

Luke 3:21-38

*“The Commissioning of Jesus:
Divine Approval; Eternal Heritage”*

January 25, 2009 -

Introduction

Perhaps in a more literal and comprehensive sense than ever before, the whole world watched as President-elect Obama stood to take his oath and become the 44th President of the United States of America last Tuesday, January 20th, 2009. It was truly a remarkable and historic event for many reasons and it was accompanied by an open euphoric celebration the like of which has not been seen in many years in our troubled world.

I did not pay too much attention to the extensive media coverage of the event, but I have to say that it was a fascinating experience this week to be watching the inauguration of Barak Obama unfold out of the corner of one eye while at the same time contemplating and studying Luke 3:21-22 which is really the inauguration and the commissioning of Jesus into public ministry. It seems almost sacrilegious to even try to compare the 2 events and yet I would ask your permission to simply make one observation as we approach the text. The inauguration of President Obama was an incredibly high powered media event with a reported 2 million people in physical attendance and millions of others all around the world watching on TV or the Internet. In sharp contrast the commissioning of Jesus was a modest, local event beside a little river called the Jordan River joining the Sea of Galilee and the Dead Sea. Neither Luke nor the other gospel writers tell us exactly how many people are there but we might imagine a small crowd of people who had been provoked to action by the powerful preaching of John the Baptist and who had come down to the river to be baptized.

As we imagine these 2 scenes side by side – one massive and global, carried on the wings of 21st century communication technologies to the farthest corners of the earth; the other local and confined to those within physical earshot – we need to ask which event is more significant in the course of human history. From our human perspective we may indeed fall into the trap of allowing the events of the past week which are the culmination of 2+ years of very public political maneuvering and debates and which represent the appointment of arguably the most powerful and influential leader of the free world – we might fall into the trap of allowing these very high profile events to eclipse the event which is the subject of last half of Luke chapter 3 – particularly verses 21 & 22.

What I hope to show as we look closely at these verses is that Luke is actually describing an event of momentous proportion here. I want us to discover that this is not the commissioning of just any human being – this is the commissioning of Jesus who is at once the fulfillment of the whole of Old Testament prophecy and also the One whom the book of Revelation will later celebrate as the King of kings and Lord of lords. In our day we might also add ‘Prime Minister of prime ministers; President of presidents’! This is, in fact, the inauguration and commissioning of the Central Character in Salvation History!

The enormity of the event is admittedly camouflaged as you look at verses 21-38 and see that there are only 2 or 3 verses of narrative followed a list of names, most of which are difficult for us to pronounce, but I would urge you to join me as we make several observations about the text and let’s ask the Lord to reveal His glory to us in these verses.

Background

We noted last week that the bulk of Luke’s Gospel story is taken up with the description of the public ministry of Jesus in first century Israel. We also noticed that the public ministry of Jesus doesn’t actually begin until 4:14 and so everything that this very skillful writer Luke is doing in these earlier chapters is to prepare his readers in such a way that when they actually meet Jesus they will be totally prepared to hang on His every word!

Last week we saw the ministry of John the Baptist as one who stirred up the religious status quo and called people to ‘produce fruit in keeping with repentance’.

This week the question is **who is this Jesus, what are His credentials and why should I listen to Him?**

READ: Luke 3:21-38

21When all the people were being baptized, Jesus was baptized too. And as he was praying, heaven was opened 22and 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."

23Now Jesus himself was about thirty years old when he began his ministry. He was the son, so it was thought, of Joseph, the son of Heli, 24the son of Matthat, the son of Levi, the son of Melki,

the son of Jannai, the son of Joseph...

*37the son of Methuselah, the son of Enoch,
the son of Jared, the son of Mahalalel,
the son of Kenan, 38the son of Enosh,
the son of Seth, the son of Adam,
the son of God.*

I think you will agree with me by simply looking at the wording of this text that the primary message of this text is that **Jesus is the Son of God**. The implication of this is huge! Luke is busy here preparing his readers to hear the message of Jesus by convincing them that He is absolutely worth paying attention to! Jesus is not at this point nor will he ever ride any significant waves of popular opinion, but Luke wants his original readers and us to know that he is introducing Someone here who is unique in the history of the world!

This, of course, is an implication that is highly applicable to us at Oaklands Chapel here in January 2009. If Jesus really is the Son of God as this text claims, what should be my response? What difference should this reality make in the way in which I make choices and live my life? Let us then make several observations about this text and see what lessons the Lord might challenge our hearts with.

Observations

1. **Baptism is important but not the main item in Luke's description.**
 - a. This may surprise you – it did me! Luke description clearly indicates that the baptism is well over and done with and Jesus is praying when the heavens open.
 - b. This is not to imply that we can't learn anything about baptism here – on the contrary there is much to be contemplated and learned about the way in which the baptism of Jesus changes and re-defines the meaning of baptism. Such a study is best done by taking all 4 Gospel accounts of the baptism of Jesus. We won't take the time to do such a study together just now.
 - c. What it does imply is what we notice in the flow of the text and that is that Luke is more concerned to communicate the true identity of Jesus at this point rather than focus on His baptism per se.
2. **Jesus is actively in prayer**
 - a. NOTE: "*as He was praying...*"

- b. Robert Tannehill in his commentary makes note of the fact that in Luke’s writing both in Luke and Acts “times of prayer and worship are frequently occasions for divine revelations to characters in the story.”¹ He also notes that throughout Luke’s Gospel that we find Jesus praying at significant points in His journey, such as just before the choosing of the 12 disciples and when He was with Peter, James & John on the Mount of Transfiguration.
 - c. We cannot leave this observation without bringing a challenge to our own lives. After all, if Jesus, whom Luke paints unequivocally as the Son of God, feels the need to pray in relation to His ministry in the world, how much more ought we to pray!
 - i. From Luke’s writings as well as other parts of Scripture we learn that **Prayer opens the door to the work of God in our lives and in our community**
 - ii. Prayer reminds us that the work we do in God’s name is really His work; without His blessing and His strength, we ought not to do it!
 - d. And so, brothers and sisters, let me urge us to learn to pray more often and more wholeheartedly for the ministry here at Oaklands Chapel!
 - i. Participate this Thursday if you can as we pray for each other’s needs
 - ii. We will soon be implementing a 24 hour prayer commitment each month – together we will join with churches all across this city to cover God’s work in this city 24/7 365 days per year. This can happen if we do our part!
3. Probably the most important observation of our passage is that we find **all Three Members of the Triune God of the universe as active participants** in what goes on here. I don’t know of any inauguration ceremony of any religious or political leader where this has happened! Let us talk briefly about the significance of the Holy Spirit’s involvement, the Father and then we’ll conclude again with the identification of Jesus as the Son of God.
- a. Luke records that the **Holy Spirit** descends onto Jesus “in bodily form like a dove.”
 - i. Martin Luther suggests, “Among all birds, the dove is known for its kind heart and lack of anger.”²
 - ii. As one reads on in both Luke and Acts, the role of the Holy Spirit is highly significant in the work of Jesus and later in the Church.
 - 1. Already in chapter 4 of Luke we see evidence of this as the Spirit fills Jesus and then leads Him out into the desert to be tempted. Then, in Jesus’

¹ Robert C. Tannehill, *The Narrative Unity of Luke-Acts: Vol. 1 the Gospel of Luke* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 56.

² Martin Luther, “This is My Son, the Beloved: Sermon on the Baptism of Jesus” in *Word and World* Vol. XVI, Number 1, Winter 1996, 8.

amazing inauguration speech which we'll look at in a couple of weeks, Jesus directly quotes these words, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me" (4:18).

- iii. And so, the Holy Spirit may be seen as the divine power in His mission.
 - 1. The challenge for us here is to recognize that before Jesus left the earth He promised His disciples that He would send the HS.
 - 2. Just as prayer is critical for orienting ourselves correctly in our ministry, so also we must become more aware of the role and presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives day by day.
- b. The **Father** appears to be seen as the 'voice from Heaven'.
 - i. Martin Luther once again notes the quiet nature of the voice of Almighty God. The same God whom the Psalmists describe as the One whose voice "thunders like mighty water" and "the earth trembles at the sound of His voice"
 - 1. Here: "*You are my Son whom I love; with you I am well-pleased*"
 - ii. There are not many other places in Scripture where we find God the Father speaking so directly into a situation on earth – this gives us a clue that we ought to consider this to be a highly significant event in human history, despite its humble circumstances.
 - iii. This short phrase gives us a remarkable window into the kind of relationship that exists between God the Father and God the Son.
 - 1. It is a picture of deep intimacy and obvious love.
 - iv. We might begin to imagine what mind have been going through the Father's mind at this point where He is expressing such affection.
 - 1. My mind runs to John 3:16 – For God so loved *the world* that He gave His only Son!
 - 2. This act of commissioning His Son Jesus into the world where He knew exactly that He would be mistreated, tortured and ultimately crucified must have been a hard act indeed!
 - v. Luke's description is a touching reminder of the tender relationship of love that exists between the Father and the Son.
- c. Finally, we see **Jesus**, clearly marked here as the beloved Son of God.
 - i. This is not new language in Luke

1. Back when the angel Gabriel spoke to Mary he prophesied to her that the baby would be called “the Son of the Most High”
 2. As a Boy when Jesus stays behind in the temple, He Himself says to His parents, “Didn’t you know I had to be in my Father’s house?” (2:49).
 3. Then if we follow the language forward from our passage into chapter 4 we find that the first thing Satan says to Him during His time of temptation is, “If you are the Son of God... turn these stones to bread”
 - a. At the very heart of the temptations of Jesus is the question – would Jesus, the true Son of God, fulfill his mandate in His own strength as Satan would tempt Him to do? Or would He submit His power and position totally over to His Father so that everything would be for His glory!
 - b. Jesus passes the test with flying colours – later He will make the comment about only doing what the Father asks.
- ii. In this context of Jesus as the Son we must also look at the genealogy recorded here.
1. There have been many articles and books written over the years which compare Luke’s genealogy here and Matthew’s genealogy in Matthew 1. Many suggestions have been put forward as to why the genealogies are so different from each other.
 - a. It doesn’t really work, as some have suggested to simply say that one is Mary’s genealogy and the other Joseph’s. They are actually both Joseph’s if you look carefully.
 - b. Of all the solutions that I have looked at so far, the one which seems to make sense to me is a fairly simple idea put forward by R.P. Nettlehorst who suggests that one traces the lineage back through Joseph’s father and the other traces it back through Joseph’s mother.
 - c. I would commend you do more reading if you are interested in solving puzzles like this one.
 2. The important observation regarding the genealogy though is not its technical accuracy, but rather the language the Luke employs to strongly emphasize the whole idea of Jesus’ unique Sonship.

- a. In verse 24 He carefully and clearly states that Jesus was only ‘thought to be’ the son of Joseph.
 - b. Then Luke carries the genealogy all the way back to Adam whom he calls ‘the son of God’
3. In the small group questions I use this quote from I. Howard Marshall:
- a. *“The point of the genealogy is... to show that Jesus has his place in the human race created by God. The fact that the genealogy is carried back to Adam, as the son of God, may perhaps point a contrast between this disobedient son of God and the obedient Son of God, Jesus.”*
- iii. I believe this is exactly what Luke is doing in this section of His carefully crafted Gospel story.
- 1. Once again remember that what He is doing is to prepare us, his readers for the time when Jesus will actually begin His public ministry.
 - 2. This is how we know He is trustworthy; this is how we know that He is unique in the history of the world!

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Conclusion

How do we respond to this amazing picture that Luke has created for us? He has given us a glimpse into the intimate inner relationships between the Persons of the Trinity. There we see an expressed depth of love and intimacy that is perhaps surprising to us.

Luke has given us this picture of Jesus, the central Character in the whole of Salvation History who receives divine approval from His Father and One who still has all of the necessary credentials through the lineage of David in the house of Israel to be the One who would deliver His people.

How can we respond?? I believe our most appropriate response is to humble ourselves before Him and offer Him our praise and worship for who He is and what He has done for us.

I am fascinated by how much of the language of sonship Paul uses in Ephesians 1. Paul is of course looking back at the completed work of Christ. Notice how the language of sonship and Fatherhood and also how the Holy Spirit is still involved in God’s great work of salvation. Let us worship Him as we hear these words:

Ephesians 1:3-14

3Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. 4For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love 5he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will— 6to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. 7In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace 8that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding. 9And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, 10to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment—to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ.

11In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, 12in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory. 13And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, 14who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory.