

"THE LAST ADAM"

I. Introduction

A. In spite of the autonomous individualism that is so dominant in our culture, the fact of the matter is that no one can escape reality, and reality makes it clear that our lives are intertwined with the lives of others in all sorts of ways.

1. Our race and our genetic make-up are passed on to us by our parents.
2. Our upbringing plays a key role in shaping who we are.
3. We depend on others for many of the opportunities that we are afforded in life.
4. The world in which we live has been shaped by the actions of previous generations.
5. In these and many other respects, it is simply not true to say,

*I am the master of my fate,
I am the captain of my soul.*

B. Luke's genealogy of Jesus calls our attention to the solidarity of the human race because it goes all the way back to Adam, the father of us all.

1. There are a couple of differences between this genealogy and the one that is found at the beginning of the Gospel of Matthew.
2. For one thing, there are some differences in the names, especially in the section that runs from David to Joseph.
3. Probably the best explanation for this is to say that Matthew traced David's line of descent through those who were in line for the

throne while Luke traced Joseph's physical line back to David.

4. The main difference between these two genealogies is that while Matthew begins with Abraham and goes forward to Jesus, Luke begins with Jesus and goes all the way back to Adam.
5. Matthew focused on Abraham because his initial readers were primarily from a Jewish background and he wanted to demonstrate that Jesus was the fulfillment of what had been promised to Israel.
6. Luke went back to Adam because his initial audience was primarily Gentile and he wanted to show that Jesus is the Savior for all the peoples of the earth.

II. Empowered by the Spirit

- A. The genealogy in our text is prefaced by the account of Jesus' baptism by John.
 1. You will recall from the previous section that John's baptism was a baptism of repentance.
 2. Of course, Jesus did not have any sin of which he had to repent.
 3. He did not need to undergo this baptism for his own sake.
 4. But he submitted to it in order to identify with us and with our sinful condition.
 5. This is part of what Isaiah foretold when he said that the Messiah would be numbered with the transgressors. (Isa. 53:12)
 6. Jesus underwent baptism because of the plan that was determined by the Triune God before the world began.
 7. In submitting to John's baptism of repentance, Jesus was publicly accepting his office as our mediator.

- B. Luke tells us that when Jesus was baptized, the heavens were opened and the Holy Spirit descended on him like a dove.
1. This does not mean that the Spirit was not with Jesus prior to his baptism.
 2. Instead, this was the point when Jesus was officially equipped with the Holy Spirit as he prepared to appear openly as the Messiah.
 3. This was the beginning of the Messianic age that had been foretold by the prophet Isaiah when he said, "There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit. And the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD." (Isa 11:1–2 ESV)
 4. This outpouring of the Spirit testified to Jesus' messianic identity.
- C. Why did the Holy Spirit appear in the form of a dove?
1. Various theories have been suggested, and there may be some truth in several of them.
 2. In my opinion, the main point was to allude to how the Spirit of God hovered in a bird-like manner over the face of the waters at the beginning of the creation account in Genesis 1.
 3. This is significant because the Spirit is the agent through whom the Triune God brings his works to their intended end.
 4. In the words of Louis Berkhof, "All things are at once *out of* the Father, *through* the Son, and *in* the Holy Spirit." [*Systematic Theology*, 129]
 5. Here at Jesus' baptism, the Spirit appears at the beginning of God's work of new creation, which will be brought about through the last Adam, the beloved Son with whom God the Father is well-pleased.

III. The True Israel

- A. Luke tells us that Jesus was thirty years old when he began his ministry.
1. The significance of this detail becomes clear when we consider it in light of the Old Testament background.
 2. The book of Numbers tells us that priests began their service in the sanctuary at the age of thirty. (Num. 4:3)
 3. Second Samuel 5:4 says that David was thirty years old when he began to reign.
 4. And Ezekiel seems to have received his call as a prophet at the age of thirty. (Ezek. 1:1)
 5. The fact that Jesus began his ministry when he was thirty points to his identity as the supreme prophet, priest, and king.
 6. He perfectly executes these three offices as the Redeemer of God's elect.
- B. This brings us to the genealogical table that takes up the bulk of our passage.
1. While we tend to have a hard time seeing the value of passages like this, the Jews carefully preserved their genealogical tables.
 2. Their connection with their past was extremely important to them, and to most other people in the ancient world.
 3. Consider these thoughts from *The IVP Bible Background Commentary*: "Often in the ancient world genealogies served sociological rather than historical functions. Instead of offering a strictly sequential report of the order of generations, they were designed to use continuity with the past as an explanation of the current structure and condition of society. Israel carried along with this an additional theological emphasis and significance that was inherent in their genealogical reports. Continuity with the past would give

meaning to their current theological situation.

“Individuals in the ancient world found their identity not in their individualism, but in their solidarity with the group. This included not only those that made up their contemporary kinship group but extended throughout the generations. The genealogies were their way of fitting themselves into this pangenerational solidarity.” [*The IVP Bible Background Commentary: The Old Testament*, 413.]

4. In summary, the reason why genealogies were important to people in the ancient world was because these people found their identity by looking to the past.
- C. Luke begins Jesus’ genealogical table by saying that Jesus was “the son (as was supposed) of Joseph.”
1. By putting it this way, Luke once again calls our attention to the fact of the virgin birth.
 2. Joseph was Jesus’ father in the legal sense because he took Mary to be his wife.
 3. This is why Jesus’ lineage is traced through Joseph.
 4. Nevertheless, Jesus was not conceived by Joseph but by the Holy Spirit.
 5. As Gabriel told Mary, and as God declared at Jesus’ baptism, Jesus is the Son of God.
- D. Many of the men named in this genealogical table are completely unknown to us.
1. They are simply links in the chain that connects Jesus back to Adam.
 2. However, there are a few names that stand out.

3. We recognize them from the roles they played in Old Testament history.
4. There is Zerubbabel, the head of the tribe of Judah at time of the return from the Babylonian exile.
5. There is David, Israel's greatest king, to whom God promised that one of his offspring would reign over an eternal kingdom.
6. There is David's great-grandfather Boaz, the kinsman-redeemer who married a Moabite widow named Ruth.
7. There is Judah, the tribe upon which Jacob pronounced these words of prophetic blessing: "The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until tribute comes to him; and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples." (Gen. 49:10)
8. There is Abraham, the father of Israel, the one in whom all the families of the earth would be blessed.
9. These names tell us who Jesus is.
10. He is the true Israel, the One in whom all of the promises that God gave to his covenant people of old reach their fulfillment.

IV. The Son of God

- A. As we have noted, Luke does not merely trace Jesus' ancestry back to Abraham but all the way back to Adam.
 1. One thing that we should not miss about this is how it takes Adam's historical existence as an unquestioned fact.
 2. We see the same thing in the other Bible passages where Adam is mentioned.
 3. This is one reason why we cannot agree with those who contend that Adam was not a historical person but only a mythological

figure.

4. The Scriptures consistently present Adam as a real person.
 5. His name is set alongside other names in genealogical tables.
 6. To deny that he really existed is to undermine the authority of Scripture.
- B. This genealogy reminds us that the whole Old Testament, not only the story of Israel but also the story of the entire human race, points forward to Jesus Christ.
1. All of the men listed in these verses were sinners, just like you and me.
 2. This underscores our need for one who could rescue Adam's lost race, one who would finally break the cycle of sin and death.
 3. God made a promise about such a figure to our first parents immediately after they sinned against him.
 4. He told them that he would send a rescuer.
 5. A son of Adam would one day appear and crush the serpent's head.
 6. This genealogy testifies to God's faithfulness to that promise.
 7. Down through the years, as sin continued to produce its bitter fruits in so many ways, God was superintending over it all.
 8. And in the fullness of time, he brought the Messiah into the world.
- C. The genealogy concludes with the words "the son of Adam, the son of God."
1. These words also tell us who Jesus is.

2. He is the last Adam.
 3. He is the true Son of God.
 4. Jesus fulfills the destiny of the first Adam.
 5. Adam was in the Garden as a covenant head for the whole race.
 6. He represented us in the probationary test that God set up in Eden.
 7. When Adam sinned, we sinned in him and fell with him.
 8. And while Adam's creation as God's image-bearer meant that he was God's son, he forfeited that sonship when he sinned against God.
 9. He forfeited it not only for himself but also for the whole human race.
 10. The only way we can be God's sons now is by being restored through the grace of adoption in Jesus Christ, the One who is the perfect image of God and the eternal Son of God.
- D. Luke's genealogy of Jesus tells us that Jesus came into the world as a second Adam and a new covenant head.
1. This sets the stage for what takes place in the first part of chapter 4, where Luke gives the account of Jesus' temptation in the wilderness.
 2. That temptation was a recapitulation of what happened with the first Adam in Eden.
 3. The key difference, of course, is that Jesus did not yield to Satan's temptations but remained faithful to God's commands.
- E. This brings us back to the words that God spoke over Jesus at his baptism: "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased."

1. God delights in Christ.
2. Jesus is the only man who is in himself pleasing to God, because he is the only man who has ever kept God's law.
3. This is why it is only in him that can we be acceptable and pleasing in God's sight.

V. Conclusion

- A. It has become common for Christianity to be defined as a way to have a personal relationship with God.
 1. The problem with that definition is that it overlooks the fact that everyone has a personal relationship with the one true God, regardless of their religious beliefs.
 2. There is no getting away from God or domesticating God.
 3. He made you.
 4. He lays claim to you.
 5. He rules over your life.
 6. He will judge you at the end of the age.
- B. The nature of your relationship with God is determined by which Adam you are in.
 1. Each and every one of us is born into the first Adam.
 2. We all belong to his lost race.
 3. In him, we all stand defiled and condemned.
 4. But those who trust in Jesus Christ are no longer in the first Adam.

5. By God's grace, the Spirit engrafts us into the last Adam, into the Lord Jesus Christ.
6. Adam's fall plunged mankind into a pit of despair, but Christ came into the world as a descendant of the first Adam in order to rescue some of the sons of Adam from that pit.
7. This is what this passage is about.
8. Here is how one commentator sums up the message of this text:
"Jesus is *like* us, in that he has come down into the same pit with us. That is the message of both the baptism story and of the family tree... But he is also *unlike* us, in that while we are here because of a fall in disobedience, he is here because of a descent in obedience, and he has never let go of the rope which joins him to the world above. He is firmly anchored up there, in the unbroken relation of sonship with his Father. That is why his humanity is distinctive. That is why it is only by clinging to him that we can ever be lifted out of the pit." [Wilcock, 58]