

Douglas E. Woolley
Rev. Terris Neuman
Life of Christ
2 January 1995

Book Report on *Jesus and Power*

David Prior structured his book, *Jesus and Power*, by tracing the life of Christ and how Jesus treated and exercised power in his daily life. Ten chapters comprise the book, summarized as follows: Although a baby is helpless and dependent, Jesus had the power to attract the attention of admirers and enemies in his infancy; Jesus was tempted three times in the desert to take the easy way out and to use his power in a selfish way to obtain relief or reward; Jesus exemplified meekness by having power under control, but other people were dangerous, utilizing strengths that were not submitted or harnessed; Jesus had power with his friends by insisting that they put him first, as he committed his life to serving others and demonstrated godly attitudes; Throughout his ministry, Jesus willingly and powerfully helped those who were truly helpless; He taught about the negative impact that money has on people possessed by its power; The Pharisees exercised religious power contrary to the way Jesus did; Pilate's political power confronts and contrasts Jesus' ways during his last twenty-four hours before his crucifixion; The resurrection power of Jesus enables Christians to live and witness for Christ; The last chapter reveals Jesus' power as he executes final judgment and serves. In addition to tracing Jesus' life, the author focuses on some of the main areas from which power is derived: money, religion, and politics. Depicting the life of Christ mostly from the four gospels of the New Testament, Prior examined aspects of Jesus' ministry and mission that deal with the theme of power.

Prior clearly states that he wrote *Jesus and Power* as "a small attempt to help Christians recover and apply in our behavior and attitudes Jesus' priorities concerning all aspects of power" (15). Unlike others who treat the subject of power by examining the two Greek words for "power" and "authority," the author studied and wrote of Jesus' lifestyle and how he handled power in different situations. Instead of embarking on a word study, Prior began an intensive study of a person--Jesus--and then wrote of the Master's attitude towards human power and utilizing God's power (15). Stressing the example of Jesus and the importance of becoming like him, the author writes from a scholarly, well researched, evangelical theological perspective while concentrating more on the practical aspects of Jesus' life that can be "applied to our own lives" (16). Although Prior does not make a statement concerning the virgin birth of Jesus, he does support the evangelical nature of Jesus and God: "In the incarnation of the Son of God [Jesus], the purpose and the very person of God became enfleshed" (23). Being equal with God, Jesus was "born in the likeness of men," sharing in the true nature of God (29). Prior is an Anglican pastor who has a strong belief that the Lord can and does heal people with or without medical means (41,42). He also avoids the extreme view of placing the blame for a non-occurrence of healing on the inadequate faith of a believer (104). From his writings, it is implied that Prior does not support the 'prosperity teaching' where children of God are guaranteed health, wealth, and success by faith (50, 108, 133). Yet, Prior clearly supports the 'charismatic renewal' that has brought new life into many churches (167-68).

Overall, I feel that *Jesus and Power* is an excellent book and has many strengths. The book's strongest attribute is that it addresses the issue of power in a unique Biblical way. Not only does Prior thoroughly quote from the Bible to support his illustrations on power while blending it into the life of Christ, but the chapters address topics that are relevant and practical to the reader. As a young

ambitious seminary student whose heart is to "advance the kingdom of God" while advancing in my computer programming career positionally as well as financially, this book has helped shape for me a Biblical approach for handling spiritual, political, and financial advancement. Written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, *Jesus and Power* has the potential to not only inform readers but also to transform readers as they allow the Holy Spirit to convict them and confirm for them the truths found in the book.

Even though the author is aware of the "theological minefields" in which he touches, I feel that Prior weakens his book by adding some biased remarks in an effort to substantiate his points.

Although Prior is maintaining his intellectual integrity by stating that the accounts of the Jewish historian Josephus "are not always to be trusted," I feel that such a statement weakens his documented points about Herod's violent actions shortly after Jesus' birth (20). Furthermore, such discrediting of Josephus could arouse inappropriate suspicion in the minds of people about the historicity of Jesus as written by Josephus in his book *Antiquities*. Understandably there has been much debate about the trustworthiness of some of Josephus' writings, but there are scholars, such as Arnold Toynbee, who rate "him among the five greatest Hellenic historians," according to R. C. Stone in *Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, Vol. 3, page 697. Stone explains that "many have distrusted [Josephus], mostly because they disapprove of him as a traitor. . . . [but] he is no more affected by human error (of memory, faulty sources, bias, and the like) than others of his time."

In discussing sectarianism, the author uses a concrete example by pointing out an individual and a denomination, namely Pope John Paul II and the Roman Catholic Church (84). As a fellow Protestant, I share similar views with Prior, but I do not approve of a writer making derogatory remarks about a Christian organization or its leader. On the contrary, I feel that Pope John Paul II has done a good job of increasing unity and acceptance among other spirit-filled churches through his endorsement of the Charismatic renewal. He has gained such wide-spread notoriety that *Time* magazine named him as their 1995 "Man of the Year."

In spite of some of Prior's biased remarks, I thoroughly enjoyed the book and felt that God had ministered to me through it. I gathered much insight into the true meaning of meekness as I pondered on the illustration of a wild horse being tamed in order to be useful to its master (59, 60). Similarly, unless we submit ourselves to God for him to teach, train, and discipline us in our energetic strengths, we will not be in a condition to be used of God in a way that reflects the nature of Christ.

Jesus' example of reaching out to the poor and helpless is admirable, and yet Prior poses an intriguing comment that is just as perplexing today: "You could never tell an authentic beggar from a charlatan" (89). Jesus, knowing all things, could readily discern those who were truly in need and compassionately met those needs. From my personal experience and the reports of others, I know that it is not easy to distinguish a person who has a genuine need from a person who is "pretending." Compassion often rises in a Christian's heart to reach out to a needy person (usually in a financial way), sometimes only to find out that the individual has used the resources for a different purpose other than for what it was given; Thus, skepticism takes root in the Christian's heart toward all those claiming to be in need until the need is proven to be genuine. The author clearly shows Jesus as a model for us to imitate in order to meet people's needs and to lead them to the gospel. Prior makes an excellent point in saying that those who are helpless, oppressed, sick, and poor are more likely to respond to Jesus' call to "childlike dependence on God" than those who are not among the disadvantaged (91).

Prior summarizes and emphasizes one of the main points in the book by stating that true power is found in Jesus' example. He humbled himself, became a servant, and was obedient to the

Father even to the point of death; Likewise, "instead of snatching, grasping, grabbing our way to success and power," we should demonstrate Christ's resurrection power by self-giving, serving, loving, and laying down our lives for others (137, 172). Prior makes a striking conclusion that when Jesus returns in "power and great glory," he will strip "himself to wait on his disciples, to be a servant." In like manner, we should do the same, here and now!