enemies want to kill him is that he is the Son of God (21:33–46).
- Jesus is sentenced to death for claiming to be the Son of God (26:63–64).
- Jesus's enemies claim that his crucifixion proves that he is not the Son of God (27:40, 43).
- Ironically, Jesus's death actually convinces people that he is the Son of God (27:54).

The Disciples

A subplot in Matthew's Gospel concerns the disciples of Jesus and their relationship to him. The climax to this "story within the story" comes in 16:13–20, when God reveals to Peter that Jesus is the Son of God.

1. See Jack Dean Kingsbury, *Matthew as Story*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1988).