

Editorial: Proclaiming Jesus, the Servant King

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Living in what many have dubbed a “postmodern world,” one of the crucial challenges facing Christians today is the proclamation of an exclusive Savior in an increasingly pluralistic world. This is especially difficult living in North America, not only due to the fact that the mindset of pluralism has affected so many people’s thinking, but also because so many think they know something of the Jesus of the Bible, when in reality, they know very little. What characterizes our society, and sadly the church, is a profound biblical illiteracy, which opens the door to serious confusion regarding the identity and utter importance of our Lord. In such a situation, how ought the church to respond? The answer is simple and perennial: we must return once again to the Scriptures in study and prayer, being confronted anew with our great God in the face of Jesus Christ. We must proclaim afresh the Jesus of the Bible in all of his glory and majesty as the only Lord and Savior, and even more, we must personally take up our cross, follow him, and proclaim him to our generation.

In this Bible study edition of *SBJT*, our goal is to help the church accomplish such a task. We focus our attention on Mark’s Gospel, which wonderfully, as do all of the Gospels, presents us with our incomparable Lord and Savior. No doubt, there are many themes found in Mark’s Gospel that are worthy of our attention, but if we are to do justice to the central purpose and subject matter of the Gospel, we must attend to Mark’s presentation of Jesus,

particularly his presentation of Jesus as the Servant King. Robert Stein, who has devoted much of his scholarly career to the study of Mark’s Gospel, begins this edition with six important and very practical exegetical issues any pastor, teacher, and student of Mark must take seriously in order to interpret the Gospel correctly. In particular, Stein wisely reminds us that our task in reading Mark’s Gospel is not to reconstruct “the historical Jesus” or fixate our attention on secondary personalities such as John the Baptist, Peter, and so on. Instead, we must constantly be asking ourselves as we read the Gospel: What is Mark seeking to communicate, by the Spirit, about the identity, message, and mission of Jesus Christ, the Son of God (Mk 1:1)? Then, in light of this, what implications does this have for our lives?

After Stein’s basic overview of some key hermeneutical issues in reading Mark, our next five articles specifically focus on how Mark presents Jesus as the Servant King. Brian Vickers, in a very helpful article, unpacks the meaning of Jesus’ announcement that the “kingdom of God” has dawned in his coming, death, and resurrection. Obviously, the message of the kingdom is key to understanding both the message and identity of Jesus the Messiah, and Vickers does a masterful job in describing what the kingdom is in its Old Testament context and New Testament fulfillment; the nature of the kingdom; and, more significantly, the utter importance of King Jesus and what he demands from us as members of his

kingdom. James Edwards continues to help us understand Mark's presentation of Jesus by showing how images of Isaiah's Servant of the Lord provided Mark with the template or prototype for the presentation of Jesus as the good news of God, both in his ministry and sacrificial death. As Edwards carefully demonstrates, the enigmatic Servant of the Lord—who in a mysterious way embodies the good news of God's deliverance of Judah from the Babylonian captivity—also prefigures the good news of Jesus, the Servant of the Lord, who in his life, death, and resurrection, not only fulfills the role of God's Servant, but also the nature and mission of the Lord himself in his saving work. That is why, Edwards argues, the good news is not about Jesus; the good news *is* Jesus Christ, crucified and risen.

Michael Wilkins, who has devoted much thinking regarding discipleship in the Gospels, focuses specifically on Mark's contribution to this issue. Wilkins stresses that for all the similarities between discipleship in Mark and forms of discipleship in first century society, Mark's portrait is different and unique because it must be understood in light of Jesus, the unique Servant and Lord. In his article, Ardel Caneday helpfully reminds us that Mark's Gospel, as a literary masterpiece, must be read in light of the overall storyline of the book and not atomistically. When this is done, it becomes clear that Mark presents the character, identity, and mission of Jesus as nothing less than the anointing and enthronement of God's Son who alone is Savior and King. William Cook rounds out our discussion of Mark's Gospel with an expositional article focusing on how Mark presents the passion of the Lord Jesus as that which fulfills the plan of God to save sinners from their sins.

Finally, in an important article related to Mark's Gospel but which interacts with Greg Boyd's open theist proposal regarding Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane, Charles Quarles, after a thorough examination, rightly and wisely concludes that Boyd's interpretation of the text fails. Quarles concludes that when the prayer is examined in context and viewed in light of the theological emphases of the Gospels, it does not confirm an open theist understanding of the future, but instead the historic view of the church regarding divine foreknowledge and God's inalterable plan. Quarles's article is an important one, once again showing that the open theist case, at the exegetical level, has not been made.

It is my prayer that this edition of the journal will help us read, understand, and proclaim God's Word better for the glory of our Triune God and the good of his church.