

Hello everyone

Sometimes when you are watching TV, you get a surprise. You've been watching a programme for years. It disappears from your screens only to be reinvented and reappear a few years later in a different form.

This reinvention happens to Super-hero movies regularly. At the moment Perry Mason is getting such a make-over on TV. Anyone who remembers the long running series with Raymond Burr will wonder at the new version, but as I tuned my mind to this different take, I started to enjoy it and see the how it all fitted with the show of my youth.

While the Bible is not fiction like Perry Mason, as we read through the Bible we do see different people looking at the same historical events and sayings of Jesus in different ways. As with remakes of TV programmes and videos we have to adjust our view and see the various versions, the various books, as a series of pictures of the same events. This is maybe most obvious in the four pictures of Jesus that the gospel writers give us as they pick out different aspects of how people have and do still experience Jesus, the Messiah, the son of God.

But as we go further into the New Testament we can see more contrasting pictures of what it means to live as followers of Jesus. Together they tell us about the history of the early church as they start to work out what Jesus means for their lives, the lives of others and the world we live in.

Much of how these aspects are written depend on the relationships the authors have to the various versions of the gospels.

Today we are looking at the early spread of Christianity. Three areas come into focus when we look at these experiences of the early followers of Jesus. Firstly, we know the book of Acts as a history of the spread of the early church, we also know it as the book that introduces a second view of the developing church through Paul and his letters, but there is a third view in the new Testament too, the view of the writers of John's gospel and the letters of John

How each of these writers tell the story of the spread of the early church flows from how they tell Jesus story.

We have four versions of the good news of Jesus Christ the Messiah, the son of God in our New Testament.

Sarah last week called them four photos taken at the same concert. They are all views of Jesus, but each emphasises Jesus slightly differently.

The gospel writers all call Jesus the son of god, but how that plays out in their lives is slightly different for each of them.

Matthew seems to agree with Mark who sees the death of Jesus, the son of God as a sacrifice, as a ransom for many. He gives us a picture to help us see what that means when he tells a story of the curtain being torn at his death. Through the torn curtain, Jesus establishes that Humankind now has access to God directly through the death of Jesus as a ransom.

For Luke Jesus, the son of God, goes knowingly and confidently to his death. On the cross, Jesus calmly gives up his spirit, 'Father into your hands I commend my spirit, he says'.

Jesus, Luke shows us, is the suffering witness, a righteous prophet. And it's a point he brings us back to again and again during his description of the early church. Stephen is stoned to death, Paul and other Christian witnessed suffer.

Two different ways of seeing the work of Jesus, the son of God that God asks us to witness to.

The gospel writer, John though, develops yet another view for us. All the gospel writers call Jesus the son of God, but it is only John who makes it obvious what that means. All the gospel writers tell us stories that can only really be believed if Jesus is God, but only John explicitly tells us that Jesus is fully equal to the Father. He is fully God. He is the I am who spoke to Moses from the burning bush. Matthew, Mark and Luke all present Jesus as the son of God but if we didn't have John, we wouldn't have an explicit statement that Jesus is fully equal to the father.

And as we look to see how the New Testament tells us that Christianity spreads, we discover that the Acts, the letters of Paul and the letters of John all reflect the situations in which Luke, Paul and the community around John find themselves.

It turns out that just as with the gospels, just as we discovered with the Old Testament, the writers of the New Testament have different versions of how Christianity spread from a small band of followers of Jesus to the world wide religion we know today.

Next week we will look at how acts of the Apostles describes the spread of Christianity from a small band of followers of Jesus in Jerusalem to the ends of the earth, but as we do so we will remember that the letters of John and the letters of Paul show us different aspects of that same story. Once more it is a collage of how God works that we are presented with rather than a manual.

We are left looking at our world today knowing that Jesus has asked us to be witnesses to his works and his role as son of God and just as we see in the Bible story a range of ways of experiencing God and showing that witness, we see the same variety on show in the world today. There are a number of denominations within the church, of which the church of Scotland is one and yet within the church of Scotland there is a wide range of views of what it means to say that Jesus is the son of God and we work out the message Jesus gave us

The reminder to worship God and help those in need.

When you think of the bible story which bits are most important to you?

A reflective, prayerful reading of the bible.

Being out there helping others in need?

Ensuring people know the story of Jesus and God?

Think about what is at the core of your belief and participation in the life of Jesus through the church.

Next week we start to look at how the early church began to put together just what it means to say that Jesus is the son of God.

Peace be with you,

Amen