

The Nature of Yeshua in the Synoptic Gospels and Acts

dominion was taken away, but an extension of life was granted to them for an appointed period of time. I kept looking in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven one like a Son of Man was coming, and He came up to the Ancient of Days and was presented before Him. And to Him was given dominion, glory and a kingdom, that all the peoples, nations and *men of every language* might serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion which will not pass away; and His kingdom is one which will not be destroyed.”

Later, in the *Carmen Christi* hymn of Philippians 2:5-11, it will be said of Yeshua, that “though he was in the form of God, [he] did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross” (Philippians 2:6-8, NRSV). Yeshua, having equality with the Father, did not come to Planet Earth to dominate people and abuse them and enslave them—as gods or goddesses of Ancient Near Eastern and classical Greco-Roman mythology would have (discussed further). Yeshua instead emptied Himself of His exalted glory, and as He testified here, the “Son of Man” would be delivered over and betrayed by mortals, to be painfully murdered. The Son of Man coming to Earth was so that permanent atonement could be offered for human sins. This necessarily highlights the significance of salvation, as proponents of a high Christology believe that only God can save people from their sins, not a created being.

Mark 10:17-18; Matthew 19:16-17; Luke 18:18-19

“No One is Good Except God Alone”

“As He was setting out on a journey, a man ran up to Him and knelt before Him, and asked Him, ‘Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?’ And Yeshua said to him, ‘Why do you call Me good? No one is good except God alone’” (Mark 10:17-18).

“And someone came to Him and said, ‘Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may obtain eternal life?’ And He said to him, ‘Why are you asking Me about what is good? There is *only One* who is good; but if you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments’” (Matthew 19:16-17).

“A ruler questioned Him, saying, ‘Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?’ And Yeshua said to him, ‘Why do you call Me good? No one is good except God alone’” (Luke 18:18-19).

The interchange which takes place, between Yeshua the Messiah and the rich young ruler, is one which has challenged many people seeking God throughout the centuries. The requirement of the Messiah is that in order for rich people to be on the path toward the Kingdom of God, they cannot just keep the commandments of the Torah, which are intended to facilitate the proper way to walk and conduct oneself, but that the rich must give their possessions to the poor (Mark 9:19-23; Matthew 20:18-24; Luke 18:20-25). It is easy to deduce that financial wealth and great assets can be a significant deterrent for those intending to walk on a path of faith—as rich people can place their confidence in their various holdings, and not totally in the Divine. When the presumed security of wealth can be removed, then rich people can be freed to completely rely upon God to move in their lives.

As the rich young ruler approaches Yeshua, and asks Him what He is to do in order to receive eternal life, Yeshua responds in a perplexing manner, and with a statement which proponents, of a low Christology of Yeshua being a created supernatural entity, believe is reflective of such a position. The rich young ruler asks, “Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” (Mark 10:17, TLV; also Luke 18:20). Yeshua responds, “Why are you calling

Me good?...No one is good except One—that is God” (Mark 10:18, TLV; also Luke 18:21). As it appears in the source text of both Mark 10:18 and Luke 18:19, *ti me legeis agathon? oudeis agathos ei me heis ho Theos* (τί με λέγεις ἀγαθόν; οὐδεὶς ἀγαθὸς εἰ μὴ εἷς ὁ θεός); “why do you call-me good? no one [is] good except one – God” (Mark 10:18, Brown and Comfort).¹⁴⁰ Proponents of a low Christology consider that Yeshua, in the affirmation “No one is good but One, *that is*, God” (Luke 18:19, NKJV), has denied that He is God.

Proponents of a high Christology, of Yeshua being God, have obviously had to address the statements appearing in both Mark 10:18 and Luke 18:19. In his commentary on the Gospel of Luke, Evans summarizes a number of the significant options which have been at interpreters’ disposal:

“**Why do you call me good?:** This question has prompted numerous interpretations down through the centuries...A favorite interpretation among early church fathers is that Jesus wanted the man to stop and realize that in recognizing Jesus as ‘good’ he was really ascribing deity to Jesus (since only God is truly good). Others have suggested that Jesus has rejected the compliment as cheap flattery. Another suggestion has been that Jesus actually acknowledged his sinfulness. To be preferred {in Evans’ estimation}, however, is the approach that understands Jesus question as ‘directing the man’s attention to God and his will as the only prescription for pleasing him’ (Fitzmyer, p. 1199; similarly Marshall, p. 684; Tiede, p. 311).”¹⁴¹

Various contemporary commentators, on the Gospel of Mark¹⁴² and the Gospel of Luke,¹⁴³ will conclude that Yeshua’s response, in Mark 10:18 and Luke 18:19, is to be taken as a dismissal of an inappropriate flattery and insincere honors being stated by the rich young ruler. Other examiners, for both Mark¹⁴⁴ and Luke,¹⁴⁵ have taken the question posed by Yeshua as one of a distinct inquiry to the rich young ruler, leading to an evaluation of His Divine nature. The rich young ruler, only recognizing Yeshua as some good teacher (*didaskale agathe*, διδάσκαλε ἀγαθέ; both Mark 10:17 and Luke 18:18), is asked why he is saying this, when “No one is good except the one God” (Luke 18:19, Common English Bible). The rich young ruler *does recognize* goodness present in Yeshua. And so, with the rich young ruler having asked Yeshua how he can have eternal life, he is posed with an inquiry about *why* Yeshua is being called good by him.

Yeshua’s response, perhaps reminding the rich young ruler that only God was good, that was to surely provoke some reflection on who Yeshua was in relation to this Good God. As Rikk E. Watts indicates for Mark 10:17,

“The life-giving goodness of God is one of the great themes of Scripture (e.g., 1 Chr 16:34; 2 Chr 5:13; 7:3, 10; 30:18; Ezra 3:11; Pss 25:7, 8; 34:8; 86:5; 100:5; 118:29; 145:9; cf. Deut 10:13; 12:28; Pss 16:2; 34:10). Jesus is not denying his own goodness but wants the man to recognize that since God alone is good and alone gives life (Deut 32:39; 1 Sam 2:6), only God can answer this question (even as only God alone can forgive sin, cf. 2:7). Hence, Jesus recites the commandments (v. 19). That Jesus then goes on to add his own requirement (vv. 21) implies his equality with God...The man’s address (‘Good teacher,’ v. 17) is appropriate only if he realizes this fact.”¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁰ Brown and Comfort, 160.

¹⁴¹ Evans, *Luke*, pp 275-276.

¹⁴² Lane, *Mark*, pp 365-366; Hurtado, *Mark*, pp 168-169.

¹⁴³ Marshall, *Luke*, 684; E. Earle Ellis, *New Century Bible Commentary: Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 218.

¹⁴⁴ Cole, *Mark*, 233.

¹⁴⁵ Morris, *Luke*, 292.

¹⁴⁶ Rikk E. Watts, “Mark,” in *NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, 2036.

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Yeshua was approached by the rich young ruler by only being called a “Good Teacher.” Yeshua asks him why he says that He is “good,” when only God is good (Mark 10:18). Yeshua then prescribes some actions to be performed, if the rich young ruler is to say on an appropriate path of faith, which will result in eternal life:

“You know the commandments, “DO NOT MURDER, DO NOT COMMIT ADULTERY, DO NOT STEAL, DO NOT BEAR FALSE WITNESS, Do not defraud, HONOR YOUR FATHER AND MOTHER” [Exodus 20:12-16; Deuteronomy 5:16-20]. And he said to Him, ‘Teacher, I have kept all these things from my youth up.’ Looking at him, Yeshua felt a love for him and said to him, ‘One thing you lack: go and sell all you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.’ But at these words he was saddened, and he went away grieving, for he was one who owned much property. And Yeshua, looking around, said to His disciples, ‘How hard it will be for those who are wealthy to enter the kingdom of God!’” (Mark 10:19-23).

That obedience to God’s commandments is expected if one intends to remain steadfast, on the path toward eternal life, is easily seen in Yeshua’s response. For the rich young ruler, it would also require him giving up his fortune, which could be a source of human confidence and pride. That this is not easy, for many rich people to do, is obvious from rich young ruler departing in sadness. What is far too easily overlooked in Yeshua’s response is how He says, “Go, sell as much as you have, and give to the poor; and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow Me” (Mark 10:21, TLV; also Luke 18:22). In order for the rich young ruler to enter into the Kingdom and have eternal life, **he will have to follow Yeshua**, which is very much a statement of Yeshua’s being good. *What does this prompt people to think about, as it concerns the nature of Yeshua?* Yeshua could have just as well have said, “One thing you lack: go and sell all you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and go and seek after the true riches of God” (Mark 10:21, NASU modified).

Commenting on Luke 18:19, David W. Pao asserts, “Jesus is not denying that he is ‘good’; rather, Jesus challenges the ruler to see if he actually considers Jesus to be good (i.e., God). The ruler shows that he does not consider Jesus to be God by refusing to follow him (v. 23).”¹⁴⁷ Bowman and Komoszewski concur in their book *Putting Jesus in His Place*, “Jesus was not denying being good; he was pointing out that human beings are not good and therefore, since the young man who approached Jesus regarded him as a merely human ‘teacher,’ he should not have addressed him flatteringly as ‘good teacher’ (Mark 10:17; Luke 18:18). If anything, Jesus’ statement in context implies that Jesus is more than human, since Jesus goes on to summon the young man to *follow him* in order to be complete (Matt. 19:18-21; Mark 10:19-21; Luke 18:20-22).”¹⁴⁸

The rich young ruler approached Yeshua from a low position of Him just being a good *human* teacher. Yeshua challenged the rich young ruler to recognize that only God is worthy of being called *good*. Yeshua later informed the rich young ruler that if he truly wanted eternal life, that he would have to *follow Him*. What does this indicate about *the goodness of Yeshua*? Morris astutely concludes for Luke 18:19,

“Jesus proceeds to show the shortcomings in the young man’s position. *No one is good but God alone* is not to be understood as a repudiation of the epithet *good* as applied to himself. If that was his meaning, Jesus would surely have said plainly that he was a sinner. Rather he was inviting the ruler to reflect on the meaning of his own words. What he has just said had

¹⁴⁷ David W. Pao, “Luke,” in *NIV Zondervan Study Bible*, 2116.

¹⁴⁸ Bowman and Komoszewski, pp 304-305.

implications for the Person of Jesus. If he was good and if only God was good, as all rabbinic teaching agreed...then the ruler was saying something important about him. So far from repudiating the deity of Jesus as some hold, the question seems to invite the young man to reflect on it."¹⁴⁹

Mark 10:32-34; Matthew 20:17-19; Luke 18:31-34

"The Son of Man Will be Killed by Sinners"

"They were on the road going up to Jerusalem, and Yeshua was walking on ahead of them; and they were amazed, and those who followed were fearful. And again He took the twelve aside and began to tell them what was going to happen to Him, *saying*, 'Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered to the chief priests and the scribes; and they will condemn Him to death and will hand Him over to the Gentiles. They will mock Him and spit on Him, and scourge Him and kill Him, and three days later He will rise again'" (Mark 10:32-34).

"As Yeshua was about to go up to Jerusalem, He took the twelve *disciples* aside by themselves, and on the way He said to them, 'Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem; and the Son of Man will be delivered to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn Him to death, and will hand Him over to the Gentiles to mock and scourge and crucify Him, and on the third day He will be raised up'" (Matthew 20:17-19).

"Then He took the twelve aside and said to them, 'Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and all things which are written through the prophets about the Son of Man will be accomplished. For He will be handed over to the Gentiles, and will be mocked and mistreated and spit upon, and after they have scourged Him, they will kill Him; and the third day He will rise again.' But the disciples understood none of these things, and *the meaning of this statement was hidden from them, and they did not comprehend the things that were said*" (Luke 18:31-34).

There were multiple times that Yeshua the Messiah told His Disciples that He would be tried and executed, but later resurrected from the dead:

- "'We are now going up to Jerusalem,' he said, 'as you can see. And the Son of Man will be betrayed into the power of the chief priests and scribes. They are going to condemn him to death and hand him over to pagans who will jeer at him and spit at him and flog him and kill him. But after three days he will rise again'" (Mark 10:33-34, Phillips New Testament).
- "Listen, we are now going up to Jerusalem and the Son of Man will be handed over to the chief priests and the scribes and they will condemn him to death. They will hand him over to the heathen to ridicule and flog and crucify. And on the third day he will be raised again!" (Matthew 20:18-19, Phillips New Testament).
- "Listen to me. We are now going up to Jerusalem and everything that has been written by the prophets about the Son of Man will come true. For he will be handed over to the heathen, and he is going to be jeered at and insulted and spat upon, and then they will flog him and kill him. But he will rise again on the third day" (Luke 18:31-33, Phillips New Testament).

The Disciples did not know what to do with their Master telling them that He was going to be betrayed to death (Luke 18:34). As people today, who affirm Yeshua to be the Messiah and Savior, we take for granted the position of those who initially walked with Him, and some of

¹⁴⁹ Morris, *Luke*, 292.