

The last encounter between Jesus and representatives of the religious leadership had resulted in their abandoning the field. They had been defeated and they knew it. The Lord now turns the tables and asks his adversaries a question. It is a theological question so it is addressed to the scribes, the teachers of the law, the theologians of the people, or, if not directly to them it is addressed to their teaching. Mark seems to indicate that the previous questions had been asked on the same day. He asked a loaded question about prevailing opinions about the Messiah

v.35

Christ is the Greek translation of the Hebrew word Messiah; both words in their respective languages mean “anointed one,” that is “the one anointed to be king.” The Jews expected the Messiah to be a descendant of David and a royal personage befitting that pedigree. Bartimaeus, the blind man outside Jericho, remember had addressed Jesus as “Son of David” in Mark 10:47. The crowds greeted him as he made his way into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday with that same title, as we read in 11:10. “Son of David” was a popular equivalent for “Messiah,” the long awaited “King of the Jews.” But here Jesus suggested that there was something inadequate, incomplete in the profile of the Messiah if all he was understood to be was a royal descendant of King David. It is not enough to say that the Messiah is the Son of David. By the way, it is a very interesting piece of history that in the first two centuries after Jesus the rabbis avoided identifying the Messiah as the Son of David, though they had made that identification as a matter of course up to the time of Jesus. They were well aware of the claims that had been made for Jesus as the Messiah and did their best to undercut those claims. Only later, when the rift between synagogue and church was complete did the Jewish rabbis once again offer messianic interpretations of Psalm 110 and make the obvious point that the Messiah would be and had been prophesied to be the son of David.

v.36

The Lord prefaced his citation by reminding his hearers that this is what God himself

says, and also that David, because he was speaking by the Holy Spirit, spoke these words as a prophet. Whatever is said here about the Messiah to come, God himself said. Some measure of the importance of this text from Psalm 110 is that it is the most frequently quoted OT text in the NT. Psalm 110 is quoted or alluded to fully 33 times in the NT.

In the original Hebrew the first “Lord” in the first verse of Psalm 110 is the name Yahweh. The second “Lord” is the general title adonai. The first Lord refers to God, the second to the king. In any case, David, speaking about his descendant, the Messiah, confesses that he is a personage greater than he. Remember, everyone to whom Jesus was speaking that day understood Psalm 110:1 as a reference to the Messiah.

v.37

There are three points of distinction here. The first is that David himself calls the Messiah his Lord. People do not usually call their sons, “my Lord.” The Messiah would be no mere successor to David; he would be a personage higher and greater than David. The second is that this personage would sit at God’s right hand, the place of supreme honor. The third is that all of God’s enemies would be placed under his feet. How then can a person of such exalted status be David’s son? And Mark expects his readers here in the seventh decade of the first century to know the answer to that question: however much Jesus was truly was David’s descendant, he was in fact also God’s Son.

The Jews ideas about Messiah were obviously misunderstood, too simplified as we have said before they were not connecting the dots. They saw him as another David, a King David alive again. They expected him to be the remarkably successful warrior that David had been and lead them in conquest of their enemies. This is a principal reason why they did not recognize Jesus as the Messiah. He did not meet their expectations, he didn’t do what the Messiah was supposed to do in their view. His ministry, dramatic and wonderful as it had been, was not what they were expecting and it would become still less what they were expecting when he went to the cross. That is the reason why

Jesus did not refer to himself as the Son of David: the term was loaded with the popular misunderstanding of the person and work of the Messiah. The Messiah was the son of David, to be sure, a point often enough stressed in the NT, but he was much more than the son of David. Remember, as we have studied, how often Jesus did not want things revealed at times because he knew they would be misunderstood.

The question Jesus asked was difficult to interpret, all the more so because he didn't answer his own question. And there is something very typical about this. I suppose that almost every thoughtful reader of the Gospels has at one time or another wondered why Jesus didn't just come out and say that he was God. Why didn't he stand up before the great crowds in those temple porches or, for that matter, why didn't he simply tell his disciples that he was in fact, no one less than the Maker of heaven and earth? Why didn't he tell them that he was the Second Person of the Triune God now having taken to himself a human nature in order to save his people from their sins? Why didn't he explain himself in perfectly unmistakable terms? Wouldn't it have spared the church a great deal of confusion and difficulty and made it easier for the church to get its doctrine right in subsequent centuries if Jesus had been more explicit?

And yet He was direct if they had understood picture/fulfillment, type/antitype as they should have. I am the door, I am the light, I am the temple etc.

In respect to its indirectness, this rhetorical question that Jesus asked is entirely typical. He asked a question: "Why is it that, if the Messiah is supposed to be a descendant of David, as the OT prophets so clearly say, does David himself refer to the Messiah as his Lord?" In that text from Psalm 110 the part about putting enemies under the feet applies to the Messiah when he comes, the coming deliverer who would establish the kingdom of God in the world. But the one to whom this applies in Psalm 110:1 David calls his Lord and Master. Fathers are not accustomed to calling their sons "Lord," and yet David addresses one who was to be his descendant as his Lord.

He asked his question in v. 37 and leaves it at that! Why did he not go on to say the obvious: "I am not only David's descendant, I am David's Lord? I am the Son of God

now come in the flesh.” Why didn’t he say about himself something like what Paul said about him in Romans 1: namely that according to his human nature he was a descendant of David, but as to his divine nature he was the Son of God?

The fact that Jesus cited this text and used it to make this point accounts for the fact that the apostles came to see Psalm 110:1 as one of the most important texts concerning the Messiah in the Old Testament. But Jesus did not himself draw out the implications of that statement. He left it for others to do. Why was that? And why here in particular?

We have seen in our studies in the Gospel of Mark on any number of occasions that Jesus kept his identity as the Messiah secret– or at least did not over emphasize that identity – so as not to provoke a confrontation with the religious leadership before the proper time. This is the famous “messianic secret” that Jesus not only practiced himself but ordered his disciples to practice and others who had come to the realization that he was, in fact, the Messiah. He would tell them not to tell anyone, though sometimes they did just the opposite. Keeping that secret was more than most people could do. Knowing human nature I’ll bet you a lot of them left Jesus having been miraculously healed and said sotto voce, “Now don’t tell anybody about this but....”

But the time for secrecy had now passed. We noticed at the beginning of the Passion Week that Jesus was now throwing his previous caution to the wind. He allowed the great crowds on Palm Sunday to acknowledge him as the Son of David, to shout their hosannas to the one who comes in the name of the Lord. But if the gloves had come off and Jesus was throwing down the gauntlet, why did he not make more explicit, why did he not stand up and say publicly and once for all that he was God now present in human nature? Why didn’t he tell the people in the temple that day “I’m the one David was talking about; I am David’s Lord, and I am your Lord as well, the Lord of heaven and earth”?

It is not as though no one figured out that this is precisely what had to be said about Jesus of Nazareth: that he was the Son of God, not in the sense that all believers are

sons of God, but that Jesus was God himself, God the Son. We have that confession made on several occasions in the Gospels as the truth dawned on one man or woman or another. “My Lord and my God” Thomas would say to Jesus a week after the resurrection: an extraordinary confession to come out of the mouth of a monotheist Jew concerning a human being he had known for several years.

And no wonder. If Jesus did not come out and tell people that he was God the Son, that though his human nature was only some 30 years old, his divine nature was eternal and that he had, in fact, himself created heaven and earth. If Jesus did not say such things explicitly about himself, he did say many things that a thoughtful, intelligent reader and hearer would take to be virtually a claim to be one with God.

1. He claimed the right and the authority to judge mankind on the last day. That was an extraordinary thing for an amateur rabbi from Galilee to say. That he would pass judgment on mankind at the great day. That is God’s work and God’s work alone as the Bible clearly says.

2. What is more striking still, Jesus claimed the authority to forgive sins. “You sins are forgiven,” he said to any number of those who came to him in faith. But only God can forgive the sins that have been committed against him.

3. Still more Jesus claimed for himself the right to bestow eternal life and, what is more, to bestow it on those who followed him, because they followed him. As many have pointed out through the ages, that is either the voice of God or of a megalomaniac.

4. And there is much, much more of this kind of evidence. He said on several occasions that the eternal destiny of human beings depended upon their response to him. He said of himself that he was greater than the temple and greater than Jonah and that he existed before Abraham. He identified actions toward himself with actions toward God. He taught the truth on his own authority. More than 70 times he introduced his teaching by saying, “Truly I say to you...” For many assertions he offered no proof other than that of his own word- His authoritative word – all of this

chapter is about His authority. He performed miracles also in his own name. His disciples performed them in his name, but he performed them in his own. He exercised divine power, that is, in his own name. A failure to give glory to God for a miracle performed was Moses' sin in the desert for which he was not granted entrance into the Promised Land, but Jesus was not faulted for a similar sin. He wielded divine power in his own name. He received worship. He never told those who fell at his feet to get up because he was merely a man as his disciples and apostles would later do when people fell at their feet. In the NT no one successfully falls down and does homage before any human being except before Jesus Christ. We read of demons acknowledging him as the Son of God, of his ordering them to be silent, and of their obeying him. And, finally, he applied to himself OT texts that referred to or applied to God himself.

There was so much of this that we can understand why, on one occasion, the Jews took up stones to stone him because he, a mere man, claimed to be God. But, as many different lines of evidence as converge to prove that Jesus was God, knew himself to be God, and was unafraid of speaking and acting as God, still he did not state the fact openly, unequivocally, and then explain it by reference to the Triune nature of God and the incarnation of the Second Person of the Godhead. Why was he not more explicit?

This is a question every Christian should ponder and know the answer to because what makes this question so pressing is the fact that Christ's deity, his being God, is what utterly sets him apart from every other human being who has ever lived and what makes him supremely important to every human being on the face of the earth. The fact that Jesus of Nazareth was and is Almighty God is the single fact that unlocks the secret of your existence and the existence of every human being. It is the single reason why we have every right to say that every human being must become a Christian, a follower of Christ. It is for this reason that Jesus, the first century man, has no rivals and no successors. His life is unique and it is final. Make the crucial discovery that Jesus is God and you cannot avoid the conclusion that Islam, which regards him only as a prophet and not even the greatest prophet, that Islam or for that matter Judaism or Buddhism or any other human religion or philosophy, is wrong at the key point. They

may be right about many things but they are wrong at the essential point. It is the fact that Jesus is God that makes the Christian faith true and all other religions and philosophies false at the bottom.

But, if Jesus was, as the New Testament claims and as the Gospels show him to be, the living God, the Second Person of the Triune God, the Maker of heaven and earth, now come in human nature, well then, it is no wonder:

1. that his birth was different than that of any other human being;
2. that he should do and say things more remarkable than any human being has ever done;
3. that his death should be the salvation of the world;
4. that he should rise from the dead;
5. and that his life and work should have such momentous consequence for every single human being who has ever lived, lives now, or ever shall live in the world.

That there is mystery here, no one can doubt. Indeed, there are two mysteries for the price of one: the plurality of persons within the unity of the Godhead (the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit) and the union of the Godhead and manhood in the person of Jesus. But mysterious as all this may be, the logic is clear and irresistible: if Jesus is God and died for men, then obviously that and that only is the way of salvation. And, for someone who has embraced Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, the fact that he is both God and man makes him unquestionably deserving of my absolute and unquestioning loyalty.

So, back to our original question: why did Jesus not say that he was God; say it and say it again; say it until everyone understood precisely what he was saying? Why did he leave the question of v. 37 unanswered? I will suggest four reasons.

First it is accurate to say that Jesus knew better than anyone what people would and could understand. There was a spiritual blindness and ignorance then as there is now. Even the Lord's disciples who witnessed all his miracles did not connect all the dots

until after his resurrection. They got glimpses and from time to time the mists would clear, but their confusion was still great and the bitter death of Jesus drove all that they had learned about him right out of their minds. It was not until after his resurrection that it all became clear to them and they fully understood that Jesus was both God and man. Until the resurrection it was simply too much for people to take in. They knew Jesus as a man; he was a man in every way; they simply couldn't understand how a man could be the living God. The resurrection proved to be the key that unlocked the puzzle.

Second, it is surely also right to say that the Lord did not make his deity as explicit as he might have because it is his will that his followers live by faith and not by sight. The truth about Jesus was there for any honest heart to grasp – and honest hearts grasped it at the time and there were those who grasped it before Jesus was incarnate. – and the truth is there in the Gospels for any honest heart to grasp today, but the Lord requires that it be received by faith. Faith sees what unbelief will not and it is the beauty and glory of faith and it is the value of faith in God's sight that it does not require all the demonstrations that unbelief asks for and demands. "Show us a sign," the Pharisees demanded. But Jesus refused. Their hearts were not sincere. They did not want to believe in him and they had no intention of worshipping him. And the same things might be said about the demonstration of Christ's deity. We may well wonder, we often do I think, why the Lord has made so much to depend on faith and why he shows us so little and makes us believe so much. We will someday see all of this demonstrated beyond doubt, but now we have to believe it. He could demonstrate all of these things to us until no questions were left; he will one day do just that, but he has ordered by we should live and be saved by faith.

He could have demonstrated his deity to people then. In fact it was demonstrated once to three of his disciples on the Mount of Transfiguration. Peter, James and John saw Jesus Christ for a few minutes that night with the divine glory upon him, but only then and only once. Why not fifteen times, twenty times? Why not to all the disciples? Why not to thousands upon thousands of people? His divine glory was also demonstrated in

his resurrection from the dead. But even then that demonstration was given to those who believed and not to others.

The third reason is his glory was withheld from them in judgment for their unbelief. "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." So that text Romans 3:23 reads in most of the English versions. The New English Bible reads that same verse, "All have sinned and have been deprived of God's glory." Man loses his right to the glory of God by his sin and his rebellion. Remember unbelieving Israel in the wilderness. Moses would speak to God in the tabernacle, he would get some revelation, some communication from God to his people there in the tabernacle meeting with him as it were face to face, and when he come out of the tent of meeting his face would be radiating the divine glory that he had just now been in the presence of. Moses would tell the Israelites what it was that God had given him to say to them and then he would put a veil over his face so that Israel could not behold the glory of God that was shining on Moses' face. She didn't deserve that privilege because she didn't believe, she didn't love God, and she had no heart to serve him. She saw the glory briefly while Moses was speaking, but then it was veiled and hidden from her as a judgment on her unbelief. Paul talks about that episode in 2 Corinthians 3 and then speaks of people in his day whose hearts were still veiled, whose unbelief still keeps them from beholding the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

The glory of God was standing before the people in the temple that day. It had been demonstrated to them through three long years of the most remarkable ministry. But Jesus wouldn't let them see it simply to satisfy their curiosity or to entertain them. They had lost their right to that privilege. Showing his divine glory to them would have been nothing more than a stunt.

And, finally, in the fourth place, to be unrecognized as the Son of God, the Creator of heaven and earth was part of his humiliation, part of the sacrifice, part of his suffering for our sin.

The greatest single fact in all the world – that God had come into the world as a man to

save us from our sin and give eternal life to those who trust in him- remained undiscovered by so many in Jesus' own day and by so many in our day it continues to be undiscovered because of the pride and sinfulness of their hearts. But to others, it became the foundation of all their hopes and the keystone of their understanding of all reality.

But that must not be the case with us. Never the case with us. For the fact is, tell me what you think of Jesus Christ, what you really think about who he is and what he has done, and I will tell you what your future will be. Tell me your thoughts about Jesus Christ and your beliefs about him and your commitments concerning him, and I will tell you what is to become of you when you die and, what is more, what kind of life you will live until you die.

Because Jesus was not only David's descendant, he was David's Lord and God.