

THE KENOTIC POLITICS OF JESUS

This chapter assumes that Jesus was political¹ and attempts to describe *how* he was political. In short, Jesus' political praxis reconfigured the use of power. Specifically, he reserved the use of power only for the benefit of the powerless or disenfranchised. All other exertions of power for self-preservation or self-aggrandizement were to be left up to YHWH, who, as a loving father, would care for his children. This political praxis will here be called 'Kenotic Politics.' This terminology comes from the Greek word *kenos* which means 'to empty' or 'to be of no value' (cf. Rom 4:14; 1 Cor 1:17; 9:15; 2 Cor 9:3).²

Thus, the intent of this chapter is to demonstrate that Jesus practiced his politics in a specific way. He intended to usher in his program of the kingdom of God through self-abnegation and ultimately through voluntary death. This will be proved through three progressive arguments. First, Mark 10:32–45 is a center-piece for this unprecedented combination of politics and self-abnegation—Kenotic Politics. Second, a good number of Jesus' recurrent sayings as well as his consistent praxis correspond with the ideology found in Mark 10:32–45. Finally, three primary inaugural events in the synoptic gospels display a messianic ministry that match the description of Mark 10:32–45.

A Brief Exegesis of Mark 10:32–45

Mark 10:32–45 (/Matt 20:17–28) recounts the story of James and John asking Jesus for the premier places in the soon-coming kingdom. In Jesus' response, he unfolds the means of

¹ Chapter 3 of my dissertation makes the argument that Jesus was in fact a bona fide political figure.

² In the poetic description of Jesus' ministry (Phil 2:7) it describes his choice to abase himself, even unto crucifixion, so that God consequently exalted him to superlative status. This appears to reflect the actual political ideology of Jesus—if he humbled himself to serve the 'least,' God would exalt him to the highest position.

achieving greatness with unparalleled clarity. He suggests that through self-abnegation one would achieve greatness in the Kingdom of God. Three initial observations should be made.

1) Jesus' Kenotic Politics were counter-intuitive to all other earthly kingdoms. There simply was no apparent equivalent in the Mediterranean world.³

2) This advice to James and John (extrapolated, of course, to all disciples) instructed them on how to achieve greatness; Jesus did not rebuke them for their aggressive quest, *per se*.

3) Jesus would model Kenotic Politics with his own ultimate sacrifice shortly after this encounter. In so doing, he introduced a new paradigm of political action, or in the words of Hanson and Oakman, "Jesus' vision offered an alternative to the political society in his time (Mark 10:42-45)."⁴

The Literary Background of Mark 10:32–45

The story of James and John is not bare history. Rather, Mark presents it in a well-developed structure as part of his overall literary project. The story is central, perhaps even centrifugal, to the meaning of the book.

Mark 10:32–45 contains the third of three passion predictions in the book of Mark (8:31; 9:31; 10:33–34), all of which fall into this central section of 8:22–10:52. This section of Mark is a single literary unit with several unique features. (A) *The Way*: At 8:27 they begin the journey that will culminate in Jerusalem. (B) *Teaching* dominates this section rather than the miracles of

³ See chapter one.

⁴ K. C. Hanson and Douglas E. Oakman, *Palestine in the Time of Jesus: Social Structures and Social Conflicts* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 126. Or in the words of Alan Storkey, *Jesus and Politics: Confronting the Powers* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 57: "My perception as a cultural sociologist is that he taught and operated in ways completely different from these groups. This is a way of politics that cuts across all these groups. For the most part, they cannot understand what Jesus is about. It is so different from anything that has gone before."

the previous section. (C) As just mentioned, there are three *passion predictions*. (D) The section is bracketed by Mark's only two healings of *blind men*.⁵ Horsley adds,

The 'middle' section of Mark (8:22/27–10:52) is a distinctive step in Mark's story. As often noted, two episodes of healing blind men frame this section and the three announcements of 'the son of man's' killing and rising, followed by the disciples' misunderstandings, provide its internal structure.⁶

Not only is this central section a coherent literary unit, it is also pivotal for the theology of the entire book.

First, Mark's meticulous and repetitive structure demonstrates his vested interest in the theology of this text. (1) Each passion prediction is followed by the disciples' misunderstanding and Jesus' correction about how *they* should live. (2) The second and third passion predictions are preceded by a contest among the Apostles for greatness. (In Matthew's version of the first passion prediction Peter is awarded the keys of the kingdom—a related issue to the contest over greatness). (3) Each of the passion predictions include three things: the "Son of Man," Jesus' suffering or his being "delivered up," and the involvement of Jewish authorities. Bowman notes how selective Mark was with his doublets. "We can be certain that Mark with his artistic sense did not include doublets of one prediction just because they were at hand. He is highly selective, and if he repeats these warnings of the death it is either for effect or because he has a tradition that Jesus constantly stressed what was coming."⁷

A second argument that this central section is pivotal for Mark's overall theological program is that it begins with Jesus' dramatic turn toward Jerusalem and is followed by his arrival at

⁵ Many understand this as a metaphor for the disciples' spiritual blindness.

⁶ Richard A. Horsley, *Hearing the Whole Story: The Politics of Plot in Mark's Gospel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 186.

⁷ John Bowman, *The Gospel of Mark: The New Christian Jewish Passover Haggadah* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1965), 216.

his terminal destination. The theme “Jesus on the *way*” is climactic for the whole book (cf. Mark 8:27; 9:34; 10:17; but especially 10:32).

The third argument is the amazement and fear of the disciples, which warns the reader of the serious nature of the material. To all of this might be added the most obvious fact that Mark 10:42–45 is the clearest statement in the whole book concerning the nature and purpose of Jesus’ death. For all of these reasons Mark 10:32–45 deserves pride of place in examining Jesus’ Kenotic Politics.

The Request of James and John, vv. 35–40

There is virtually no question what James and John are asking for (with the help of their mother, according to Matt 20:20). As Jesus pushes toward Jerusalem (v. 32), they undoubtedly expected an earthly kingdom to be inaugurated at that time. This resilient expectation lived on even after the resurrection (cf. Acts 1:6). Obviously, such a kingdom would necessitate cabinet members surrounding the king. Moreover, Jesus’ promise of twelve thrones undoubtedly fostered such an impression (Matt 19:28, cf. Luke 22:30). But there is even more to be gained. One could hope for an appointment to a chief-advisory role.⁸ In an honor/shame culture such a premier appointment would be coveted. The advantages to one’s kinship group would be enormous! (of which Salome is well aware). Furthermore, Jesus was not, apparently, an egalitarian. Peter, James, and John had been singled out to witness the raising of Jairus’ daughter (Mark 5:37/Luke 8:51), as well as the Transfiguration (Mark 9:2/Matt 17:1/Luke 9:28). Later they would be privy to Jesus’ prayer in Gethsemane (Mark 14:33/Matt 26:37). In addition, Peter and John were chosen to prepare the Last Supper (Luke 22:8, cf. Mark 14:13). Jesus did have his inner-circle. In

⁸ Kaminouchi, *Echoes of Power*, 97, traces the usages of the metaphor “right and left hand,” confirming the obvious fact that this is a metaphor for positions of political power.

such an environment and at precisely this time—of approach to the capital—there were appointments of status to be had by those who could position themselves to be chosen. The entire political history at the disciple's disposal would encourage such seeking of rank. From Augustus to Alexander, from the Maccabees to David's 'mighty men,' from Gibraltar to the Ganges, this was the *modus operandi* of political progress.⁹

Jesus never promised to grant their request. In fact, he deliberately relinquishes the decision to God. Rather, he simply asks if they are willing to suffer. The synonymous metaphors of cup¹⁰ and baptism¹¹ both foreshadow suffering (often as a result of judgment). There is nothing surprising in such a reply. After all, many regime changes require great sacrifice, even loss of life. It is clear from the response of James and John that this is how they interpret Jesus words. What follows, however, clarifies that Jesus has something different in mind. Suffering is not the price one pays on the way to achieving positions of power. Rather suffering, particularly through service, is the vocation of the one who has already achieved greatness.

Kenotic Politics, vv. 41-44

The boisterous request from the Sons of Thunder elicits two responses. Their compatriots were angry, ostensibly out of envy, not from some offence at the utter inappropriateness of the request. Jesus, on the other hand, equally scandalized, attempts to reverse their expectations as well as their praxis of power.

⁹ Of course, anyone reading the gospel, already familiar with its tragic ending, is struck by the paradox of seeking the right and left hand of Jesus. Such positions would soon be held by brigands on crosses (Mark 15:27). Cf. Gundry, *Mark*, 577.

¹⁰ The 'cup' is sometimes a positive image (Jer 16:7; Psa 23:5; cf. Psa 16:5; 116:13) but more often it has a negative connotation (Psa 75:8; Isa 51:17; Jer 49:12; 51:7; Eze 23:31–34; Lam 4:21; Hab 2:16), and especially of judgment (Jer 25:15–29; Zech 12:2).

¹¹ Water in general (Psa 42:7; Isa 43:2) and baptism specifically (Lk 12:50) are metaphors sometimes used for an overwhelming experience of suffering. This is all the more obvious here, where 'baptism' is paralleled with 'cup'.

In classic Hebraic parallelism, Jesus uses two nominal synonyms for rulers and two verbal synonyms for their rule. First, “those whom they recognize as their rulers” is simply a plural nominative participle ‘those who give the impression [or have the reputation]’ with the infinitive verb ‘to rule.’ Typically, it is translated so as to give the impression that they are considered rulers by popular acclaim. In actuality, ‘those who give the impression’ *are* those who rule. Thus, Jesus’ phrase implies they considered *themselves* rulers and seek popular acclaim for their claim.¹² The second word for ruler is ‘great ones’ or as rendered by the NIV, ‘high officials.’

The verbal synonyms are interesting. They are simply verbal forms of the nouns ‘lord’ and ‘authority,’ both prefixed with the Greek word *kata*. This normally would imply intensification. But as the term is traced through the Old Testament there is virtually no difference in meaning between the prefixed and non-prefixed forms. In his definitive study of this word, Kenneth Clark did not find it to imply oppressive power inappropriately yielded, but rather the normal nature of rulership.¹³ Thus, Clark suggests Jesus is not contrasting good leadership with bad leadership but leadership in general with servanthood. This can be seen in the second verb for leadership, ‘exercising authority’ (NIV). Its nominal form has already been used five times in Mark to describe Jesus. However, each time it is used, it describes his authority exercised for the

¹² Kaminouchi, *Echoes of Power*, 119, points out that they only *think* they are ruling since all real rule, according to Jesus, belongs to God. Any arrogation of oneself to a high position is vain imagination. Interestingly, a similar construction is used in Dan 13:5 to describe the wicked elders who considered themselves rulers but used their positions to attempt rape, blackmail, and execution of Susanna.

¹³ Kenneth W. Clark, “The Meaning of (Kata)Kyrieyein,” in *The Gentile Bias and Other Essays* (edited by Kenneth Clark; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1980), 208–210. This is true not only in extra-biblical literature, but also in its eleven uses in the NT (cf. Rom 6:9, 14; 7:1; 14:9; Mk 10:42, Mt 20:25; Lk 22:25). “The Christian virtue is service to his fellows rather than political preeminence and power over them. This contrast has no reference to ‘lording it over’ and there is here [not necessarily any] suggestion of arrogance and oppression on the part of Gentile rulers” (210).

benefit of the lowly, either teaching the crowds, healings, or exorcisms (1:22, 27; 2:10; 3:15; 6:7).

These four words taken together describe the *modus operandi* of the Mediterranean political world. It was so well known, in fact, that this is the only thing in the entire gospel that the disciples are said to have known. “Jesus, however, categorically rejects the leadership style of the world . . . What Jesus commands his disciples could not possibly be more at odds with conventional wisdom.”¹⁴

Kaminouchi brilliantly demonstrates that in Mark’s book there are two literary-political foils to Jesus’ style of leadership, namely, Herod and Pilate.¹⁵ Mark labels Herod a king when, in fact, he was not. He did pursue the title, at the instigation of Herodias, but instead wound up being exiled by the Emperor in 39 A.D. because of his ambitions. In the gospel, Herod, against his better judgment, beheads John the Baptist, through the conniving of his wife and the entrapment of his pubescent stepdaughter. As for Pilate, he capitulates to the crowds when they blackmail him with a threat of libel. Neither Herod nor Pilate, although they had power, had control. They both acted under pressure from quislings.

Kaminouchi’s observations within the confines of Mark’s gospel are no different when extrapolated to the broader Roman world. This was, in fact, how politics operated even/especially up to the Emperor.¹⁶ For example, there were two coins in Palestine that indicate

¹⁴ Evans, *Mark 8:27-16:20*, 115.

¹⁵ Kaminouchi, *Echoes of Power*, 175, 188, 196.

¹⁶ Marcus Borg, *Conflict, Holiness, and Politics in the Teachings of Jesus* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1984, 1998), 245 acknowledges that “the Roman emperor was undoubtedly to be numbered among those who lorded it over their subjects, which was an object lesson of how not to behave.”

the kind of rulership familiar to Jesus and the disciples.¹⁷ Tiberius' denarius portrayed him as the semi-divine son of Augustus. The copper coins of Herod Philip from Caesarea showed the head of Tiberias and had the inscription, "He who deserves adoration." While Tiberias was, in many ways, an especially egregious example of a self-promoting leader, no emperor from Julius to Hadrian could escape the accusation.

In contradistinction from earthly political rulers, Jesus suggests that kingdom rulers would lead through service. Verses 43–44 again use typical Hebraic parallelism: Whoever wishes to be great / first must become a servant / slave.

Conclusion

The book of Mark is structured in such a way that Mark 10:32–45 stands as one of its towering peaks. That is to say, these are not just Jesus' words; they vie for pride of place even among the 'red letters.' Here Jesus articulates his purpose in life—to die as an atoning sacrifice, reflecting the servant of the Lord in Isaiah 53. All of this heavy 'salvation talk,' however, is juxtaposed with one of the most 'earthy' passages in the gospels. Jesus is responding to James and John's request for political power. He teaches them a different way, a counter-intuitive way of ruling. But Jesus does not merely *advocate* Kenotic Politics; he *illustrates* it through his own ultimate sacrifice. "The sacrifice and suffering of the Son of Man are not the prelude to Triumph: properly understood they are the supreme triumph."¹⁸ More importantly, this is not a 'look at me' passage, but a 'go thou and do likewise.'

¹⁷ Cf. F. F. Bruce, *The Gospel of Mark* (NICNT 2; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974), 382.

¹⁸ T. W. Manson, *The Servant-Messiah: A Study of the Public Ministry of Jesus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953), 77.

Jesus' Other Statements and Actions Reflecting Kenotic Politics

Mark 10:32–45 is the clearest articulation of Kenotic Politics in the gospels. It does not stand alone, however. Aside from Matthew 20:20–28, which is a true parallel, Luke 22:24–27 espouses the exact ideology, putting it in very different words and in a completely different context. John, of course, shares similar thoughts but couches them in his own inimitable style: “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep” (John 10:11; cf. Luke 19:10). Or again: “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life” (John 12:23–25). This says nothing about the previous passion predictions feeding into Mark 10:45¹⁹ nor the passion narratives in which Jesus so thoroughly exemplified his teaching in Mark 10:32–45. Simply put, it appears that Jesus explicitly taught Kenotic Politics on multiple occasions (not terribly shocking for an itinerant preacher).

Reversal

Jesus taught Kenotic Politics throughout his ministry even aside from the specific teachings just mentioned. It shows up in a series of statements that hang together under the theme of ‘reversal.’ The theme is replete throughout the gospels and is dialectically enmeshed with Ken-

¹⁹ Mark 8:31/Matt 16:21/Luke 9:22; Mark 9:31/Matt 17:22-23/Luke 9:44; Mark 10:32–34/Matt 20:18–19/Luke 18:31–33; Matt 26:2/Luke 22:15; Mark 10:45/Matt 20:28; Luke 24:6–7.

To these could be added a number of allusions to his death: Matt 9:15/Luke 5:35; Matt 12:39–40/Luke 11:30; Mark 9:9, 12; Mark 14:27/Matt 26:31 (quoting Zech 13:7); Luke 12:50; 17:25; 22:37; John 2:19; 3:14; 6:53; 10:11; 12:7, 32–33; 14:19; 15:13; 16:20.

In addition, the disciples were enjoined to carry their own cross in imitation of Jesus' Kenotic Politics (Matt 10:38; Mark 8:34/Matt 16:24/Luke 9:23; Luke 14:26–27; cf. Luke 12:4, 11, 51–53; 17:33; 21:12–17; John 12:25).

otic Politics. Four such sayings teach this idea of reversal. Each of them is found dominantly in contexts of Kenotic Politics.

Mark 10:44/Matt 20:27 says, “Whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all.” This heartbeat of Kenotic Politics is echoed in five parallel statements, “The first will be last and the last first” (Mark 9:35,²⁰ 10:31; Matt 19:30; 20:16; Luke 13:30). In addition, two other passages vary the wording: “The greatest among you will be your servant” (Matt 23:11) and “The least among all of you is the greatest” (Luke 9:48). In addition to these seven texts, Jesus taught this principle in several of his parables: The laborers hired at different times of the day (Matt 19:30–20:16), the king who throws a wedding banquet (Matt 22:1–10), and to a lesser degree, the prodigal father (Luke 15:11–32) and Dives and Lazarus (Luke 16:19–31). Yet the most striking parable is about a master who comes to his own wedding feast, finds his servants ready and waiting, so rewards them by sitting them down and serving them at table (Luke 12:35–38). The reversal is colossal, even ridiculous. Nonetheless, this parable was enacted in John 13:1–17 when Jesus washed his disciples’ feet. Jesus embodied the kind of Kenotic Politics to which he called his disciples.

Patterson says, “The Wisdom of Jesus is first and foremost about the reversal of common values. The Empire of God calls for a reordering of human life and relationships that places those who are valued least in the world at the very center.”²¹ However, it is more than God prioritizing the poor and powerless; it is a way of achieving status in the kingdom and exercising

²⁰ Mark 9:35, “Whoever wants to be first must be last of all *and servant of all*,” overtly connects the theme of reversal to Kenotic Politics.

²¹ Stephen Patterson, *The God of Jesus: The Historical Jesus and the Search for Meaning* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1998), 97.

rule by means of self-abnegation. In other words, Kenotic Politics must not be diluted down to mere compassion. It is the paradoxical exercise of power through the very renunciation of it.

A closely related phrase is this: “For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it.” This too is intimately connected with Kenotic Politics, for in three of its five uses (Mark 8:35; Matt 10:39; 16:25[/Luke 9:24]) it is prefaced by Jesus’ call to take up the cross and follow him. In John 12:24–25, the cross is merely replaced by the metaphor of a kernel of wheat falling to the ground and dying as a preface to life. Only Luke 17:33 uses this phrase without directly tying it to the cross.

It is likely that the two phrases above (‘first/last’ and ‘save life/lose life’) are extrapolations of the OT concept that the humble will be exalted and *vice versa*.²² This becomes more evident when one looks at the three times Jesus used this ‘exalted/humbled’ phrase. First, in Matthew 23:12 it follows directly on the heels of, “The greatest among you will be your servant” (Matt 23:11). Thus, this ‘exalted/humbled’ saying is of a piece with the ‘greatest/servant’ sayings. Second, Luke 14:10–11 uses the ‘exalted/humbled’ saying as the final argument for why one should choose the lowest seat at a banquet. It is thus inextricably bound to all the implications of social power plays and all they entail.²³

Finally, the beatitudes (Matt 5:3–12; Luke 6:20–26) embody Jesus’ expectation that the economy of this world would soon be turned on its head. It might be objected that these sayings are spiritual, having nothing to do with politics. Granted, the political nature of these texts are not as overt as the previous three sayings. Nonetheless, the following points can be made con-

²² E.g. Psa 18:27; 147:6; Prov 3:34; 16:18-19; 29:23; Isa 2:11-17; 53:10-12; 57:15; Ezek 17:24; 21:26; Sir 3:17–20; also see its NT uses outside of Jesus: Luke 1:48, 52; Phil 2:3-11; Jam 1:9-10; 4:6.

²³ This concept of choosing lower seats also has OT precedent: Prov 25:6–7, “Do not put yourself forward in the king's presence or stand in the place of the great; for it is better to be told, ‘Come up here,’ than to be put lower in the presence of a noble.”

cerning their political nature. First, Matthew's first and last beatitude bracket the poetic whole with the phrase 'kingdom of God.' This is irreducibly political.²⁴

Second, Luke's rendition lacks the kind of spiritualization of Matthew's. He speaks only of the poor and rich, hungry and well-fed, the mourners and the celebrants. Thus, it may be that the beatitudes imply more than physical conditions, but they cannot imply less.

Third, both Luke (6:23) and Matthew (5:12), equate the blessed citizens of the kingdom with the persecuted prophets of old. This is a political manifesto that goes well beyond mere metaphor. When the book of Acts describes the actual fulfillment of this prediction it is clear that the kingdom citizens come into direct confrontation with very real political entities.

Finally, the seventh beatitude, 'blessed are the peacemakers,' promises an extraordinary blessing—'they will be called sons of God.' The most apparent application of this (at least in the West) is reflected in the slogan 'Like father; like son,' which is, in fact, even more pronounced in its Jewish setting. When we go about making peace then we will be 'about our Father's business.'

There is a second implication in this beatitude, however, that emerges from its Jewish and Roman environs. The combination of 'peacemaker' and 'son of god' would strike the ears of Jesus' listeners as a kingly figure of political rule. Both Israelite kings and Roman Emperors received this titular combination of terms. In the beatitudes, however, these 'royal pretenders' were the least and lost, the beleaguered and battered, the downtrodden and outcast. From their fortunate deprivation they emerge as God's greatest ambassadors of peace on earth. This strangely twisted political evaluation of Jesus, read rightly against its cultural backdrop, still strikes thinking people as utopian, unrealistic, and fantastic. That is why this is a political axiom for the

²⁴ See chapter 3 of my dissertation.

church. Only those of faith can see the eschatological future of God's intervention, for without that, this beatitude is utter nonsense.

Summary: Our survey of these reversal sayings has shown two things. First, these phrases are used almost exclusively in contexts of Kenotic Politics. Second, they are found throughout the four gospels in different layers of tradition and in different periods of Jesus' ministry. The gospel records leave the strong impression that this was a consistent and foundational principle in Jesus preaching and praxis.

Ministry to the Least

On one occasion the imprisoned John sent envoys to ask Jesus if he was, in fact, the messiah (Matt 11:2–19/Luke 7:18–35). The question was valid, given that Jesus met none of the contemporary expectations of a messianic ministry. (For that matter, he deviated quite a bit from his mentor's model as well.) Jesus responded by paraphrasing Isaiah 35:5–6, "The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor." With this reply, Jesus reconfigured the essence of the messianic role. It was not about displays of power. It was not about wreaking vengeance on God's behalf. It was not about territorial expansion or national independence. It was about serving the least and the lost. The list of who that might entail is considerable.

Throughout the book of Mark, Jesus' considerable power is only enacted on behalf of the weak: (1) children (5:39-41; 7:17-30; 9:21-37; 10:13-30; 12:19; 13:12); (2) women generically (5:25-33; 7:25-26; 12:22; 14:3; 15:40); as well as 'widows' (12:40-43); and 'wives' (6:17-18;

10:11; 12:19-23);²⁵ (3) ‘Gentiles’ (7:26; 10:33-42); (4) the ‘sick’ in general (1:30-34; 2:17; 6:5-56); and (5) the ‘poor’ (10:21; 12:42, 43; 14:5, 7).

One might conceive of this as an issue of compassion quite apart from any political implication. That, however, would be too narrow a view. Jesus’ healings, exorcisms, and table-fellowship were not simply acts of kindness.²⁶ They were highly charged political actions because they were designed to reconfigured society. Furthermore, these ‘acts of compassion’ were public displays of power. Now, secular authorities exercised power for the advantage of the elite few. When Jesus exercised power in judgment (Matt 7:21-22), over disease (Matt 8:2, 6, 8; 9:28; 15:22, 25), death (Matt 8:21), creation (Matt 8:25; 14:28, 30), and believers (Matt 10:24-25) it brought healing and life, especially to the most downtrodden. “His *bon vivant* existence with robbers and sinners was therefore something much more scandalous and ominous than a mere matter of breaking purity rules dear to the *hābērīm* or the Pharisees.”²⁷

Moreover, as Jesus predicted in his Nazareth sermon, he extended the kingdom even to those outside the boundaries of Israel, both Samaritans and Gentiles. While it is obvious that Jesus’ own ministry did not target Gentiles (Matt 10:6; 15:24), it is clear that Jesus’ ministry would inevitably lead to Gentile inclusion.²⁸ This was hardly just a politically correct strike against ra-

²⁵ Jesus’ inclusion of women among the disciples is particularly striking. Storkey, *Jesus and Politics*, 229, comments: “He sets out on an extended journey, with women and other supporters in his entourage, but without a policy for power. No first-century politician relies on women. In these terms, every move is a mistake, a failure. But clearly, Jesus operates on different terms.”

²⁶ That this is Kenotic Politics and not mere compassion is seen in that “these powerless people are not only to be embraced, but also to be imitated. Children are presented to the disciples as models to follow in order to enter God’s kingdom,” (Lee-Pollard, “Powerlessness as Power,” 180). Furthermore, the beatitudes demonstrate that it is the powerless in general and not children in particular that are to be imitated.

²⁷ John P. Meier, *Mentor, Message, and Miracles*, Vol. 2 in *A Marginal Jew* (New York: Doubleday, 1994), 149.

²⁸ Jeremias, *Promise to the Nations*. Some of the more compelling arguments include Jesus’ ministry to the Samaritan Woman (John 4), the crowds of Gentiles that flocked to him (Mark 3:7-10/Matt 4:24),

cism. It had such significant ramification that his neighbors in Nazareth were ready to execute him on the spot (Luke 4:28–29; cf. Acts 22:21–22).

Conclusion

Jesus' ministry targeted the weak, the unclean, and the foreigner. Such were not merely recipients of compassion but model citizens in his kingdom.²⁹ Here we find a collusion of Jesus praxis and preaching. His quintessential teaching in Mark 10:42–45 is splattered across the pages of the gospels in both word and deed. Thus there is no doubt that Kenotic Politics was a theme that Jesus preached, practiced, and enjoined upon those who would follow after him. This becomes all the more important since the cross, the ultimate expression of Kenotic Politics, was the focus of the Gospels as well as the preaching of the early church.

Pivotal Projections of Jesus' Kenotic Ministry

Three key passages describe the future direction of Jesus' ministry in a somewhat paradigmatic fashion. While each of these narratives reflects the Evangelists' idiosyncratic emphases,

especially those in the temple (John 12:20–22), the several Gentiles Jesus healed [Centurion's servant (Matt 8:5–13/Luke 7:1–10), Syro-Phoenician woman (Mark 7:24–30/Matt 15:21–28), the Gerasene demoniac (Mark 5:1–20/Matt 8:21–40/Luke 8:26–39), and the Leper (Luke 17:16)], not to mention that Jesus intimated that he had sheep outside the fold of Israel (John 10:16). Not only did Jesus promise his ministry would break the boundaries of Israel in his Nazareth sermon, he promised Gentiles a share in the kingdom: Ninevites and the Queen of Sheeba (Matt 12:41f./Luke 11:31f); Sodom and Gomorrah (Matt 10:15/Luke 10:12; Matt 11:24); and Tyre and Sidon (Matt 11:22/Luke 10:14). All nations will stand before the throne (Matt 25:31ff). This included those who had faith in Jesus (Matt 8:10–12) as well as those who repented at the prophet's preaching (Matt 12:41/Luke 11:32). This is nothing more than can be deduced from the prophets (Psa 96:3, 10; Isa 2:1–4; 19:23; 40:5; 51:4; 52:10; 55:5; 60:3; Zech 2:13). This line of reasoning was followed, of course, throughout the NT (e.g. Matt 28; Acts 15; Luke 2; Romans 9–11; Ephesians).

²⁹ This theme of weakness as strength in the kingdom of God continues throughout the Epistles. An entire separate study could be done on Kenotic Politics in 1 Cor 1:20, 25; 2 Cor 6:9–10; 10:1; 12:9–10; Phil 2:6–13; Gal 2:20. Hengel is surely correct when he says, "In all likelihood there is scarcely a group in the history of the world which, relying totally on the word entrusted to it, embodied a greater discrepancy between outward powerlessness and inner, victorious certainty of power than the primitive Christian community," cf. Martin Hengel, *Christ and Power* (tr. Everett Kalin; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1974), 25.

couched in terms that would make sense to the post-Easter church, all four narratives have strong intimations of the Kenotic Politics as described above. Furthermore, each of these texts are presented as paradigmatic ‘inaugurations’ of Jesus’ career as if to say, “This is how Jesus always operated for it was his God-ordained destiny.” These three inaugural events are offered here as paradigmatic displays of the ministry of Jesus by the synoptic evangelists.

The Baptism of Jesus

Jesus’ baptism is pivotal for the future direction of his ministry (e.g. Acts 1:22). That is why it is so significant to find in this narrative a series of paradoxical juxtapositions that portray Jesus as both powerful yet humble, as both an inaugurated king yet one destined to die.

Paradox #1: *Jesus was more powerful than John, yet submitted to his baptism.* This caused John no little consternation (Matt 3:14). This is only natural, for John had predicted a coming eschatological judge (with winnowing fork in hand), so far greater than himself that John was unworthy to play the role of his servant by removing the Master’s sandals (Mark 1:7/Matt 3:11/ Luke 3:16). This coming one was to be a judge with unprecedented power even to the point of baptizing with the Holy Spirit. While Mark does not mention John’s objection to baptizing Jesus, the same point is made by the juxtaposition of John’s prediction of the ‘more powerful baptizer’ in verses 7–8 to Jesus coming *to be baptized* by John in verse 9. This is an obvious step backwards for John’s program. Mark heightens the paradox by noting that Jesus came out of Nazareth in Galilee. The prejudice against Galilee was notable (cf. John 7:40–52). Moreover, even other Galileans disparaged Nazareth (John 1:46). This is hardly the place one would look for an up-and-coming apocalyptic Messiah (Luke 3:15).³⁰ This paradox is all the more striking

³⁰ The contextual arrangement of this pericope in Luke is highly political, following as it does on the heels of John’s arrest for his preaching against the Herod’s marriage (Joseph Fitzmyer, *The Gospel Ac-*

since John's other baptismal candidates were from Jerusalem and Judea (Mark 1:5)—far more respectable urban centers.

Paradox #2: Jesus' baptism was an inaugural event for his ministry but pointed toward his ultimate demise in death. Several motifs demonstrate the magnitude of this event:³¹ The opening of the heavens, the endowment of the Spirit, and the verbal affirmation by God.³² The *heavens being opened* signaled momentous happenings in apocalyptic literature (Isa 24:18; Ezek 1:1; Mal 3:10; 3 Macc 6:18; Acts 7:56; Rev 19:11; 2 Bar. 22:1). For example, Isaiah 64:1 (63:19 MT) says, "O that you would tear open the heavens and come down, so that the mountains would quake at your presence."³³ This was a sign of the presence of God and a turning point in human affairs. The opening of heaven was accompanied by the *descent of the Spirit* which provided empowerment for his Messianic ministry (cf. Isa 11:2; 42:1; 61:1; cf. Psa Solomon 17:37). Mark's preposition (1:10) is most interesting for he says the Spirit came 'into' Jesus, not just 'on him,' indicating a particularly full relationship with the Spirit of God. Thus Bratcher and Nida say, "It seems reasonably clear that Mark does not say that the Spirit came *upon* Jesus at his baptism as the Spirit of God came upon Old Testament leaders: rather he says that the Spirit entered into

cording to Luke I–IX [AB 28; Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1981], 479). One would expect that any follower of John, therefore, could likely look a good bit like him politically. Likewise, Mark's context is politically charged. One must keep in mind that Mark's introduction is heavily laced with political vocabulary: *euangelion* (v. 2), the quotations from Malachi 3:1 and Isaiah 40:3 (vv. 2–3), the nation streaming to John in the desert to confess their sins (v. 4), John's costume of Elijah (vv. 5–6), and finally John's promise of the powerful 'coming one' (vv. 7–8). His readers are fully prepared for a royal inauguration; they are as surprised as John at what actually showed up at the river.

³¹ Luke alone records that Jesus was praying (3:21); for Luke this is a tell-tale sign that something significant is about to take place (6:12; 9:18, 28–29; 22:40–42; 23:34; cf. 5:16; 11:1).

³² There are obvious similarities between Jesus' baptism and transfiguration. Sellin speculates that a line can be drawn from these back to the life of Moses, particularly his experience on Sinai and Pisgah.

³³ This passage is particularly illustrative here because only in Isa 63 LXX is the verb 'opening' associated with both the Exodus, central to Mark's opening, and the descent of the Spirit, both of which have to do with coming through water (cf. 1 Cor 10:1–14). See Watts, *Isaiah's New Exodus*, 104. Watts notes further that "the destruction of adversaries and the trembling of the nations are absent in Mark" (106) aligning, of course, with Kenotic Politics.

and possessed Jesus, who henceforth acts with the authority and power of God, as God's Spirit-filled and Spirit-led Son."³⁴ Likewise, the *verbal affirmation of God* was appropriate for the coronation of a king, particularly in its reference to his 'son.'

These same three motifs had already been featured in *T. Levi* 18:6–8:

The heavens will be opened,
 And from the temple of glory sanctification will come upon him,
 with a *fatherly voice*, as from Abraham to Isaac.
 And the glory of the Most High shall burst forth upon him.
 And the *Spirit* of understanding and sanctification
 Shall rest upon him [in the water].³⁵
 For he shall give the majesty of the Lord to those who are his sons in truth forever.³⁶

The parallels between *T. Levi* 18:6–8 and the synoptic accounts of Jesus' baptism are striking indeed. It would appear that Edwards is justified in comparing the two texts and concluding that Mark's baptismal account is deliberately fashioned as a sort of inauguration of Jesus' messianic ministry.³⁷

At the same time, each of these three motifs of 'inauguration' contain paradoxical elements. First, the Holy Spirit does represent empowerment, yet the first thing the Spirit does is 'thrust' Jesus into the wilderness where he suffers trials (Mark 1:12). Second, Mark's account of the heavens 'torn' portends the temple veil rent during Jesus' crucifixion. This connection of the

³⁴ Robert Bratcher and Eugene A. Nida, *A Translator's Handbook on the Gospel of Mark* (Leiden: Brill, 1961), 29.

³⁵ According to Geza Vermes, this is the only point at which Christian interpolation is to be suspected (*Jesus the Jew*, 263 n. 64).

³⁶ Cited in J. Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1983), 1.795. Emphasis added.

³⁷ James R. Edwards, "The Baptism of Jesus According to the Gospel of Mark," *JETS* 34/1 (1991): 43–57. In a somewhat provocative and deliberately anachronistic yet instructive note, Bock says, "The closest modern parallel to Jesus' baptism—though of course it is not at all the same—is the selection of a presidential candidate at a political convention" [it is different, he suggests, because of the political process (God's selection vs. Human election) not because it is any less political] cf. Darrell L. Bock, *Luke* (IVP 3; Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 77.

Baptism to the Crucifixion is highly instructive and logically follows. The physical act of baptism mimics burial (cf. Romans 6:3–4) and metaphorically is a natural link to suffering (cf. Mark 10:38; Psa 69:1–3 [LXX 68:1–3]).³⁸ If Jesus ended his ministry by dying vicariously for the sins of the world, does it not make sense that he would begin his ministry by submitting to a baptism of repentance and vicariously taking on the sins of Israel? It would be natural for Israel's new leader to represent the nation and take upon himself her sins. This (alone?) would adequately explain Jesus' own justification for his baptism by John—"fulfill all righteousness" (Matt 3:15).

Paradox #3: The voice of God affirmed Jesus as his son (king) but also as Isaiah's servant. Twice the synoptics record the voice of God—at the Baptism and Transfiguration. What one should note here is how each of the sayings can be divided into two parts, the first declares Jesus as God's dearly loved son, the second describes him as 'pleasing' to God. The statement is clear enough but what does it connote? Obviously, placed on the lips of YHVH it has massive import. There is general agreement that the first half of the statement is an allusion to Psalm 2:7 while the second points toward Isaiah 42:1. '*You are my beloved son*' appears to reference Psalm 2:7 where it functions as a regal declaration of a particularly powerful king. '*With you I am well-pleased*' appears to allude to Isaiah 42:1 where it introduces the 'Servant of the Lord.' This declaration thus combines two strands of Messianic tradition in a striking juxtaposition: The powerful king and the humble servant. The baptism thus initiates (and models) the political and social pattern of Jesus' future ministry. He is both the messianic king as well as the Lord's humble servant.

³⁸ That the connection between suffering and baptism was a natural link in the early church is demonstrated by Reardon in his discussion of martyrdom as a kind of second baptism; see Patrick H. Reardon. "The Cross, Sacraments and Martyrdom: An Investigation of Mark 10:35–45," *SVTQ* 36 (1992): 103–15.

Summary: The narrative of Jesus' baptism is steeped in the ideology of Kenotic Politics. He was the 'more powerful' one, yet submitted to John's baptism. He was confirmed by the Holy Spirit yet the very event portends his future suffering and death. The Father verbally affirms Jesus as both king and servant. These paradoxes betray how deeply embedded Kenotic Politics was in the life and ministry of Jesus. It is as if his ministry can not be introduced without reference to the self-abnegation and suffering that would characterize the whole.

The Wilderness Temptations (Matt 4:1–11/Luke 4:1–13, cf. Mark 1:12–13)

The Temptation tradition runs deep and early through Biblical literature (Mark 1:12–13/Matt 4:1–11/Luke 4:1–13; cf. John 6:15, 26–34; 7:1–4; Hebrews 2:17; 4:15; 5:2) and it describes Jesus being tempted, not to commit some personal peccadillo, but to take his Messianic career into his own hands. Whether this narrative emerges from the early church, or more likely, goes back to the historical Jesus, it preserves a tradition of a foundational experience in the life of Jesus when he had to decide the course of his future rule.³⁹

The argument here is simply that the Temptation Narrative establishes the pattern of Jesus' later ministry, specifically Kenotic Politics.⁴⁰ This is seen in two ways. First, the Temptations are intimately tied to Jesus' Baptism; together they declare that acclamation and self-

³⁹ Some scholars use the temptation narratives to prove that Jesus refused politics. Kirk rightly shows that Jesus refused the 'Zealot' option, but this does not mean Jesus was in no way political (Andrew Kirk, "The Messianic Role of Jesus and the Temptation Narrative: A Contemporary Perspective," *EvQ* 44/1–2 [1972]: 11–29, 91–102). Cullmann and Edwards were right to refute Brandon's notion that the temptations demonstrate Jesus was a pro-zealot, when, in fact, they point in the opposite direction; see respectively Oscar Cullmann, *Jesus and the Revolutionaries* (tr. by Gareth Putnam; New York: Harper & Row, 1970), 9–10; George R. Edwards, *Jesus and the Politics of Violence* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), 21–43 and S.G.F. Brandon, *Jesus and the Zealots: A Study of the Political Factor in Primitive Christianity* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1967), 310–14.

⁴⁰ "In functional terms the temptation has to do with the concrete way in which Jesus will carry out his mission. The concrete content of the temptation is Jesus' use of power in exercising his mission," Jon Sobrino, *Christology at the Crossroads: A Latin American Approach* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1978), 98.

abnegation are of a piece for God's ruler. Second, Jesus, in contrast to Israel in general and Moses in particular, will pass the test of faith—whether to trust God alone or to take matters into his own hands.

The accounts of Jesus' baptism and temptation are inexorably linked. Beyond the contextual link, the conversation between John the Baptist and Jesus is functionally parallel to the conversation between Jesus and the Devil. Wilkens says, "One could call the short dialogue between the Baptist and Jesus a prelude to the dialogue between Jesus and the Tempter."⁴¹ This connection must be kept in mind when one examines the temptation.⁴² Jesus has just come up from the waters of baptism. He was powerfully filled with the Holy Spirit and verbally confirmed by God as his beloved son, i.e. the King of Israel—Messiah. Now he is tempted by the Devil to execute his power by turning stones to bread, miraculously demonstrating his Divine support, and acquisition of the kingdoms of the world. This is not a temptation to personal, moral transgression but a testing of the nature of Jesus' Messianic career.⁴³ The question of the temptation, it would thus appear, is not *whether* he is God's son but rather *how* his rule is going to be achieved. Both John and the Devil invited Jesus to forgo humility and suffering. Jesus refused, for humility and suffering were the very praxis of his rule.⁴⁴

⁴¹ "Man könnte den kurzen Dialog zwischen dem Täufer und Jesus ein Präludium zu dem Dialog zwischen Jesus und dem Versucher nennen," Wilhelm Wilkens, "Die Versuchung Jesu Nach Mattäus," *New Testament Studies* 28 (1982): 481.

⁴² Pokorný points out yet another connection between the Baptism and Temptations from the history of religions school. Namely, temptation often accompanies initiation. Hence, this juxtaposition of these two stories is natural in ancient literature. Petr Pokorný, "The Temptation Stories and Their Intention," *NTS* 20 (1974): 118.

⁴³ John T. Fitzgerald, "The Temptation of Jesus: The Testing of the Messiah in Matthew," *ResQ* 15 (1972): 152–60. "He rejects any role as the Messianic Son which does not involve being God's Servant as well" (159).

⁴⁴ The phrase, "If you are the son of God" (Matt 4:3, 6/Luke 4:3, 9) refers back immediately to the heavenly voice that confirmed Jesus at his baptism. For the astute reader, however, they may also point forward to the derision of the cross (Matt 27:40, which uses the exact Greek phrase).

The second argument concerning the Temptations is that Jesus succeeds where Israel in general and Moses in particular failed.⁴⁵ The ‘forty days’ points back to the experience of Israel in the Desert.⁴⁶ More specifically, the three temptations (following Matthew’s order), backtrack through three texts in Deuteronomy (8:3, trusting God for food; 6:16, doubting God’s power; and 6:13, not chasing after other gods). These three temptations take Jesus back to the pivotal moments in ‘the great and terrible wilderness’ (Deut 8:15) as if to answer the question, “Will Israel pass the test this time?” She is, of course, embodied in her leader, Jesus, which is not so unusual since in many ways she was embodied in Moses earlier. In fact, Jesus’ third temptation mirrors Deuteronomy 6:16–19 which deliberately references to Exodus 17:1–7. Exodus 17:1–7 recounts Moses striking the rock at Rephidim (cf. Psa 95:7b–11). Of course, when this incident was repeated at Kadesh, God told Moses to speak to the rock but he took matters into his own hands and struck the rock twice (Num 20:1–13). For this failure, he was excluded from the Promised Land, a failure Jesus will not repeat. Specifically, Jesus refuses to employ his power for self-preservation whether that be for physical nourishment, Messianic announcement, or territorial expansion.

⁴⁵ G. H. P. Thompson, “Called-Proved-Obedient: A Study in the Baptism and Temptation Narratives of Matthew and Luke,” *JTS* 11 (1960): 1–12. Jesus, like Israel (Deut 8:5), was God’s son; Jesus, like Moses, fasted for 40 days (Deut 9:9). As Thompson points out, the ‘test’ is one of faith: “The man who tests God doubts his power and providence. Therefore ‘to test God’ is essentially the opposite of ‘to have faith in God’”(4).

⁴⁶ The number 40 seems to be a metaphor in the Scriptures for a long but limited period of time. It was used of the flood (Gen 7:4), the spies of Canaan (Num 13:25), Philistine opposition (1 Sam 17:16), Elijah in the wilderness (1 Kgs 19:8), Ezekiel laid on his side (Ezek 4:6), Jonah’s preaching (Jonah 3:4), Jesus’ resurrection (Acts 1:3), etc. It is an obviously common Biblical metaphor that may simultaneously allude to Israel as well as her leader, Moses who spent forty days on the mountain before bringing down the law (Exod 24:18; 34:28; Deut 9:9). Given the plethora of Mosaic allusions in Matthew’s first five chapters, such a dual allusion here would serve the author’s purpose well.

At least two more times during his ministry Jesus will face this very same decision—exercising worldly politics through power or practicing Kenotic Politics through self-abnegation and obedience. The first followed Peter’s ‘great confession’ in Caesarea Philippi (Mark 8:27–9:1/Matt 16:13–28/Luke 9:18–27). This was the clearest declaration of Jesus’ messianic identity to date which he chases with an equally clear prediction of his own suffering and death. This was counterintuitive; in fact, the idea of a suffering Messiah was unprecedented. It was so shocking that Peter actually took Jesus off to the side to rebuke him for such ‘nonsense’ (Mark 8:32–33/Matt 16:22–23), only to find himself on the other end of Jesus’ (arguably) most scathing rebuke in all the gospels. Apparently, Jesus felt strongly about articulating and defending Kenotic Politics as the primary means of carrying out the work of the kingdom. This is even more significant when one realizes the central importance of this text. Lee-Pollard explains, “The place to begin understanding powerlessness in Mark is clearly the scene of Jesus’ self-disclosure at Caesarea Philippi (8.27-9.1) which is both the organizational centre and the theological heart of the Gospel.”⁴⁷ The final time Jesus faced this desert decision was in the garden of Gethsemane. There too he was alone in a deserted place, there too he wrestled thrice, and according to Luke’s textual variant there too he was ministered to by angels. The point is, this tradition of Jesus’ desert temptation refracts further into Jesus’ ministry. It apparently was the demon with which he wrestled throughout his Messianic career.

Summary: In this narrative, Jesus faced squarely the choice of pursuing earthly kingdoms with earthly resources versus submitting himself to the plan of God. Both Marsh and Storkey agree that the temptations poignantly illustrate the choice of Jesus as to which political

⁴⁷ Dorothy A. Lee-Pollard, “Powerlessness as Power: A Key Emphasis in the Gospel of Mark,” *SJT* 40 (1987): 178.

paradigm he would follow. More specifically, “Two concepts, messianic ruler and suffering servant, had lain side by side in Hebrew Scripture for centuries, but only in Jesus is it seen that they are united in one individual.”⁴⁸

Inaugural Sermon in Nazareth (Luke 4:16–27)

Perhaps more than in any other passage, Jesus’ agenda for his ministry is explicated in this sermon. Several aspects of this text display the kenotic character of Jesus’ politics.

Jesus reads from Isaiah 61:1–2a. Whether or not this was a lectionary reading or a passage Jesus chose is impossible to tell. What is clear is that this text was understood as eschatological and messianic. In an extraordinarily bold move, Jesus claims to be the fulfillment of this biblical promise.

Equally striking, this text emphasizes the power of the anointed one expended upon the disenfranchised rather than Israel’s enemies. This is by far the ‘minority’ tradition concerning the Messiah. Typically he is described as a mighty warrior wreaking vengeance on the wicked. This text, by contrast, concentrates on the service of the Messiah for the downtrodden (which becomes paradigmatic for Jesus in Luke [e.g. 6:20–22; 7:22; 14:13, 21]). Moreover, the judgment talk of Isaiah 61:2b, is (deliberately?) excluded from Jesus’ citation leaving only the impression of a Messiah of compassion who will enforce Jubilee.

Furthermore, while Jubilee was never practiced, at least as far as any historical texts indicate, it remained a powerful idea in Judaism of salvation and a consequent return to pristine roots (e.g. *Pss. Sol.* 11; *Shemoneh Esreh* 10; 11QMelch). Some have understood Jesus’ words as a lit-

⁴⁸ Arch B. Taylor, “Decision in the Desert. The Temptation of Jesus in the Light of Deuteronomy,” *Interpretation* 14/3 (1960): 301.

eral economic renewal program,⁴⁹ though neither the context of Isaiah 61 nor Luke 4 supports that. What is of significance here is that Jesus connected the Jubilee text of Isaiah 61:1–2a with the ministries of Elijah and Elisha to those *outside* of Israel. This is a striking twist on the Elijah/Elisha tradition in that the emphasis shifts from a call to Israel to repent, to an offer of salvation to Gentiles. His messianic program was not, therefore, to be a campaign of liberation of Israel through power but liberation of the marginalized through compassion. Thus Jesus' Jubilee was no longer limited to Israel, it was no longer limited to economic debts, and it was no longer limited to the 49th year.⁵⁰

Summary: The Nazareth Sermon establishes the direction of Jesus Messianic career. In it Jesus defines his rule using Isaiah 61, a text emphasizing compassion rather than vengeance, and that portion of the text which *does* predict vengeance has been excised. More poignant still is the fact that Jesus compares his own ministry to that of Elijah and Elisha, specifically their ministry to those outside the normal boundaries of Israel. In other words, his power will be exercised for the benefit of the powerless. All this will usher in a redefined Jubilee with economic, ethnic, and ethical implications.

⁴⁹ Andre Trocme, *Jesus and the Nonviolent Revolution* (Scottsdale, Pennsylvania: Herald Press, 1973), 39, and John H. Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1972, 1994), 34–40, 64–77 argue that Jesus' saw his ministry as the actual inauguration of Jubilee (cf. Luke 4:14-21, 12:30-33, 6:20-26).

⁵⁰ Matthey, "Manifesto," 7. While Jesus' Jubilee cannot be limited to economics, nor applied under the same stipulations of the ancient theocratic government of Israel, it would be a serious mistake to ignore the economic implications of the preaching of Jesus because he supposedly 'spiritualized' Jubilee. These concerns are taken up by a number of theologians in response to very specific geo-economic issues. See for example David Tiede, "Proclaiming the Righteous Reign of Jesus: Luke 4 and the Justice of God," *Word & World* 7/1 (1987): 83–90; Jürgen Moltmann, *Jesus Christ for Today's World* (translated by Margaret Kohl; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 119–123; and Samuel O. Abogunrin, "Jesus' Sevenfold Programmatic Declaration at Nazareth: An Exegesis of Luke 4.15–30 from an African Perspective," *BTh* 1/2 (2003): 225–249.

Thus, every major ‘inaugural’ text in each of the synoptics includes self-abnegation as paradigmatic of the shape Jesus’ messianic career would take.

Conclusion

The use of power, through coercion or force, is a constituent element of all worldly politics, one which Jesus refused to practice. Rather, he spent his power in service and suffering. This has led many (read ‘most’ in Constantinian Christendom), to assume that Jesus was not political.⁵¹ This creates an irreconcilable tension between a non-political Christ (an oxymoron) and Jesus’ words and deeds, which are irreducibly political. Here is a simple solution to the tension: *Jesus is political, but he altered how politics should be practiced.* Rather than using power for self-aggrandizement as the Lords of the Gentiles (Mark 10:42), power is expended only in service to others. Mark 10:32–45 is the reconfiguration of the practice of politics, not the abandonment of it.⁵²

In a paradoxical way, true power is in the renunciation of it. The Pilates and Herods of this world clamor for recognition and control. In doing so they find themselves slaves to the opinions of those they deign to rule. Jesus, on the other hand, recognized that true rule is in acts of service not coercion or violence. Moreover, he understood that God has all power and our at-

⁵¹ Theissen bemoans this neglect, “There are many intimations in the Jesus tradition that Jesus refused force. While there is a consensus in this regard, that this refusal of force has been articulated with political categories has not be underscored,” cf. Gerd Theissen, “The Political Dimension of Jesus’ Activities” in *The Social Setting of Jesus and the Gospels* (ed. by Wolfgang Stegemann, et. al.; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2002), 233. Similarly, Horsely, *Hearing the Whole Story*, 194, “That the point of this passage is the internal politics of the movement is often missed because the sanction on the teaching stated in 10:45 has been so important to Christian faith in Christ’s death as a ‘ransom for many.’”

⁵² Schweitzer, *Quest*, 20, “When He put an end to the quarrel about pre-eminence, and when He answered the request of the sons of Zebedee, He did not attack the assumption that there were to be thrones and powers, but only addressed Himself to the question how men were in the present to establish their claims to that position of authority.” Contra Erasmus, who, at every turn in his exegesis of Mark 10:32–45, contrasts earthly and spiritual kingdoms as mutually exclusive options. See Desiderius Erasmus, *Paraphrase on Mark*, in *Collected Works of Erasmus* (vol. 49; Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988), 129–31.

tempts to wield some of that power for self-aggrandizement or self-preservation is ultimately self-defeating idolatry.⁵³ As a result of these two truths—(a) God has all power and (b) true rule is service—Jesus undertook the task of the cross as the quintessential act of his ministry. Through his ultimate self-abnegation, through this very political-kenotic act, Jesus exercised his greatest power.⁵⁴ “The cross is beginning to loom not as a ritually prescribed instrument of propitiation but as the political alternative to both insurrection and quietism.”⁵⁵

In summary, the exegesis of Mark 10:32–45 points toward just such a reconfiguration of the political use of power, what is here called ‘Kenotic Politics.’ Jesus’ essential statements on reversal, his ministry to the least of all, and the pivotal projections of his ministry confirm the Kenotic Politics found in Mark 10:32–45. Mark 10:32–45 is not an isolated or idiosyncratic text—it is the core of Jesus’ ministry; it is the core of his politics.

⁵³ See especially Hengel, *Christ and Power*, 81–82.

⁵⁴ Lee-Pollard, “Powerlessness as Power,” 173–74, argues that the power of God is seen, paradoxically, in the cross of Jesus even more than in his resurrection.

⁵⁵ Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus*, 36.