

You are My Beloved Son
Luke 3:15-18, 21-38
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Read Luke 3:15-18, 21-38

"(Jesus) said, 'Blessed (rather) are those who hear the word of God and keep it!" (Luke 11:28)

Introduction: Finding Your Roots

Has anyone watched the PBS show "Finding Your Roots"? I've only seen a few of the shows, but it's a really fascinating look at people, usually celebrities, finding out about their family trees. The host, Henry Louis Gates Jr, always has some questions about how much a person's ancestry and roots influence them. One episode I saw featured the actress, Maggie Gyllenhaal, who is descended from Latvian Jewish peasants on her mom's side and they could only trace back to her great-grandmother. But on her dad's side they could trace all the way back to King Henry I, born in 1068, the time of the Crusades. She found out that her name came because one of her Swedish ancestors was recognized by the Queen of Sweden for his valiant fighting in the 30 Years War, so in 1652 his name was changed from "Gunnarsson Haal" to "Gyllenhaal, meaning "Golden Hall." Her 10th great-grandfather was a pastor in an underground church in England who was imprisoned and then sent to Massachusetts in the early 17th century. She found out that her cousins through that preacher are both President Bushs and Shirley Temple. She talked about how this picture of who she is because of who her ancestors were is so different from how she always thought of herself.

I don't know if you're curious to know about your family tree and feel that it would shed some light on who you are. Our DNA, the things that we've inherited from our ancestors, partly shapes who we are, though, of course, we make the decisions that define our lives. I know that Pop has done a ton of research into the Pennington family tree, fascinating stuff. My Aunt Margie has done some research into the Dorst family tree. I found out that the first member of the Dorst family to arrive in America was 8 generations ago, Peter Dorst, who was born in Bavaria Germany in 1774 and came to Pomeroy, Ohio in 1838 with his extended family. His great-grandson, Arthur, was the first Dorst born in the USA, in 1868 in Meigs County, Ohio. Arthur & his wife had two sons, Jacob and Dwight, and they moved to Pittsburgh in 1904. Dwight was convicted of murder for killing a butcher in the robbery of a butcher shop and was executed in 1931, during the Depression. Jacob begat Ralph. Ralph begat David Alan. David Alan begat David Robert. And David Robert begat Miles and Wesley.

Our passage today contains Jesus' genealogy, tracing it all the way back to the beginning of human history. Luke had access, perhaps, to the temple records or to Mary, Jesus' mother's records. He was able to establish a lot about Jesus. Family roots and ancestry were very important to the Jews for many reasons. Today's passage is going to be about identity, and three different ways that Jesus' identity was established as He was coming into adulthood and preparing for His three years of public ministry. In the first four verses, Luke wraps up his picture of John the Baptist, who explains **I. Jesus' Identity According to John (vv. 15-18)**

¹⁵ As the people were in expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Christ, ¹⁶ John answered them all, saying, "I baptize you with water, but he who is mightier than I is coming, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. ¹⁷ His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire." ¹⁸ So with many other exhortations he preached good news to the people.

We talked about John's main message and preaching ministry last week. As John attracted more and more people and his ministry made an impact, people tried to figure out who he was. Was this Elijah or some other prophet? Was this the Christ, the Messiah promised through the ages, who would come and save His people? John clarified that, while the Messiah is coming, I am not Him. John's humility was amazing and beautiful. The Gospel of John quotes him as saying, "*He must increase, but I must decrease*" (3:30). Here Luke has him saying that he is not worthy to untie the Messiah's sandals. In that day, untying someone's sandals was such a low task, that not even the servants were expected to do that. So, John was saying that he's even lower than that: "I'm a nobody, save your praise for the One who is coming; He is worthy of it."

This is a great reminder not to confuse anybody with Jesus. Please don't elevate the person who brought you to faith in Christ, or disciplined you, or any pastors or ministry people above Jesus. Praise God for them, but don't take their words as gospel without comparing them with Scripture and God's eternal, timeless truth. That's easy with me, I'm just a goofball, nobody's tempted to put me up there with Jesus, praise God. But we all are inclined to grab onto a celebrity pastor or a historical figure – whether it's John Calvin, R.C. Sproul, Tim Keller, or John Piper; for some people it's Joel Osteen or Matt Chandler – and subtly elevate them to being the true mouthpiece of spiritual truth. Every pastor, really every Christian, should be constantly reminding others: "I'm nothing, I'm just a mouthpiece. Really, I'm a mockingbird, just repeating what I've heard. I'm not making up new things, I'm just passing on the timeless truths and helping you embrace and apply them in today's world. It's way more important that you meet and get to know Jesus. I am not worthy to untie his sandals!"

When John said at the end of v. 16 that Jesus would "*baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire,*" was he referring to Pentecost in Acts chapter 2, when the disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit and had tongues of fire appear over their heads? I don't think that's what John is referring to, since it doesn't appear that Jesus' disciples have appeared yet, and since we don't expect Pentecost to happen again. How does Jesus baptize the rest of us with Holy Spirit and fire?

Putting that together with verse 17 about separating the wheat and chaff, I believe that John is saying that Jesus is bringing either blessing or judgment, depending on your response to Him. Anyone can baptize with water on the outside, but Jesus' baptism works on our hearts, on the inside. When we come to faith in Christ, it's the Holy Spirit's internal work in our lives that brings us to faith and changes our hearts from hearts of stone to hearts of flesh that respond to the work of God. Fire, on the other hand, represents the judgment of God; remember the snakes fleeing from the fire in last week's passage. That's why the wheat and chaff will be separated – people will be saved or condemned. John was saying that Jesus would be doing the work of the kingdom, bringing the dual message of salvation and judgment. Notice what Luke calls that in v. 18 – not hard news, not challenging news, but good news, Gospel.

Let's jump to verse 21, since we dealt with vv. 19-20 last week, to see

II. Jesus' Identity According to God the Father (vv. 21-22)

²¹ Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heavens were opened, ²² and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form, like a dove; and a voice came from heaven, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased."

Verse 3 said that John was performing "*a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.*" And into the midst of the crowd who were lined up to be baptized walked the one Man who had no sin and

nothing to repent of or be forgiven for. Did John refuse to baptize Him? No, according to Luke, Jesus got baptized just like everybody else, but doesn't comment on why. Matthew's gospel sheds some light on this (Matthew 3:13-15): "*Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, to be baptized by him. John would have prevented him, saying, 'I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?' But Jesus answered him, 'Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness.' Then he consented.*" So John was hesitant, thinking, "I'm the sinful one, you should be baptizing me." But Jesus needed to undergo baptism on our behalf. Because He would be representing us in all ways as a human being, He needed to be baptized just as His people were undergoing this symbolic act of cleansing. He told John that it was to "*fulfill all righteousness,*" which means that He was taking the place of sinners even then. Just as Jesus identified with us in His baptism, symbolically washing clean our sins, so His death on the cross would actually be the instrument that took our sins away. He would die in our place, He became sin on our account and paid the awful penalty that our sins deserve.

This is also one of the great passages that we refer to when we talk about the Trinity. Since the word "Trinity" is not used in the Bible, it is sometimes dismissed as a theological invention, but not truly Biblical. But here, very clearly, we have the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit all appearing at the same time. The Trinity is One God in three persons, all equal in substance, power, and glory. I was having a new member meeting where I was asking the new member about their understanding of the Trinity, and I purposely misled them: "So, the Father is the top guy, then Jesus is below Him, then the Holy Spirit is down here; it's a real hierarchy, right?" And they kind of looked at me, like, "This is a trick question, right?" And then John and I started laughing, because yes, that is a misunderstanding of the Trinity. They are equal in every way, even though Jesus submitted to the Father's will and plan while here on earth. Here we see each member acting separately – Jesus going about His earthly ministry fulfilling what He needed to fulfill, the Father giving His divine approval and direction, and the Spirit empowering and helping.

The Father and the Spirit don't show up here to declare something new, that they had just decided. Jesus had always had the power of the Spirit and the love and approval of God the Father. This was a declaration to the watching public that Jesus was the true Son of God, empowered by the Holy Spirit as He began His public ministry. John has handed off the ministry to the One who was to come, the great Messiah for which the world had been waiting in hope.

Before Luke talks about Jesus' acts of ministry, though, first he establishes Jesus' identity in one more way. I won't read it again, but the last part of the chapter is the list of Jesus' ancestors.

III. Jesus' Identity According to His Family Tree (vv. 23-38)

This is Jesus' family tree that goes all the way back to Adam. Actually, it goes back one more step – Adam was the son of God. So it's actually a circle, because Jesus is both Adam's creator and his great-great-great-grandson. Only one other Gospel records Jesus' genealogy, Matthew, but his only goes back to Abraham. This is most likely because he was primarily writing to a Jewish audience, and Abraham was the father of the Jews. Luke is the Gentile writer who traces things back to everyone's father, Adam, reminding us that the Savior of the Jews is also the Savior of all humanity. The two family tree lists are notoriously hard to harmonize or untangle their differences; I think the best way to explain them is that Matthew's family tree list is from Joseph's side, while Luke's list is Mary's side. But they list different fathers for Joseph, so Heli must have been Mary's father, so Joseph's father-in-law.

What's interesting is that after the Romans destroyed Jerusalem and the temple in AD 70, the genealogical records that were kept in the temple were destroyed as well. So Jewish people could

not trace their lineage back through the ages unless they had those records in their homes. Thank God that Luke was able to research and record Jesus' genealogy before that happened. We see names in this list that we can read about in the OT: Boaz, Judah, Jacob, Isaac, Abraham, Noah, Methuselah, Seth, and Adam. The most important thing that this family tree shows, though, is that Jesus was a descendant of David. Since 2 Samuel 7 prophesied that a descendant of David would sit on his throne forever, this was key to establishing Jesus' fulfillment of the Messianic prophecies. He was from the tribe of Judah, also key to the prophecies, as the Lion of the Tribe of Judah.

One more thought I had about this genealogy: have you ever had the thought that if one of your ancestors hadn't had children when they did or died at a young age or made some different life decision, that you wouldn't exist? Do you remember in "Back to the Future" when Marty McFly has a picture of himself and his siblings that starts to fade out when it looks like his parents aren't going to get together? I think about how the Lord orchestrated all those things throughout history that eventually resulted in you and me being here. Look back over Jesus' line - there's Abraham, who was way too old to have a child, but God blessed with Isaac at age 100; there's Boaz who was a bachelor until Ruth moved to town and started gleaming in his fields and he noticed her and redeemed her by marrying her; there's Noah, who saw the entire population of the world wiped out, but his three sons and their wives. God kept the line of the Messiah alive through the centuries that eventually brought the Savior into the world at the "fullness of time."

Conclusion: "You are my Beloved Son"

I want to go back to the scene at the baptism. My dad grew up with a very loving mother, but he says that he never heard encouraging words from his father growing up. He longed to hear, "well done" from his dad. He tells the story of playing a baseball game where he not only threw 15 strikeouts as the pitcher but also hit 3 home runs in 4 at-bats as a batter. His dad was the coach, and when they got in the car, he felt that his dad would have to say something positive to him. His dad said, "You swung at a bad pitch in your last at-bat." He says that he knew then that he could never earn his father's approval. Subsequently, he vowed that he would affirm his children, and he has taken every opportunity, every birthday and Christmas card as well as taking every chance in person to tell me and my brothers, and our wives, and his grandchildren how proud he is of us. It means so much to me, and I'm pretty sure to all of us, to hear "I love you, I'm proud of you" from dad or grandpa. If you are a father who never affirms your child (moms too), never tells them how great they are, how pleased you are in who they are, I would challenge you to find a time to say out loud or write out how proud you are of your child. Don't make them earn it with grades or athletics or some other achievement, praise them for being them. Give them unconditional love. A child who never hears praise, or worse, only hears criticism, has a profound father wound that will color their life in negative ways. They will often search for approval subconsciously, but nobody else can give what a father needs to give, except perhaps a heavenly Father.

Jesus heard His heavenly Father say, "*You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.*" I don't know how much His earthly mind and emotions needed to hear that. I said before that this statement was certainly given to let the crowd know who Jesus was, but this also had to be meaningful to Jesus. He certainly knew intellectually that God was pleased with Him, but perhaps His human will needed that encouragement to keep Him going through the trials and immense conflict that He encountered.

And we need to hear it as well. Every one of us who believes in Jesus and is joined by faith to Him should hear God say of us: "This is my beloved son, or this is my beloved daughter; with you I am well pleased." Jesus came to make peace between sinners and a holy God, and the beauty of His

sacrificial death on the cross is that He clothes us in His righteousness. When God the Father looks at us, He no longer sees our sin, He sees the faith and obedience of His Son. We could not stand before Him on our own merit, but on the merits of Jesus we are accepted and loved. John 14:21, Jesus told His disciples that, *“he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him.”* In John 17:26, Jesus prayed to the Father, *“I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them.”* “God the Father looks at us with the same affection and approval that He has for Jesus Christ.”¹

If you are a follower of Jesus, if you have received the love and forgiveness of the Father through the sacrifice of His Son, then you are His beloved child. He is well-pleased with you. As you go through life and experience failures, as you experience people’s disappointments and anger, as you question your value and worth, return again and again to hear your heavenly Father say, “You are my beloved child, with you I am well pleased.” Do we take that love for granted and say, “Great, I’m forgiven and loved no matter what, let’s get wild and sin away”? Paul says in Romans 6:2, *“By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?”* and Peter says in 1 Peter 2:16 *“Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God.”* You are a beloved child of the King, live your life in gratitude for what the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit have accomplished on your behalf.

And all those who believe that God loves them and is well pleased with them, said, “Amen.”

Benediction

2 Corinthians 4:5-6 - *“For what we proclaim is not ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake. For God, who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”*

¹ Philip Graham Ryken, *Luke, Volume 1* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2009), p. 138.