

JESUS, GOD'S BELOVED SON

Luke 3:15-38

Key Verse: 22, "...and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: 'You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.'"

John the Baptist preached a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. Humble people asked him what they must do. John gave them practical advice how to show their repentance: don't be greedy; work with honesty and integrity; do what is right. In today's passage we hear what John says about the one coming after him, that is, Jesus the Messiah. John pointed people to Jesus. Actually, the whole Bible points to Jesus. Let's see why the world needs to go to Jesus, look at him, and listen to him. This passage in particular tells us four things about Jesus: he baptizes with the Holy Spirit, he is the Judge, he is the Son of God, and he was fully human. These truths of Jesus' identity compel us to trust in Jesus. May God help us to do so.

First, Jesus baptizes with the Holy Spirit. The ministry of John the Baptist was so powerful that many people wondered if John might possibly be the Messiah. The Messiah was a long-awaited leader who was foretold in the Hebrew Scriptures (what Christians call "the Old Testament"). This Messiah would be an offspring of woman who would crush the head of the serpent (Gen 3:15). This Messiah would be descended from Abraham to bless all nations (Gen 12:3; Gal 3:8). This Messiah, Moses foretold, would be a great prophet whom God's people must listen to (Dt 18:15). This Messiah would be a great king in the line of King David (Isa 9:6-7).

So was John this promised Messiah? No. Rather, John's ministry was to introduce him to the world. John said, "I baptize you with water. But one who is more powerful than I will come, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie." John was saying, "You think I'm somebody great? Ha! I'm nobody. I'm not even worthy to be a servant to the coming Great One." John was a great man of God. But he didn't think so. He didn't boast about his ministry, though he could have. He didn't draw attention to his rugged lifestyle or the fact that even tax collectors and soldiers were repenting at his powerful message. From John, we learn that true servants of God don't try to bring attention to themselves, but rather point people to Jesus.

John had much more to say about Jesus. He said, "He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire." John baptized people with water as a symbol of cleansing. Jesus' baptism is greater. He baptizes and fills people with the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of God. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Jesus. Many people know they need to stop certain sins in their life. They really want to be cleansed of their sins, which make them feel dirty. It could be lying, or cheating, or stealing, or sexual immorality. People have many regrets of things they've said or done, which they wish they could take back or do over. One counselor said, "Half of my clients would not come for counseling if they could have confidence that their sins are forgiven." People need the forgiveness of sins. People need to know that their guilt and shame is washed away, blotted out, gone forever.

However, forgiveness of sin is not enough. All people need a new life, a new spirit, a new power, a new reason for living. Without it, we will just revert back to sin over and over. Jesus teaches later that even when a demon comes out a person, if that vacancy is not filled, more demons will come in. In other words, we need the filling of the Holy Spirit to replace demons and sins. Jesus is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit, when we repent of our sins and trust in him. To trust Jesus means to love him, follow him, serve him, and obey him. It does not mean simply wearing a cross necklace, or having a Christian bumper sticker on our car, or even listening 24/7 to KLove Christian music, although those can all be good things. It doesn't mean quoting a Bible verse or saying a prayer, and then going on our way. It means surrendering our hearts to Jesus to trust him fully with our lives and our futures. It means to pray earnestly: Lord Jesus, forgive my sins of trying to be lord of my own life. Fill me with your Spirit, your Holy Spirit, to love and serve you for the glory of God. God help us to pray sincerely with that spirit.

What does it mean that Jesus baptizes with the Holy Spirit "and fire." Scholars debate whether "fire" here is a positive or negative thing. Taken in the positive sense, it could be the holy fire of zeal for God, or a purifying fire to sanctify those who trust in Jesus. Taken in the negative sense, it could refer to a fire of judgment, for those who reject Jesus and the gospel. This leads us to a second truth of who Jesus is.

Second, Jesus is the Judge. In verse 17 John continued to talk about Jesus: "His winnowing fork is in his hand to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire." Here, John uses farming imagery. A farmer uses a winnowing fork to toss some grain in the air. The light useless chaff blows away. The wheat falls to the ground and is stored away for food. The wheat is saved. The chaff is thrown away or burned. Here, John is saying that Jesus separates the good from the bad, the saved from the condemned, the sheep from the goats, the good fish from the bad fish. Jesus is the Judge. Jesus will separate the righteous from the wicked on the day of judgment. Those who reject Jesus, refusing to accept his salvation and lordship must face him as the Judge on the day of judgment.

With many other words John exhorted the people and proclaimed the good news to them. It was good news to those who responded favorably, accepting John as God's messenger. It was bad news for those who rejected him. One such person was Herod the tetrarch. He didn't like John the Baptist, since John rebuked him for unlawfully marrying his brother Philip's wife. Herod didn't like to be called a sinner or to be rebuked for evil things he had done. So he added one more evil deed to them all: he locked John the Baptist up in prison. Eventually, he had John executed, which both Matthew and Mark tell us about. He judged John, but he, like everyone, had to face the judgment of God.

Third, Jesus is the Son of God. When all the people were being baptized by John, Jesus was baptized too. However, Jesus had no sins to confess, since he was sinless. Then why was Jesus baptized? The NIV Study Bible gives four good reasons: (1) To fulfill all righteousness, that is, to fulfill all of God's righteous requirements for the Messiah, (2) For public identification

of Jesus as the Messiah by John, (3) To identify with human sin and failure as our substitute, and (4) As an example to his followers.

Jesus being baptized by John gave validity and authenticity to John's ministry and message. John was indeed a prophet of the Lord, preparing the way for the Messiah's ministry. Jesus' baptism by John was the inaugural ceremony at which Jesus launched his public ministry. Like a relay race, John handed the baton over to Jesus, and Jesus was going to finish the race for our salvation.

As Jesus was praying, two heavenly signs identified Jesus as heaven-sent, one visible and the other audible. The visible sign was that heaven opened and the Holy Spirit descended upon Jesus in bodily form like a dove. The Holy Spirit, in a visible form of light swooped down from heaven like a bird and rested upon Jesus. It's important that we realize Jesus did not become the Son of God at his baptism. That is a false reaching called "Adoptionism." Jesus did not become something he was not at his baptism. Jesus has always been the Son of God. He was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. The Holy Spirit's descent upon Jesus was first of all an identification of Jesus as the Chosen One of God, who would proclaim and usher in the kingdom of God, through his life, death and resurrection. The descent of the Holy Spirit upon Jesus also indicates the origin and power of Jesus' ministry, namely from God the Holy Spirit. Jesus came from God and he ministered in the power and authority of God. We too need the Holy Spirit to love and serve God and to grow as children of God.

The other heavenly sign was the audible voice of God the Father. A voice came from heaven: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased." Luke's gospel has this voice speaking directly to Jesus. The voice of God his Father encouraged and strengthened Jesus to do God's will. Matthew's gospel has the voice speaking to others to hear: "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased" (Mt 3:17). Both accounts have the same conclusion: Jesus Christ is the Son of God, whom God loves. God was well pleased with him. The gospel writers all testify that this is what God wants us to know and believe. Jesus is the Son of God, dearly loved by God, and most pleasing to God the Father.

This is a rare occasion, even in the Bible, of God speaking audibly from heaven, so that people actually heard something. In another account of God speaking from heaven, John's gospel describes it as thunder or like an angel speaking (Jn 12:28-29). The other event when God spoke from heaven was when Jesus was transfigured in glory on a mountain, with three disciples present. To God, Jesus' baptism was such an important event that he spoke from heaven. It was similar to Jesus' birth, when angels announced his birth as good news of great joy. God wanted the world to know that Jesus came as the Son of God and ministered in the fullness of the Holy Spirit of God. All who consider themselves as God's people must listen to Jesus and follow him.

Do you have a favorite celebrity, athlete, actor or talk show host? Do you hang on their every word? I hope not. No human being has the status of Jesus Christ. It cannot be said of any human being: "This is my child, whom I love; with them I am well pleased." No person is worthy

of our imitation or obedience like Jesus is. Of course, we can learn from others and imitate something virtuous or godly in them. But not to the degree that we learn from and listen to Jesus.

At the same time, there is an incredible biblical truth here. There is a way that God can also say of us, "You are my child, whom I love; with you I am well pleased." It is through faith in Jesus Christ. When we repent of putting ourselves first and worshiping other people or things, and give our first love and obedience to Jesus, we are adopted into God's family. To all who receive Jesus and believe in his name, God gives the right to become a child of God (Jn 1:12). God adopts believers into his family by his grace. We become new creations. Our old identity is gone, and a new identity has come (2Co 5:17). The Bible calls this being "born again" (Jn 3:7; 1Pe 1:23).

Today, so many people are having identity crises. They don't know who they are or why they were born. But when we repent of pursuing money and pleasure and recognition, and put our trust in Jesus and follow him, he calls us his own child, his beloved. We are loved by the Creator of the Universe. God proved his love for us in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ of Nazareth. One who accepts God's love for them finds themselves with a new identity as a child of God. They no longer live to please people. They live with an identity and purpose in Jesus Christ as a child of God.

Fourth, Jesus was fully human. We are children of God by adoption, by the grace of God. Jesus, however, is by nature the unique Son of God. Luke points this out again when he mentions the genealogy of Jesus. On the one hand, Jesus was only thought to be the son of Joseph. We know from chapter 1 that Jesus was born of the virgin Mary. So Jesus did not have a human father. Joseph, the husband of Mary, was only thought to be his father. In actuality, God the Holy Spirit was his Father. This highlights the divinity or deity of Jesus. Jesus was God in the flesh.

But his divinity did not negate or minimize his humanity. Jesus was still fully human, born of Mary. Luke mentions that Jesus was about thirty years old when he began his public ministry of preaching and healing. This is the only reference in the Bible to Jesus' age, besides the other event that happened when he was lost at age 12. Thanks to Luke we know that Jesus was about thirty years old when he ministered. For those of us older than 30, we might be embarrassed that we are not as mature as Jesus. For me, I just realized again this week that I'm 57 years old. I wondered how did that happen? I'm I really 57. I only feel like I'm 35 or 40. What happened in the last 20 years? I'm a bit ashamed of my immaturity.

Luke gives us the human lineage of Jesus, from his apparent father Joseph, all the way back to Adam. Matthew's genealogy is slightly different in a few ways. Matthew begins with Abraham and moves forward in time to Jesus. This is to emphasize Jesus' Jewishness and all the promises made to the Jews which were fulfilled in Jesus. Luke begins with Joseph and goes back in time all the way to Adam. In fact, he ends by saying, "Adam, the son of God." Adam had no human father. Adam was made directly by God out of the dust. Jesus also had no human

father; rather, the Holy Spirit conceived Jesus in the womb of Mary. Of course Adam was created. Jesus was not created, for he was and is the eternal Son of God, who took on humanity without giving up his deity. Jesus had two natures: one human, one divine.

Connecting Jesus to Adam, Luke is declaring Jesus' humanity. Jesus descended from Adam, the first man, who came from the dust. Jesus was fully human. Jesus was not a spirit or an angel. Jesus Christ was a human being like you and like me. He thirsted. He got tired. He had to eat and sleep. He bled when his skin was cut. Jesus was the perfect man, who lived the perfect life, which we were all intended to live. Jesus was our perfect representative. Apostle Paul called Jesus the last Adam or the second Adam, as the second and last representative of the human race. Where Adam failed, Jesus perfectly succeeded.

There are two more slight difference in the genealogies of Luke and Matthew. There is a different list of men named from David to Abraham. Matthew traces the lineage through Solomon, son of David. Luke traces through Nathan, son of David. Scholars suggest that Matthew traces the legal line of descent through the kings, while Luke traces the actual physical descent. The two gospels also have different names for Joseph's father. Some suggest it could be Mary's genealogy. Others suggest Joseph could've had a step-father, and therefore two different names are given. In both genealogies, nonetheless, Jesus' descent through Abraham and David are clear, in fulfillment of God's promises to send the Messiah through their line.

Today we learned more about Jesus. Jesus is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit. Jesus is the Judge. Jesus is God's beloved Son. Jesus was fully human. We need the baptism and fullness of the Holy Spirit. We need the assurance that we are God's children, dearly loved by God. Since Jesus is the Son of God, the Judge and the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit, we must repent of our pride and self-reliance and give our best love, trust and obedience to Jesus our Savior and Lord. May God help us to do so by his grace and mercy. Amen.