**Gospel Christology Paper Assignment Instructions**

**Overview**

The Gospels have been described as “biographical sermons” of Jesus. They are *biographies* in that they aim to inform the audience (whether reading or hearing) about the life and legacy of the protagonist - Jesus of Nazareth. They are *sermons* in that they aim not merely to inform, but to inspire, persuade, and elicit a response. Where multiple sources of the same presentation exist, inevitably those presentations are both alike and different. Think “remake.” For example, the movie, *True Grit*, was originally released in 1969 with John Wayne as “Rooster” Cogburn. It was remade in 2010 with Jeff Bridges as “Rooster” Cogburn.” The story is essentially the same in both movies, but the way the story is interpreted in the two movies, and the way the central character, “Rooster” Cogburn, is portrayed, is different. That is because the directors of the two movies paint a portrait of the central character, “Rooster” Cogburn,” so that the audiences see him through the directors’, or storytellers’, eyes. In much the same way, the four Gospel writers tell the same story of the central character of their biography, Jesus of Nazareth; but because we see Jesus through each Gospel writer’s eyes, we see a unique portrait of him in each of the four Gospels. In scholarly parlance, we call this “portrait” of Jesus the Gospel’s *Christology*; that is, its understanding, and presentation, of Jesus the Christ.

**Instructions**

Your task in this assignment is to experience *the Gospel writer’s* portrayal of Jesus as the story unfolds before you in the biblical text.

What the assignment is *not:*

* Your assignment is *not* to write a critical introduction of your Gospel, exploring such things as authorship, date, provenance, genre, etc. Your Gospel’s Christology is the same, no matter where you come down on these things. Moreover, an introduction to your Gospel is already available in your textbook; there is no need to rehearse that in your Christology paper.
* Your assignment is *not* to write a theology paper on what “Christology” is. Christology has already been defined for you above. Moreover, this is a class in New Testament, not theology.
* Your assignment is *not* to write about whom *you* understand Jesus to be in your Gospel. Your assignment is to identify and describe who *your Gospel writer* understood Jesus to be as evidenced in the way he tells his story of Jesus in his Gospel; that is, the assignment is analytical, not introspective.

What your assignment *is*:

*Your assignment is to work your way through your Gospel, section by section (see your textbook for commonly recognized sections/divisions of your Gospel), making the case as you go that your identified Christological title is the title your Gospel writer had in mind in telling the story of Jesus as he did.*

In completing the assignment, read the Gospel all the way through at one time, as you would a story or short novel, rather than randomly shuffling through the story looking for particular scenes or passages or verses, the very act of which will disrupt the flow of the story and cause you to miss your Gospel writer’s portrayal of Jesus. If you prefer, you may listen to the Gospel read on DVD or MP3. In some ways, listening to the story is preferable to reading it because the Gospels were stories written more *for the ear* than the eye (remember, many in the ancient world could not read, and even if they could, books were too expensive to own a personal copy). As you read or listen to your Gospel, listen to the voice of the Gospel writer (the story’s implied “narrator”) as he describes Jesus in the story. Try to isolate the *single*, central Christological image or role your Gospel writer uses to describe Jesus; for example, Messiah (or Christ), Son of Man, Son of God, Miracle Worker, Teacher, the New Moses, the Suffering Servant, the Prophet, the Word (*logos* of God), and so forth. Be sure that you are identifying a *Christological* *title* and not just an emphasis of your Gospel. For example, everyone recognizes that Luke portrays Jesus as compassionate, but “compassionate” is not a *Christological title.* That could be said of lots of people who had no Messianic pretensions or aspirations. Also, while there may be multiple Christological images employed at times in your Gospel, your task is to identify and explore the *single* Christological image that seems to you to dominate the writer’s view of Jesus. That is, you must explore *one* Christological image in your Gospel, not *multiple* images. You may not, for example, write on “Jesus as Messiah *and* Son of God in the Gospel of Matthew.” You may choose any Christological title *you can defend from the text of your Gospel,* but you must defend your choice by appealing to the text of your assigned Gospel.

Once you have isolated the Christological portrait of Jesus you believe your Gospel writer employs (e.g., Son of Man, Son of God, Messiah, Suffering Servant, Prophet, New Moses, etc.) test your hypothesis against the experts by comparing your Christological interpretation of your Gospel with course Learn materials (textbook and course presentations), as well as scholarly resources (especially academic Bible dictionaries and commentaries). You will want to read a scholarly article on your Christological title in a good *academic* (i.e., not one written for pastors and laypeople) Bible dictionary (e.g., *The Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible,* *Holman Bible Dictionary,* etc.) so that you understand what the title meant *in its original context*. If you would find it helpful to see a scholarly *model* of the kind of thing you are being asked to do in this assignment, see, for example, Mark L. Strauss’ *Four Portraits, One Jesus.* However, do not consult “the experts” until you have come to your own conclusions. Finally, write a paper explaining and defending your Christological interpretation of Jesus in your Gospel.

You may choose any of the four canonical Gospels for this assignment (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John), your choice. However, confine your discussion *to* *your chosen Gospel;* do *not* write on all four Gospels. Remember, you are reading the Gospels “vertically,” in this assignment, not “horizontally.”

*Specific Requirements:*

* Thesis statement: The paper must have a thesis statement *clearly identifying* which Christological image of Jesus will be defended, e.g., “The thesis of this paper is that Mark portrays Jesus as the Son of God.”
* Length of assignment: Not less than ten (10) and not more than fifteen (15) pages in length, double-spaced, *strictly applied* (excluding title page, contents page, and bibliography page; footnotes count in the page total).
* Format of Assignment: Turabian, current edition. Footnotes and bibliography only; no parenthetical citations or endnotes. See the *Turabian Format Quick Guide* for specifics.
* Number of citations: The paper must interact directly with your chosen Gospel, as well as with course Learn materials (including *both* textbooks and course presentations). Additionally (i.e., beyond textbooks and course presentations), the paper must consult at least five (5) scholarly sources as “conversation partners” with whom to test your ideas, *one of which must be an academic commentary on your chosen Gospel*. Consult the website <bestcommentaries.com> for commentary suggestions.
* Acceptable sources: Bible, recent scholarly sources, textbooks, and course presentations. Preference should be given to academic commentaries on the Gospels. *No internet sources (except those secured through the Jerry Falwell Library) may be used without the instructor’s prior approval.*
* Submit the paper as an MS Word file (doc or docx file format). No pdf files accepted.

Note: Your assignment will be checked for originality via the Turnitin plagiarism tool.