

The Beloved Son of God

Within just a few verses, the baton is handed off from the forerunner to the Hero of Luke's Gospel (vv. 18-20). All eyes are now on Jesus as He takes center stage in the drama of Redemption. But just before John exits the stage, we are introduced to the opposition and rejection of those who refuse to hear the truth of God's Word. John rebuked Herod Antipas, who was tetrarch of Galilee, because he did many evil things, including marrying Herodias, his brother's wife (v. 19). But now added to all these evil deeds, Herod imprisoned John in a futile attempt to shut up the Word of God (v. 20). It was futile because in taking John out of the picture Herod essentially opened the door for Jesus to now enter the scene. As we will see throughout the Gospel, this hatred for God's Word will only increase in the days of Jesus until His enemies finally nail Him to a cross. Jesus will rebuke those who persistently shut their ears to God's Word:

Matthew 23:29-38 ²⁹ ¶ "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you build the tombs of the prophets and decorate the monuments of the righteous, ³⁰ saying, 'If we had lived in the days of our fathers, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.' ³¹ Thus you witness against yourselves that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets. ³² Fill up, then, the measure of your fathers. ³³ You serpents, you brood of vipers, how are you to escape being sentenced to hell? ³⁴ Therefore I send you prophets and wise men and scribes, some of whom you will kill and crucify, and some you will flog in your synagogues and persecute from town to town, ³⁵ so that on you may come all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of innocent Abel to the blood of Zechariah the son of Barachiah, whom you murdered between the sanctuary and the altar. ³⁶ Truly, I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation. ³⁷ ¶ "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not! ³⁸ See, your house is left to you desolate.

The Jews were famous for killing the prophets God sent to her and refusing to turn away from their self-righteous, man-made religion which is why Jesus firmly warns them:

Matthew 21:43-44 ⁴³ Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people producing its fruits. ⁴⁴ And the one who falls on this stone [i.e., Jesus] will be broken to pieces; and when it falls on anyone, it will crush him."

Imprisoning and finally killing the prophet John is nothing new in the long history of Israel – over and over again, when God sent Word to His people they remained hardened in their sin and typically expressed their rage toward God by murdering the prophet He sent to them. But Herod did far worse than imprison and have John executed. Luke records the friends of Peter praying in **Acts 4 (reflecting on Ps. 2)**:

Acts 4:25-28 "Why did the Gentiles rage, and the peoples plot in vain? ²⁶ The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers were gathered together, against the Lord and against his Anointed'-- ²⁷ for truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, **both Herod** and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, ²⁸ to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place.

Well now that John is taken out of the picture, the focus of Luke's Gospel now becomes Jesus. Let's begin with the genealogy this morning, identifying Jesus' true ancestry, and then work our way backwards in the text until we reach the divine commission.

With Luke's unique genealogy of Jesus (**vv. 23-38**) we are finally approaching the true beginning of Luke's biography of Jesus, now that Jesus is divinely commissioned and anointed by the Holy Spirit of God to accomplish all that His heavenly Father's perfect will. Typical of the divine commissioning of a prophet, priest, or king throughout the Old Testament would certainly include their genealogy of the office bearer, demonstrating the inductees' ancestral qualifications for office, along with a divine calling and sign of being set aside by God for a special calling on his life.

While I do not want to entertain too much speculation this morning, which is known to take place among many students of biblical genealogies, there are some interesting characteristics about Luke's genealogy. First, note how Luke reverses the typical order of Jesus' genealogy. Normally, a genealogy, including Matthew's genealogy, begins with the individual of concern and then lists his children down through the coming years, but Luke begins with Jesus and then works his way backwards through time until He reaches God (**v. 38**). By doing this, Luke brings Jesus front and center as **the culmination** of a long history of God's story of redemption. In Jesus, we have reached the unique "son of God" who purposefully fulfills all that God has been doing since the creation of the world in bringing many sons to glory (**cf. Heb. 2:10**).

A second characteristic to note is that if you begin with Adam and count backwards to the seventh name you land on such names as: Enoch (**v. 37**), Abraham (**v. 34**), David (**v. 31**), Joseph (**v. 30**), Joshua or Jesus (**v. 29**), Joseph (**v. 24**), and finally Jesus (**v. 23**). Similarly,

Matthew also has an appreciation for the number seven in his genealogy (see **Matt. 1:1-18**), grouping 2 sets of 7 in fourteen generations from Abraham to David, and fourteen generations from David to the deportation to Babylon, and fourteen generations from the deportation to Jesus Christ (**1:18**). Matthew clearly demonstrates how Jesus, as the true seed of Abraham, **is the New Israel of God** and as the true seed of David, He is **the Promised King of Israel**. Luke's focus is different. It is not that Luke doesn't see the importance of Jesus as the culmination of the history of Israel or as the coming promised Davidic King – he clearly does, as we will see in the chapters to follow. But Luke's presentation of Jesus is much broader. While Abraham and David are included in Luke's genealogy, he extends the genealogy further back in history to Adam. By presenting Jesus as “the son of Adam, the son of God” (**3:28**) Luke sees Jesus not simply as the new Israel, but **the new humanity**. As Adam was the head of the human race of this present creation, Jesus is the New Adam of the new creation – behold, Jesus comes to make all things new!

Jesus has come to set the new humanity on an entirely new footing. Whereas, we have all been born into the world as “sons of Adam” and therefore, as Paul masterfully demonstrates in **Romans 5**, we were sons of death and condemnation, **NOW** those who have been made by God to believe in Jesus have been reborn into a new creation, now as “sons of God,” resulting in eternal life and justification.

The consequences of this work of God's grace are enormous. And central to this work of the redemptive grace is the **unique** “sonship” of Jesus (cf. **vv. 22, 38; 4:3, 9**). Adam as son of God is precisely placed after the baptismal proclamation of Jesus as the unique Son of God (**3:22**) and before Satan' tempting of the Son of God (**4:3, 9**). It is clear that Luke sees Jesus as taking His place within the human family, an entirely flawed humanity, so that through His **unique** position, His **absolute obedience** to the Father's will, and His willingness to be **the sacrifice** for the sins of God's elect, He will raise us up to a position of His own glory that is far superior even to the angels and invites us to sit with Jesus at the right hand of God (see **Heb. 1-2**).

But Luke doesn't merely place Jesus within the long history of God's redemptive work throughout the ages; He presents Jesus as the unique Son of God, who is set aside by God Himself. Now, Luke doesn't provide details of the baptism itself, but rather focuses our attention on Jesus piously praying after His baptism and the heavens opening so that the Spirit would descend upon Jesus and His Father declare His approval of all that Jesus will take up and do (**3:21-22**).

John, as prophet, had no power to open heaven and bring the Spirit down upon Jesus. Jesus prays humbly before His Father, submitting His will to Him, and the Heavens are suddenly

opened to release the Spirit from the world above into the world below and to permit the voice of God to be heard below. The Spirit is seen here descending upon Jesus like a bird, a dove to be specific. In creation, we see the Spirit of God hovering like a bird over the waters of the world, which was described as formless and void (**cf. Gen. 1:2**). Over the next 6 days of creation, the Spirit will bring form and structure to the formless world and fill it up with God's marvelous creatures. With the artistry of the Divine mind, He will glorify God's creation bringing it to completion to the delight and Sabbath enjoyment of God.

The same hovering of the Spirit of God is seen in the creation of man, where he is endued with the image of God. In **Gen. 2:7**, we are told that God, in a special act of creation, formed man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breathe (or the Spirit) of life, resulting in man becoming a living creature, created in the image of God.

This won't be the only time we see the Spirit of God hovering over God's creation to bring it to His purposed glory. We could well mention the creation of Israel in the wilderness as the Spirit of God descends upon Mt. Sinai, which led them through the wilderness as a cloud by day and a fire by night. We could also speak of the glory of the Spirit which filled the completed tabernacle and temple with the glory of God, as well as the Spirit of God falling upon priests, kings and prophets. Each of these manifestations of the Spirit in creation and redemptive history are particular invasions of God from the world above into the world below to manifest His glory, which surrounds the Might Acts of God's calling and deliverance of His people.

I want us to think of two differences with these Old Testament scenes which are of particular importance to us this morning. There are many others, but I want us to at least meditate on these two. First, the anointing and commissioning of Jesus after His baptism may draw to mind that scene in **1 Sam. 16:13** when the prophet Samuel anointed David:

1 Samuel 16:13 ¹³ Then Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the midst of his brothers. And the Spirit of the LORD rushed upon David from that day forward.

Here we see David anointed through the medium of oil as he was divinely commissioned by God as King of Israel. But with Jesus, there is no oil applied to him. Rather, we see the direct pouring out of the Spirit of God upon the Messiah as promised in **Isa. 42:1** and **61:1-2**:

Isaiah 42:1 Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; **I have put my Spirit upon him**; he will bring forth justice to the nations.

Isaiah 61:1 **The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me** to bring good news to the poor; he has sent me to bind up the

brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound;

God is pleased to pour out His Spirit upon His Son to anoint and commission Him to take up His good pleasure to redeem us and carry out all that is necessary to fulfill the Father's will.

Further, we are told that the Spirit descended upon Jesus in bodily form "like a dove" (v. 22). Note how different the Spirit comes upon Jesus as the New Israel is born in the wilderness unlike how the old Israel was born at Mt. Sinai. Luke pictures the coming of the Spirit upon Jesus very differently from the coming of the glory cloud upon Mt. Sinai (**READ Ex. 19:16-24**). The author of Hebrews draws out this contrast of the coming of God at Mt. Sinai, with the coming of Jesus with these words:

Hebrews 12:18-24 For you have not come to what may be touched, a blazing fire and darkness and gloom and a tempest ¹⁹ and the sound of a trumpet and a voice whose words made the hearers beg that no further messages be spoken to them. ²⁰ For they could not endure the order that was given, "If even a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned." ²¹ Indeed, so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, "I tremble with fear." ²² But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, ²³ and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, ²⁴ and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

Unlike the coming of the glory cloud of a blazing fire, and darkness and gloom, which fell upon Mt. Sinai, the Spirit of God falls upon Jesus "like a dove," the divine symbol of God's tender peace, which the angels proclaimed at His birth:

Luke 2:14 ¹⁴ "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!"

This is the character of Jesus' ministry in which He has come to bring peace between God and His elect. Jesus has not come to destroy us in our sins, but to take our sins upon Himself and be crucified for us. Paul testifies to this in Ephesians 2:

Ephesians 2:13-16 ¹³ But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. ¹⁴ For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility ¹⁵ by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in

himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, ¹⁶ and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross,

And this peace comes to you on account of the One who has been set aside and sent by God.

Note that along with the dove-like Spirit comes the voice of God Himself saying, "You are my beloved Son, with you I am well pleased." Here we see, in connection with **Psalm 2**, that Jesus is in a unique filial relationship with God unlike any other, in all creation. He alone is the beloved Son of God to whom God ultimately says, "You are my Son, today I have begotten you" (**Ps. 2:7**). While the Psalmist originally addressed God's anointing of David in **Psalm 2**, it was only because David was created and ordained as a partial fulfillment of God's son through the ages, which we saw in the genealogy. Jesus comes as the unique and complete fulfillment as God's truly beloved, unique Son from all eternity, with whom He is well pleased.

Jesus combines these two glorious passages of **Isa. 42:1** and **Ps. 2:7** as the One whom the LORD God has seen fit to place His Spirit to sit enthroned upon as His unique, beloved Son who is now commissioned to go forward and stands on the threshold to carry out the divine plan of your redemption. For:

Hebrews 1:1-2 Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, ² but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son,

Amen!

-SDG-