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The Gospel of Luke
IX. Son of God, Son of Adam
Luke 3:21-38

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In chapter nine of Luke's Gospel, Jesus turns to His disciples and puts to them this question: "*Who do you say that I am?*"¹ Two thousand years later, Jesus still puts that question to those who would be His disciples. It is, in fact, one of the most important – perhaps even the most important – question we must answer in life. But when it comes to who Jesus is, there is actually an even more important question than who we think He is. And that question is who does the Bible reveal Jesus actually to be. And the answer to that question is what our passage this morning is all about.

The first answer our passage gives to that question of Jesus' actual identity is that Jesus is the Son of God. Jesus has gone out into the wilderness to see John the Baptist. And the action in our passage begins with Jesus having already been baptized by John in the Jordan River. Following His baptism, says our passage, Jesus was praying to the Father – when suddenly the sky tore open above Him. The Holy Spirit, appearing as a dove, came down from the heavens above and descended upon Him. And then, from heaven, through the cloven skies, came the voice of the Father: "*You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.*"

Jesus Christ is the Son of God. It took the Christian church a few centuries after Jesus' Incarnation to work out exactly what is meant by that title – the final conclusion being the words of the Nicene Creed, that Jesus is "*God from God; Light from Light, true God from true God; begotten, not made; of one Being with the Father.*" Those words were chosen with great care, and are quite precise in what they are both affirming and rejecting about the meaning of Jesus as the Son of God. And one could spend a lifetime simply unpacking the meaning and majesty of that confession. But, for this morning, we'll take a shortcut. What those words about Jesus as the Son of God in the Nicene Creed were trying to capture is the full truth of several passages of Scripture – two, particularly, from the Gospel of John. In John 1, that great passage we read every Christmas Eve about the Word becoming flesh, a few verses after where we usually end that reading is this verse, verse 18: "*No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known.*" Jesus, the Son of God, incarnate in this world, makes God known to us.

But even more straightforward is something Jesus Himself said in John 14. After Jesus has said to His disciples, "*I am the way, and the truth, and the life,*" Philip says to Jesus, "*Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us.*" And here is the answer Jesus gives:

Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father.²

“Whoever has seen me has seen the Father.” For us, this is perhaps the single most important implication of the fact that Jesus is the Son of God. It means, simply, that if we want to know what God is truly like, all we have to do – the only thing we ought ever to do in answer to this question – is to look at Jesus. When we look at Jesus, we are seeing God as He really is – or, at least, seeing as much of God as can be contained within our human flesh and blood. What is God like? God is like Jesus. God is like Jesus because Jesus is God. That is what it means for us when Scripture and the creeds affirm that Jesus is the Son of God.

The beloved Christian writer Philip Yancey has a wonderful way of coming at this truth of Jesus’ Incarnation as the revelation of God’s true personality to us. He uses an analogy drawn from his fish aquarium. He describes all his labor involved in creating and maintaining the aquarium for the health and happiness of his fish – monitoring the oxygen, cleaning the tank, regular feedings, and so on. And then he writes this:

You would think, in view of all the energy expended on their behalf, that my fish would at least be grateful. Not so. Every time my shadow loomed above the tank they dove for cover into the nearest shell. They showed me one “emotion” only: fear . . .

To my fish I was deity. I was too large for them, my actions too incomprehensible. My acts of mercy they saw as cruelty; my attempts at healing they viewed as destruction. To change their perceptions, I began to see, would require a form of incarnation. I would have to become a fish and “speak” to them in a language they could understand.³

And that’s what it means for us that Jesus is the Son of God – true God from true God. The Incarnation means we can now know exactly what our God is like, because He took our form and came down into our world in order to speak our language and tell us for Himself who He really is.

And also, so that we could truly understand His intentions toward us – how He truly feels about us. Like Yancey’s frustration over his fish misinterpreting his every intervention of care and keeping, so Jesus as the Son of God reveals to us not just who God is and what God is like, but also enables us to understand how God really feels about us and what His ultimate intentions towards us really are. Now I could preach from here till Tuesday and not exhaust this theme – so let’s take another shortcut. It’s a story Presbyterian pastor John Ortberg tells about sitting on a plane next to a businessman. Looking over, Ortberg noticed that the screensaver on this businessman’s laptop was an image of a little boy just taking his first steps. Ortberg, a dad himself, leaned over and asked, “*Is that your son?*” Big mistake, says Ortberg – because this businessman was only too happy to tell Ortberg everything about his son, with pictures. The boy’s name was Adam, to begin with. Ortberg writes: “*He had a whole string of pictures of Adam doing pretty much what all children do, and he displayed them one at a time. With commentary. I and my seatmates got a graduate course in Adamology.*”

As the lecture on Adam was finally winding down, the businessman said with a sigh, “*I can’t wait to get home to him.*” And Ortberg, thinking that maybe this proud papa had been on the road for a good while – which might help explain the fervor of his preoccupation with his son, asked him how long he had been away. And the businessman said, “*Since yesterday.*” It was only later, Ortberg writes, while pondering this encounter – no doubt searching his thoughts about his feelings regarding his own children – that he came to this rather useful conclusion: “*The man was preoccupied with Adam because he looked at him through the eyes of a father.*” “*And then,*” writes Ortberg, “*It hit me*”:

I am the child on God’s screen saver. And so are you. The tiniest details of our lives never grow old to him. God himself is filled with wonder at our faltering steps and stammering words – not because we do them better than anyone else, but because he views them through the eyes of a loving Father . . . And the story of the Bible is first of all God’s story – the story of a father rushing through the clouds to be at home with [us]. One day apart is one day too many.⁴

Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Meaning that if we want to know what God is really like, all we have to do is look at Jesus. Meaning, also, that if we want to know how God feels about us, all we have to do is look at Jesus. Just look at the fact that God came down to this earth solely for our sake, solely out of His love for us – something Jesus Himself confirmed when He said, “*For God so loved the world . . .*”⁵ Looking at Jesus, the Son of God, we see that we are, indeed, the children on God’s screensaver. And that, for Him, even one day separated from us is one day too many.

Which brings us to the second thing our passage reveals to us in answer to the question Who Is Jesus? Jesus is the Son of God – but also, says our passage, Jesus is the Son of Adam. Look at the genealogy we read this morning. The genealogy traces Jesus’ human roots – born of Joseph and Mary, His human parents – and then all the way back on the human family tree to the creation of Adam in the Garden of Eden. Just as every one of our individual family trees all eventually end up with Adam as our greatest of great-grandfathers. Jesus, like us, is the Son of Adam – and what is meant by that is that just as Jesus is fully God, so Jesus is also fully a human being. That, by the miracle of His Incarnation, Jesus was, at one and the same time, both fully God and fully a human being.

And Jesus was human just the same as we are human, save for the sin – not sort of human, but really human the way we are human. This is something the church enshrined within the words of the Apostles’ Creed: “*Born of the Virgin Mary; suffered under Pontius Pilate; was crucified, dead, and buried.*” These are all markers of His humanity – to have been born out of His mother’s womb, to be capable of feeling mental and physical suffering, even to undergo death and burial. The Scriptures tell us that Jesus knew hard work and sweat and fatigue just as we do. That He laughed, got angry, got happy and sad just as we do. That He had a childhood, an adolescence, and grew into mature adulthood, just as we do. That when His friend Lazarus died, He cried; that when He was scourged with the whip, He bled; and that when He was crucified, He truly suffered and then He died. Jesus is the Son of Adam every bit as much as He is the Son of God.

Which means, among a host of things, that just as we can look at Jesus and see exactly what God is like, so too we can look at Jesus and see just exactly what a human being is supposed to be like – what you and I are meant to be as fellow sons and daughters of Adam. And, again, I could preach from here till Tuesday on this theme, about what Jesus reveals about our true humanity. But let me take one more shortcut and just point out two things – the two most important things – which Jesus, as the Son of Adam, reveals about our humanity. Namely, how we are to respond to God, and how we are to treat one another.

What Jesus, Son of Adam, reveals about our human relationship to God is simply that it is meant to be the single most important fact and aim and practice of our existence. That relationship with God is no different from the air we breathe and the food we eat – necessary, essential, central to our very existence. And what might that look like? Well, when the heavens open after Jesus' baptism, what is Jesus, the Son of Adam, doing? Praying. Talking to God, walking with God, being in close and intimate relationship with God. Praying. Not talking about God, but talking to God. Not just believing in God, but having God before us in all things. Not God now and then, but God at all times, in all the daily circumstances of our lives. As Skye Jethani puts it, it's supposed to be a "with God" life.

In other words, it's all those things Jesus was trying to get through to us when He said to us things like, "*Seek first the kingdom of God*"⁶ or "*Abide in me, as I abide in you.*"⁷ What the Son of Adam was revealing to us who are also the sons and daughters of Adam, is that we have been made, above all else, to be in active, intimate, daily relationship with our Creator. That this is the essence of what it means to be a human being under God's heaven.

And, following from that, what Jesus, the Son of Adam, reveals about our rightful human response to our fellow humans is that we should treat one another as if each one of us is also a child of God – which we all certainly are. Look at that long list of names in the genealogy – half of which, I confess, I'm pretty sure I mispronounced. Nahum, Josech, Addi, Zerubbabel – just names on a page to us, like the way we think of so much of the great vast human family – just a bunch of names. But what that genealogy of Jesus, the Son of Adam, reminds us of is that every single one of those names represents an actual person – a son of Adam just like Him. And that every single person in that genealogy was someone known individually to God, created uniquely by God – and who mattered and matters still infinitely to the heart of God.

Which is just how Jesus, the Son of God and the Son of Adam, treated every single human being He met during His time on earth. It didn't matter who you were or what you did or how much you had or didn't have – you mattered to Jesus. He would stop for you, talk with you, care about you – whether you were a Samaritan woman alone at a well, a man possessed by demons living in a cemetery, or a rather flawed disciple like Peter or James or John. Jesus sees us each one individually, knows our names, and treats us with dignity and worth and kindness.

And that is what the Son of Adam, the perfect human being, reveals to us about how we are to relate to one another. Because each one of us matters to God, without exception, therefore each one we encounter is someone we are to meet as someone worthy of mattering to us. Because each one of us shares in common the humanity of the Son of Adam, so each one we encounter is

to be received as a brother, as a sister, as someone who belongs to our family, the family of Adam, created by God – someone who is one of us. This is precisely what Jesus meant when He told us that parable about the Good Samaritan – the one who did not pass by on the other side when it would have been far easier to do so, but who instead saw in that beaten, half-dead stranger the fact of their common kinship in the family of Adam, their common worth in the eyes of God.⁸ And so reached out and helped him. And this is precisely what Jesus was after when He told us that parable about the sheep and the goats before the throne of heaven – that whatever we do or do not do for even the ones we consider least among us, we are doing or failing to do for Jesus Himself, the Son of Adam just like us.⁹ In Jesus Christ, the Son of Adam, we see how we are to live out our human existence before God; and we see how we are to live out our human existence in relation to our fellow human beings in the genealogy of God’s boundless grace.

Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh, Messiah, Savior, Lord, and King. The Son of God, and the Son of Adam. May His name be praised by us always, and in all that we do. Amen.

¹ Luke 9:20.

² John 14:9.

³ Philip Yancey, The Jesus I Never Knew (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), pp. 38-39.

⁴ John Ortberg, God Is Closer Than You Think (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), pp. 14-16.

⁵ John 3:16.

⁶ Matthew 6:33.

⁷ John 15:4.

⁸ Luk3 10:25-37.

⁹ Matthew 25:31-46.