

Was God a Son?

Jonathan K. Dodson | Advent 2013

We are considering *the coming of God* this Advent. We've looked at the unlikely claims that God became a baby, a helpless child, and a perfect human, a sinless person. Today we're looking at: Was Jesus actually the Son of God? Was God *a Son*? God walked the earth as a male adult? Let's consider this by looking at the meaning of this title, Son of God. What he the person of God? If so, how do we know, and how should we respond?

Person of God

This is the Christmas claim—Jesus was the “Son of God.” It's sung in a famous classical piece by the composer Handel in his “Messiah,” “[For unto us a child is born and unto us a son is given...](#)” This comes right out of the Old Testament: (Isa 7). The child is born but the son is *given*. Why is the *son* (and not the child) given? Maybe because the son is “Almighty God”, the very son of God. A son who was never born but always has been, *Son*. Is this *Jesus*? Let's see what **God** thinks. The Son of God title is used throughout the Bible but appears most prevalently in the Gospel of Mark, so we'll focus there. At the opening of the Gospel of Mark the first verse reads: “[The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.](#)” Here it is in neon. The coming attraction. Let's watch for the Son of God. Jesus' public baptism, we're told “[And a voice came from heaven, “You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased”](#) (1:11). Here we see that God freely, lovingly identifies Jesus as his Son. Later on during the transfiguration of Jesus, God the Father says from a cloud: “[This is my beloved Son; listen to him](#)” (9:7). Clearly God sees Jesus as his Son, **but what does that mean?** Well, lets go back to the baptism. in Judaism People were regularly baptized as a sign of repentance. Meaning they were turning away from sin to worship YHWH, the one, true God. Which makes sense of John's resistance in baptizing Jesus, who had no sin. So why get baptized? Jesus' baptism is different, not one of repentance and salvation. Instead, it **announcement and anointing**. God is announcing his delight in Jesus as his Son, no ifs, ands, or buts. He passes through the waters, not in judgment and cleansing, but in approval and anointing, the voice of his Father, and the Spirit dove of power from heaven. This double symbol (voice and dove) indicates the approval of God the Father and anointing of God the Spirit. No prophet or priest gets that. It is God's way of bill-boarding the city with “Jesus is my Son, the Son of God.” Nobody gets a baptism like that, especially without repentance, except Jesus. **This is telling us that Jesus—the Son of God—is utterly unique**, that he is part of the divine community—Father, Son, & Spirit—and as the Son of God he is full of God, very God of very God as the Chalcedonian Creed says. The later episode, where God says: “listen to him,” tells us he is also the voice of God, his revelation (Heb 1:1). So, to summarize, we've got a big bold claim up front, stuffed into this title—that Jesus is the **person and power of God**, approval and anointing. Okay, God says it, *but how do we know Jesus actually was God? Where's the power to go with it?*

Power of God

As Mark unfolds, we discover the **demonic spirits** (suspend your scientific bias) recognize Jesus as Son of God. This isn't God; its God's enemy. Mark tells a graphic story about a possessed man who lived among the tombs, couldn't be held by chains, howled in the wild

and cut himself. He runs toward Jesus falling at his feet crying out: “[What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God](#)” (5:7; 1:25). Jesus identifies the evil spirit as Legion because there were many in the man. Legion—legion—begs Jesus to not send them out of the country so he sends them into pigs. Here we have, perhaps, the most terrifying of people undone before Jesus. What kind of power would intimidate not one but myriad of demons? God’s power and Jesus shows his power without even flinching. There’s no wrestling match here. It’s nothing for him. Why? Because he is the **very person and power of God**. So we’ve got God the Father’s testimony, God the Spirit, and now the demons, who are opposed to God, trembling in Jesus’ presence with full confession—Son of the Most High God. They even add in “Most high” because they know who this is. Now, what did Jesus think? Is all this a projection onto him or did he actually claim to be the Son of God? In a home, packed with people, **Jesus** encounters a paralyzed man, who is lowered down through the roof for healing, but Jesus responds by saying “Son, your sins are forgiven.” Makes you wonder what is most important. Experts in Jewish law say, “Who can forgive sins but *God* alone?” Jesus responds: “[Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Rise, take up your bed and walk’? But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins, ‘Pick up your bed and go home.’](#)” *And he did, with singing.* (2:9-10). The very authority, power of God present to do what only God can do—forgive and restore. Our sins aren’t ultimately against one another, they are against the one who calls them sins, who establishes right and wrong, the Judge and Creator. Only the truly offended party can forgive and restore. [kids] Jesus’ use of power reveals his deity, *but he’s doing more than that*. His authority isn’t used just to depose evil but also to *forgive sin*. The Pharisees know that only God can do that! Here we have the power of God in meekness, in compassion, in love—restoring a paralyzed man and forgiving his sin. In fact, according to the Law a paralytic was ritually unclean and not to be touched, rejected by society. Jesus overturns, then fulfills the law, by using his power to restore cleanliness, so he’s up to code, he’s forgiven and accepted. That’s what Jesus does with his power. He takes people on the margin and brings them into the center of God’s forgiveness and love. It’s not abusive power, showy spectacle, but servant power. He uses his power to heal creation, restore the lame, and *cleanse the deepest wound, our sinful separation from his Father*.

Responding to the Son

So, we’ve considered God’s perspective, the demons’ perspective, and Jesus’ view on him being the Son of God. What about a “secular” view, someone who doesn’t have a Jewish stake in the game? We get a close-up from the **centurion** (Longinus was a Roman military officer in charge of 100) who stood facing Jesus as he hung on the cross. Mark records: “[And Jesus uttered a loud cry and breathed his last. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And when the centurion, who stood facing him saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, ‘Truly this man was the Son of God!’](#)” (15:39). Here we have Jesus’ very executor declaring him the Son of God. In essence, he’s saying, for all to hear, “I made a gross mistake!” He’s wrecking his career, ruining his reputation. Why do this. He could have at least kept it to himself. What was so **affecting** that he couldn’t help but blurt out his confession? It was in response to the “way Jesus breathed his last.” What was significant about Jesus’ last breath? It’s hard to know. It is accompanied by a loud cry. What did Jesus cry? Did he announce his triumph over sin, death, and evil, declare his love for the

world, his longing to be with the Father, or just writhe in pain? We don't know. What we do know is that the centurion was deeply affected, so moved, that he couldn't help himself and blurted out: "[Truly this man was the Son of God!](#)" Imagine being there, at the foot of the cross. The physicality of it all, the heaving body, the atmosphere titillated with emotion, the sky a supernatural black, the sheer power and grace of it all must have converged in the centurion's soul to awaken, at the very least insight—this is the Son of God. He has witnessed an act of the ultimate warrior, the self-sacrifice of the Son of God, landing on the grenade for his rebellious creation. Departing from the intimacy of the Father out "my God, my God"; it must have been undeniable, as Jesus reached out for him with a cry, heaving in pain, submitting to his father, honoring him down to the very last breath, where Jesus embraced it all for us. "**Truly**", means "I speak with certainty." How did Jesus' executor come to such certainty? There were no apologetic books to read and no excuses to make; he stood there viscerally aware—this is the Son of God. Are you aware? **How should we respond?** Some responded by associating him with Elijah, a religious prophet, but Jesus made no such claim. He did not claim to be Elijah. In fact he had refuted that association earlier with this disciples (8:27-29). Jesus claimed to be the Son of God. So you have to decide. The options are limited. Is he lying or telling the truth. Is he a *shyster or the Son of God?* Another person responded by giving Jesus wine to dull the pain, cynically saying we should wait to see if Elijah comes to save him. Mockery. It's like they are saying "Nice little *crazy* Jesus." But Jesus doesn't act crazy. He's level headed, compassionate, and uses his power for good, to heal and forgive, not gain more power, status or control. *Is he psychotic or Son of God?* You must respond. Here we have a clear claim by Jesus himself that he is the very power and person of God. You cant blow it off. He's either a shyster, a psycho, or the Son of God. There's the centurion, standing in the dirt, looking up at the bloodied Christ. He had seen a thousand crucifixions, but this one was unique. Jesus died without hurling insults—but by forgiving sins—and he dies with a cry that carried enough force to rip the temple curtain in two. I think the soldier felt that force, the force of truth and beauty merging, God and grace manifest in Jesus, God crucified before him. That same truth and the beauty is present with us this morning, in the very word of God—listen to him—the presence of God is here, confirming this truth, asking us, you, to surrender to his forgiving power, to his divine sacrifice. Andy Crouch makes a stunning observation about Jesus use of power. **Jesus doesn't give up his power; he gives up his privilege and status.** Why? So we can be clean. So we can gain his status—sons of God. *Shysters* use their power to manipulate to others to get wealth or advantage, but Jesus gave away his advantage, his right to call down angels on his enemies, his privilege. *Psychotic* people use their power to destroy or accumulate more power and status. But the Son of God, he uses his power to grant status, to lift up the poor and the lame. He remains the ever powerful God, emptied of privilege and status, while reconciling the world from a bloody cross. The Son of God goes down so that we can come up, he becomes unclean so that we can become clean. Will you turn and trust him, joining with the centurion, but saying in affectionate faith: "TRULY this man *is* the Son of God?!"