

Truth for Today

The Bible Explained

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Luke's Gospel: Jesus' baptism, genealogy and temptations

Today we continue in our study of Luke's Gospel, the Gospel where the Lord Jesus Christ is set forth as 'the Son of Man'. We will have noted that Matthew in his Gospel writes particularly for the Jews and sets forth Jesus Christ as King. Mark writes particularly for the Romans and sets forth Jesus Christ as the Servant. John writes many years later and in a unique style from the other three Gospel writers. John writes for the whole world and sets forth Jesus Christ as the Son of God, in all the deity of His person. Luke is writing for the Greeks and his particular exercise is to record the humanity of the Lord Jesus Christ. Wonderful contemplation, that in the person of Jesus Christ we have One who is truly God and yet truly man (but we would be quick to point out that unlike all other men, He was sinless).

It's good to repeat these things as it gives us an understanding as to why the Gospels differ from each other, and why we need them all, each writer (under the control of the Holy Spirit) bringing before us a particular view of this blessed Man. Whilst Mark, we believe, follows a more correct chronological (or historical) order, and Matthew has more of a dispensational order in his Gospel, Luke has a particular moral order to his writings. We will see this today and as we move through in our further studies of this Gospel.

Our Scripture references for today's talk are from Luke 3:21-4:13 and the subject is Jesus' baptism, genealogy and temptations.

Luke 2 closes with the Lord Jesus going down to Nazareth aged twelve and being subject to His parents (Luke 2:51-52). But it is worth noting that while Luke speaks of "*his parents*" (Luke 2:27, 41), and Mary speaks of "*thy father*" (Luke 2:48), Jesus Himself speaks of "*my Father*" (Luke 2:49). Here we read the first recorded words of the Son of God in this world, "*Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?*" (Luke 2:49). It's as if the Lord Jesus is making the clear distinction that while Mary was indeed His mother, Joseph was not his father. As the husband of Mary, Joseph was the legal guardian of Jesus (as we shall see when we look at the Lord's genealogy as recorded by Luke).

Last week, we looked at Luke 3:1-20 and the ministry of John the Baptist. While Matthew says "*In those days ...*" (see Matthew 3:1ff), Luke gives us precise details of where and when John's ministry took place. John preached "*baptism of repentance for the remission of sins*" (Luke 3:3) and prophesied of One, mightier than him, who would come after him. John's faithful witness would result in his being shut up in prison and eventually losing his life. But as we have already said, Luke does not record events in a chronological order, Jesus' baptism obviously took place before John was imprisoned.

His baptism (Luke 3:21-22)

And so today we begin with Jesus' baptism by John in the river Jordan (Luke 3:21-22). So many years had passed since we read in the last chapter of Jesus at the age of twelve. Some eighteen years, silent years as far as the Holy record is concerned, covered by a single verse, "*And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man*" (see Luke 2:52). However, as we can see, God saw that perfect life, lived in this world where all other men had "*come short of the glory of God*", and the Father's voice was heard, "*Thou art my beloved Son; in thee I am well pleased*" (Luke 3:22). You'll notice that this pronouncement was made by the Father before the Lord's public ministry in the world began, just as the angel had announced to Mary before His birth that "*He shall be great...*" (see Luke 1:32). Some time ago I heard a brother say "that in the Lord's perfect life lived here on earth, we have but a few pages in the eternal diary". I believe that is absolutely so. The Father had found His delight in Him (His Son) from all eternity! (Luke 3:22) The heavens were opened at His baptism and again at His transfiguration and the voice of the Father was heard expressing His great delight in His Son. The perfect, sinless life of the Lord Jesus Christ, lived before men, glorified God and brought pleasure to the Father's heart. As the true meal offering, the life of Jesus ascended heavenward as "*an offering ..., of a sweet savour unto the LORD*" (see Leviticus 2).

Before we say something about the Lord's baptism itself and what it teaches us, just look at the declaration to the world of the Godhead: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Some point out that the word 'Trinity' is not found in the Bible (and that is correct) but here is a clear reference to the Holy Spirit who descended in the form of a dove, the voice of the Father from heaven and the incarnate Son in the waters of baptism. As a dove the Holy Spirit was visible, the Father

was audible, and the Son was visible, audible, and tangible, that is, He could be seen, heard and touched. It is interesting that here the Holy Spirit took the form of a dove. We first read of a dove in the story of Noah (Genesis 6:13-9:29) and, returning with the olive leaf (Genesis 8:11), it has become a symbol of peace. In contrast to the raven (Genesis 3:7, Leviticus 11:13-19), the dove was a clean bird and that I suggest is the emphasis in this symbol. The fact, too, that doves were allowed for sacrificial offerings would speak of their purity (Genesis 15:9, Leviticus 12:6, Luke 2:24). Another thought would be of love and of course we have the Lord's own words to His disciples about being "*as harmless as doves*" (Matthew 10:16). How fitting then that the Holy Spirit should come upon Him in this way, the One who is holy, harmless and undefiled. As the true meal offering, the Lord Jesus Christ was both 'mingled' and 'anointed' with oil (again see Leviticus 2).

Only here in Luke's account do we read that Jesus was praying! (see Luke 3:21) As the dependent Man in this world Jesus is spoken of as praying seven times in Luke's Gospel. Of course, Jesus would pray daily, several times, but Luke mentions seven specific occasions to show just how completely dependent Jesus was upon God. Remember, Luke is looking primarily at His humanity rather than at His deity. If the sinless Man expressed His dependence upon God by continual prayer, how much more should we be found on our knees as we endeavour to live godly lives in this world. Prayer is power! Jesus was marked by prayer, and what a valuable lesson for us to "follow His steps".

Israel as a nation were in state of unbelief and under the heel of the Roman authorities at this time. How terribly sad that God's chosen people had no appreciation that their Messiah had been born, a fact borne out by their refusal of Him in the months which would follow as Christ presented Himself to them as their King. But there were those godly ones, like Simeon and Anna who "*looked for redemption in Jerusalem*" (see Luke 2:25-38), who were baptised by John and who "confessed their sins" and the sins of their nation. Now we must be very clear, as the Holy Son of God, Jesus had no sins to confess or to repent from. John the Baptist understood this, and this would explain his reluctance to baptise Jesus (see Matthew 3:14-15). Baptism invariably has the thought of identification associated with it. Today, in Christian baptism, we take our place figuratively in death with our rejected Lord and, coming up out of the water, take our place in fellowship with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart. So in the same way, the godly Israelites who were baptised by John were separating themselves from an ungodly nation and identifying themselves with a godly remnant who would look for the Messiah and His kingdom. To "fulfil all righteousness", it was necessary that our Lord Jesus Christ identified with the godly ones who had been baptised by John.

His genealogy (Luke 3:23-38)

In Matthew's and in Mark's Gospels we move from the Lord's baptism immediately to His temptation by Satan in the wilderness, but Luke has something very important between these two events to bring before us. It's the Lord's genealogy (through Mary His mother) showing clearly the true and undeniable manhood of Jesus Christ. Although He was and is God, yet He would be tested as a man, in the wilderness, by the devil (Luke 4:1-13). That is the reason why Luke brings in the genealogy at this point in his Gospel. From Luke 3:23-37, we have a parenthesis and without doubt we pick up the story of the Lord's life again at the beginning of Luke 4. It's probably true to say that when we get to long lists of names, many which are difficult to pronounce, many of us would be inclined to skip over these verses. However, we would miss a great deal if we didn't take some time to look at this list of names and compare them with the list found in Matthew's Gospel. As we remarked earlier, Mark presents the perfect Servant and John presents the Son of God in their Gospels, so it is no surprise that no genealogy is offered. What interest is there in the family history of a slave and how could we have anyone before Him who was "*in the beginning!*" (see John 1:1)

Luke is bringing to our attention the Perfect Man, and amazingly is able to make a complete list of names right back to Adam. You'll notice, too, that Adam was the son of God! (see Luke 3:38) No room for the evolution theory here! Adam was created in the image of God. In Genesis 1:27 we read, "*So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.*" In our modern society which has largely moved away from God and His Word, it's always good to get back to Genesis, 'the book of beginnings'. Obviously Doctor Luke had no issue with believing the creation story.

Matthew's Gospel begins with the Lord's genealogy as the son of David, from Abraham to Joseph (See Matthew 1:1-17) but in Luke 3:23-338 we have His genealogy as the son of Man, from Mary's father, Heli, to Adam. The whole point of Mathew's list of names was to show that Jesus Christ descended from King David through Solomon, in the kingly line. His royal claim to the throne of Israel could be backed up by His genealogy to His legal father Joseph. We have noted previously that Joseph was not the biological father of Jesus and if you take a close look at the words Matthew uses, they bear this out. We read, "*Jacob begat Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ*" (Matthew 1:16). Notice that the Scriptures do not say that Joseph begat Jesus. It is a marvel of God's grace that within this list of names, set out to prove the legal position of Christ the Jewish Messiah, there is mention of four Gentile woman - Tamar, Rahab, Ruth and Bathsheba. We have no time to further develop this comment in our talk today, but if you made a study of these four women, I'm sure it would be a blessing to you.

Luke is not concerned with the legal claims of Christ but, true to his Gospel, he stresses the manhood of Jesus. I don't think that there is much doubt that the starting point of this genealogy is Heli, who was the father of Mary. Matthew clearly states that "*Jacob begat Joseph the husband of Mary*" (Matthew 1:16), so Heli would have been the father in law of Joseph who was the 'supposed' father of Jesus. The words in brackets in our Authorised Version are there to remind us as we have already noted that while Joseph was the legal father of Jesus he was not His biological father. So Luke is giving us Mary's genealogy. You can see that Mary was also a descendant of King David but through Nathan, not Solomon. David had many sons and although Nathan was older than Solomon, it was Solomon who inherited the throne. The Son of God, conceived of the Holy Spirit was "*born of a woman*" (see Galatians 4:4), and I wonder sometimes if some of us are guilty of underestimating this great woman, perhaps in response to the unscriptural glorification of her by some. Although Mary was an ordinary young woman naturally, she was highly favoured amongst women spiritually. It was the desire of every young Jewish girl to bear the Messiah and this honour was given to Mary. Both Mary and Joseph were especially chosen to bring up the Lord Jesus Christ in this dangerous and sinful world.

So in this interlude, Luke proves that Jesus was a man, just as Adam was a man, body, soul and spirit. We need to remember this as both the deity and manhood of Christ are under attack today. Many years later, John in his epistles writes to warn believers of deceivers "*who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh*" (see 2 John 7). But let us ever be careful to emphasise that Jesus Christ was a sinless man. Paul, the learned one said, "*He knew no sin*" (2 Corinthians 5:21); Peter the man of action said, "*He did no sin*" (1 Peter 2:22) and John the beloved said, "*In Him is no sin*" (1 John 3:5). So whilst this genealogy proves His manhood, it is vital to see that because Jesus was conceived of the Holy Spirit in the Virgin Mary's womb, He did not possess the sinful nature of Adam. Listen carefully to what I am about to say, because not all Christians grasp this truth - not only did Jesus not sin, but it was **impossible** for Him to sin! We don't become sinners when we sin, we were born sinful and that is why we sin. In contrast, He was born sinless, holy and pure and there was nothing in Him which would respond to sin as we shall see in Luke 4. He didn't sin because He couldn't sin!

His temptations (Luke 4:1-13)

In Luke 4, we begin by reading that "*Jesus being full of the Holy Spirit returned from Jordan, and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness*" (Luke 4:1). Mark tells us that it was "immediately" which again fits with the servant aspect of his Gospel. In the genealogy, Luke has brought before us the Son of Man and now we see the great contrast between Adam (the first man) and Christ (the second man). Paul tells us that, "*The first man is of the earth, earthy: the second man is the Lord from heaven*" (see 1 Corinthians 15:47). What a wonderful consideration it is, that all that was lost for God when Adam, the first man, fell in sin was restored through the obedience of Christ, the heavenly Man, the last Adam.

Adam was placed in the beautiful garden of Eden where everything was for his blessing and good. There was nothing to disturb or alarm him; the animal creation was in subjection to him. He had the perfect environment and there was an abundance of provision made for him. Here we find Jesus was in the wilderness without anything to eat. Mark tells us that "*[He] was with the wild beasts*" (Mark 1:13). Could the contrast be greater? All the more wonderful then to see that where Adam failed, plunging the world into sin, Christ overcame and in His triumph restored that which He took not away (see Psalm 69:4). The devil who, from Adam onwards, had been taking men captive at his will had never met a Man like Jesus!

The Apostle John warns us "*not to love the world neither the things that are in the world*" (1 John 2:15) and summarises the things of the world as: "*the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life*" (1 John 2:16). How many have been entrapped by the overwhelming desire to have what they should not have, to see what they should not see, and to be what they should not be. Let us be warned! Satan thought that by bringing the same kind of temptations before the Lord as he had done to every other man (and woman), he would gain the victory over the Son of Man, but these temptations would only prove His perfection and bring glory to God in the highest. Job tells us, "*There is a path which no fowl knoweth, and which the vulture's eye hath not seen: the lion's whelps have not trodden it, nor the fierce lion passed by it*" (see Job 28:7-8). In this world, the Lord Jesus Christ trod a pathway of sinless perfection which all others had failed to do and in doing so brought glory to God, the Father.

Whilst we read of three specific temptations, I have no doubt that Satan was tempting the Lord all through the forty days. You will notice that Luke 4:1-13 gives the three temptations in a different order from Matthew 4:1-11. As we have previously suggested, Luke is giving a moral order rather than a purely historical one. Both Gospel writers give the first temptation as turning the stones to bread, which was in direct response to the fact that Jesus was hungry. Of course Jesus could have done this miracle but the dependent Man recognised the temptation was to provide for His own needs and He would not act outside of the will of God. Luke changes the order and presents the second temptation as the worship of the devil in exchange for the power and glory of the kingdoms of the world. Satan is "*the father of lies*" (John 8:44) and what he offered Jesus, he was powerless to deliver. The Lord Jesus knew that in God's time He would be crowned King of kings and Lord of lords (Revelation 17:14, 19:16) and He would not act outside of

God's perfect time. The last temptation was to tempt God in relation to His providential care, but the Lord would not act outside of the word of God. You can see the moral order which Luke presents: temptation in relation to personal needs, the world and its kingdoms, and the tempting of God. The Lord triumphed over Satan, and *"he departed from him for a season"* (Luke 4:13). Throughout the Lord's public ministry, we find that Satan was never very far away and we should not be surprised to find him opposing us as we try to live for Christ.

Just a final comment, you will notice how the devil poses his questions: *"If thou be the Son of God..."* (Luke 4:3), *"If thou therefore wilt worship me..."* (Luke 4:7), and again *"If thou be the Son of God..."* (Luke 4:9). He tries to introduce uncertainty with the "If" of doubt, but each time the Lord Jesus answers from the certainty of the Scriptures with, *"It is written..."* (Luke 4:4, 8, 12). May we in our day learn to skilfully use *"the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God"* (see Ephesians 6:17).

May God bless you all.

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