JESUS AS THE DAVIDIC MESSIAH IN MATTHEW

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Introduction

There is a growing awareness in recent New Testament scholarship that an analysis of the christology of any particular gospel cannot be done properly by studying christological titles alone. Nobody denies that their contribution to the understanding of Jesus Christ in each of the gospels is significant, but there are other christological aspects which they do not touch. This opinion is based on the assumption that each gospel is a story about Jesus. If Jesus is a central figure of that story, everything in it relates directly or indirectly to him. In regard to christology, this means that besides christological titles the narrative itself contributes significantly to the understanding of Jesus Christ. Even more, this also means that the titles themselves cannot be properly interpreted without seeing them as part of the narrative, i.e. that the narrative itself, and not the analysis of the history of tradition of each particular title, has the last word which is decisive for its meaning. This new approach to christology gave rise to the birth of narrative christology.

The suitability of the term “narrative christology” is particularly obvious in the case of the Gospel of Matthew. Matthew begins his gospel by reporting that the newborn child whom his father Joseph named Jesus, will be called Emmanuel, which means “meth' hēmōn ho theos”, and closes it with Jesus’ promise to be always with his disciples: egō meth' humōn eimi. These phrases, which form an inclusio of Matthew’s gospel, suggest that Matthew intended to shape his story about Jesus according to the Old Testament model of telling the history of God with his people. The name Emmanuel connects the divine and human sphere. It points to the presence of the divine among the humans. Jesus as Emmanuel is the embodiment of God’s presence on earth. In that sense he has an eschatological significance. Accordingly, if the whole of Matthean christology should be seen within the framework of Emmanuel-christology, a careful analysis must be made of the way Matthew narrates the story about Jesus’ life in order to discover how he interprets the person of Jesus Christ.
Regarding the christological titles, we should be aware that an analysis of them is not sufficient for getting the whole picture about Matthew's christology. On the other hand, every analysis of Matthew's christology will be incomplete without the analysis of christological titles. Furthermore, we can no longer speak about different christologies in Matthew's gospel, but about one christology with different aspects. Each aspect contributes to the whole picture. It is, therefore, questionable whether we can speak about the priority among different christological titles, a view particularly advanced by J.D. Kingsbury in his various publications. According to him, the title Son of God has the priority and is the most important title for Matthew's understanding of Jesus. To be sure, Kingsbury mentions a lot of convincing proofs which support his opinion. So it cannot be overlooked that after Peter's confession in Mt 16:16 “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” Jesus answers with words “Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jona! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven,” which clearly shows that Jesus interprets Peter's confession as the revelation which comes from God. However, it seems that Kingsbury overlooked several important details. First of all, Matthew is the only Evangelist who couples Peter's confession of Jesus' messiahship in Cesarea Philippi with his confession that Jesus is the son of the living God (su ei ho Christos ho huios tou theou tou zōntos - Mt 16:16; cf. Mk 8:29, Lk 9:20, and John 6:69). Almost identical wording appears in Matthew's version of the question of the high priest: su ei ho christos ho huios tou theou; (Mt 26:63) in contrast to Mk 14:61 (su ei ho christos he huios tou eulogē tou;) and Lk 22:67 (su ei ho christos;). Also, after Peter's confession, Matthew writes in v. 20: “Then he strictly charged the disciples to tell no one that he was the Christ.” Finally, even though it seems that Jesus in his trial before the Sanhedrin gives a positive answer to the question of the high priest: “Are you the Messiah, the Son of God?” (Mt 26:63), it is important to note that Jesus continues by mentioning another christological title, the Son of man. In both cases the title Son of God is combined with another title, as if Matthew feared that by using only the title Son of God something decisive would have been left unsaid. All of this shows that the relationship between christological titles in Matthew is far more complex than it might seem at first glance.

This thesis will be confirmed in the analysis which follows. Its ultimate goal is to demonstrate that Matthew's presentation of Jesus as the Davidic...