

More About Jesus, Week 29: Jesus did not promote himself

by Paul Hammons

One of the images which all four of the gospel accounts show us is that of huge crowds following Jesus wherever he went, seeking him out even when he went out into the wilderness or the Gentile territory.

They came in large part because of what they had seen and heard from others - those who had seen Jesus perform great signs or who had heard him preach on the kingdom of God. They didn't come because Jesus tried to draw crowds or attract attention with impressive displays of power and glory of God, or by sending the disciples out to round up large crowds for him to address. Jesus wasn't a self-promoter.

In fact, the greatest claim that he made about himself was one that he almost never directly stated. Jesus' claims to be the Christ, the son of God, were stated through his works and through the testimony of witnesses.

He was subtle enough that eventually the Jews in Jerusalem cornered him and demanded that he give them a clear response:

...Jesus was walking in the temple, in the colonnade of Solomon. So the Jews gathered around him and said to him, "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly." - John 10:23-24 (ESV)

This was most likely toward the end of his ministry, and Jesus' answer to this question indicates that his actions should have been plainly understood by that time without needing specific claims from him:

Jesus answered them, "I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father's name bear witness about me, but you do not believe because you are not among my sheep. - John 10:25-26.

It shouldn't surprise us that even today, people try to argue that Jesus never actually claimed to be the son of God, because even during his life, many were confused by his teachings. But as Jesus points out on numerous occasions, the confusion didn't stem from lack of clarity.

Instead, it arose because of people who refused to see the signs and witnesses, accept the conclusion they pointed to, and believe as the apostles had.

A willingness to believe the signs – to draw conclusions from Jesus' character and teaching and power - seems to have always been Jesus' intent. He didn't proclaim his own identity from the rooftops, and with very few exceptions he did not even go seek out the crowded areas where he could easily find an audience.

Instead, the crowds went out and found him, following him because they had either seen his power or heard the accounts of those who had seen.

Even when Jesus did go speak publicly or perform works in public settings, he didn't do them for the purpose of drawing attention to himself. When Jesus turned the water to wine in Cana, the only people who knew what he had done were the servants who were present (John 2:9).

His unbelieving brothers suggested that he go publicly with them to the feast in Jerusalem (John 7:3-4), saying "no one works in secret if he seeks to be known openly. If you do these things, show yourself to the world."

Instead of building his own reputation as his brothers recommended, he left that task to those who had witnessed his works and heard his words. And even then, Jesus would tell those he healed to "Go home and declare how much God has done for you" (Luke 8:39), rather than "Spread the word about me." As it happened, they did that anyway.

And he told the Jews why he took that approach:

"Yet I do not seek my own glory; there is One who seeks it, and he is the judge. ... If I glorify myself, my glory is nothing. It is my Father who glorifies me." - Jn 8:54

Jesus' approach was in line with Isaiah's prophesy of the Christ, which said, "He will not cry aloud or lift up his voice, or make it heard in the street; a bruised reed he will not break, and a faintly burning wick he will not quench" (Is 42:2-3).

The example we see in Jesus is one he called us to follow as well, not doing our good deeds to be seen of men (Mathew 6:1-4), but rather for the purpose of doing God's will and bringing Him glory.