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WHOSE SON ARE YOU?

SERIES: THE GOSPEL OF LUKE

Whose Son are You?

The theme of our text this morning comes out of a question Jesus poses to the scribes about his identity, an issue that he suggests is more complex than it appears on the surface. How do you determine your identity? What determines the core of who you really are? Growing up as the youngest of four siblings and the only son of my father, I took great pride in being the “doctor’s son.” My father was an outstanding surgeon, second to none, and was highly revered at the French Hospital where he operated in Los Angeles. In the few times I visited my father at his office, he would always drop what he was doing and be glad to see me. Once when I was about 8 or 9, I entered his office filled with patients waiting to see him, and boldly marched past my father’s new receptionist without saying a word. As I turned to go down the hallway, she let out a stern rebuke, “Young man, where do you think you’re going?” Just then my dad appeared from behind the door, and I turned to her and retorted, “I’m the doctor’s son!” A bit flustered by the sight of my father, she responded, “My, how you’ve grown!”

Growing up as a surgeon’s son brought other privileges. When I was ten my dad joined a prestigious Country Club and at thirteen he encouraged me take golf lessons so we could play golf together. I had mixed feelings about the experience. On the one hand, the golf course was the one place where I was able to spend quality time with my dad; but on the other hand, I felt a growing disdain for a culture that catered to the rich and fostered exclusivity. There was an unwritten code that Jews and blacks were not permitted to be members. Women were permitted to play golf, but the dress code demanded that they wore dresses, and unlike the men’s posh locker room, theirs was substandard at best. After a round of golf, my dad and I would enjoy dining in the massive and luxurious grillroom. But if we were with my mom, we were forced to eat in the small but quaint foursomes’ room. Though the club boasted not one but two championship golf courses, they refused to put in a pool, for fear of being invaded by children. This was the all white, male, gentile world of which I was a part.

And then I broke all the rules of the game and became a Christian, and worse yet, a pastor. Once on a visit home, I approached the first tee and overheard one of my dad’s friends whispering to his partner, don’t ask the good doctor what his son does for a living; you’ll only embarrass him. Once I was in, now I was out. I wondered what they would have thought if they knew that Emily’s Jewish stepfather once served as security guard at their club.

How do you define your identity? Who are you really at the core? For the believer the Bible’s answer is that you have a brand new identity—you are “in Christ” adopted as sons of God. That’s

the simple answer, but the more complex question is “Who is the Son to you?”

In our text last week the Sadducees challenged Jesus about his belief in the resurrection. Using Moses as their authority, they created a hypothetical scenario in an attempt to show how ridiculous Jesus’ claim was. In response, Jesus exposed their false assumptions, which prevented them from knowing the God to whom their Scriptures testify, the nature of the age to come and the fact that the future age had already begun to impinge upon the present. Jesus’ rebuttal was so effective it elicited verbal praise from several scribes in the crowd. Like Jesus, they championed belief in a resurrection and so took pleasure in the humiliation of their foes, the Sadducees. The fact that they share common theological ground with Jesus, however, doesn’t solicit Jesus’ praise in return. Though intellectually they believe in a resurrection, they have no clue what the implications might be, and therefore their belief has no bearing on the way they live their lives. Like the Sadducees they will have no share in the age to come. What about you?

I. Son of David, Son of Man? (Luke 20:41-44: Psalm 110)

A. Jesus’ question

But he said to them, “How can they say that the Christ is David’s son? For David himself says in the Book of Psalms, ‘The LORD said to my Lord, ‘Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool.’ David thus calls him Lord, so how is he his son?”

(Luke 20:41-44 ESV)

To expose their bankrupt theology, Jesus poses a difficult question on the nature of David’s relationship to the Messiah. It was common belief that the Messiah would come from the line of David (2 Sam 7:12–14; Isa 11:1, 10; Jer 23:5). Thus, the title “Son of David” became synonymous with “Messiah” and evoked Israel’s hopes for one who would come and conquer Israel’s enemies, restoring Israel to its former glory as in the days of David.

Alongside the Messiah’s Davidic origins, Jesus places another text from Psalm 110, which gives an altogether different viewpoint on the Messiah’s identity. Jesus’ choice of Psalm 110 is significant. While many psalms use exalted language that points beyond the reigning king to the future Messiah, this is the only psalm that is purely prophetic. David, in the role of an inspired prophet, speaks of “an oracle of the LORD,” concerning a future descendent, who he calls “my lord.”

An oracle of I AM to my LORD:

“Sit at my right hand
 until I make your enemies
 a footstool for your feet.’
 Your mighty scepter
I AM will extend from Zion.
 ‘Rule in the midst of your enemies.’
 Your troops offer themselves freely on the day of your
 strength.
 Arrayed in holy splendor, from the womb of the dawn,
 the dew of your youth comes to you.
I AM swears and will not change his mind:
 ‘You are a priest forever,
 like Melchizedek.’”

(Psalm 110:1-4 translation by Bruce Waltke¹)

I AM (*Yahweh*) was the name God first revealed to Moses, *I am who that I am* (Exod 3:14). It became his covenant name, reflecting faithfulness to keep his covenant promises to his people. The oracle reveals that God’s covenants will be fully realized in a King that David foresees is greater than himself, for “in the spirit” (Mark 12:36) he calls him “lord.” The exaltation he receives is beyond anything imaginable. As A. B. Ehrlich argues, “From the Old Testament point of view it was wholly unthinkable, even in metaphor, to describe a mortal as seated on Yahweh’s right hand.”² Waltke elaborates on its significance:

The invitation to sit *at my right hand* gives David’s lord the highest place of honor and, as Luther recognized, on that exalted throne in heaven he “possesses the very majesty and power that is called divine.” At God’s right hand assured him of divine protection to occupy honor, power, and majesty forevermore.³

From that secure position of exaltation *I AM* promises to make all his enemies a footstool for his feet, guaranteeing his ultimate triumph. Jesus has pulled a new card out of the deck, one that the scribes had not fully considered in their political games and manipulations for power. David’s lord is Daniel’s Son of Man, who ascends through the clouds to the Ancient of Days. His throne is beyond the reaches of earth at God’s right hand, which means that his dominion will be exercised in a realm far greater than Israel’s national hopes and dreams. He will bring all nations under his rule and “his dominion is an everlasting dominion which shall not pass away” (Dan 7:14). “Lord” is the only appropriate title for such a king.

So, Jesus reasons, “If David calls him Lord, in what sense is he his son?” How can someone who is junior in age be superior in rank? Could it be that David was given a vision of one of his descendants exalted to the place of such extreme honor, that only the title Lord would be appropriate? And when David caught the vision, he worshipped his future son as his King and Lord. Is this how he redefines “sonship”?

What I find instructive is that Jesus doesn’t answer his question. He could have expounded the rest of the psalm where David goes on to say that this new king will also be “a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek.” Setting aside a king to be priest reverses the Mosaic dispensation that radically separated the two theocratic offices. Now they will be combined in one individual,

which means the future king will supersede the present high-priestly regime. Jesus has already declared that the temple will be destroyed and its sacrifices replaced, and now with this text, he adds that the priesthood will be superseded as well.

But rather than blowing them out of the water, he just leaves his question hanging with the theological tension unresolved. This suggests that questions are more powerful than answers when it comes to subverting faulty worldviews. What Jesus leaves us with is an invitation to any who are seeking the truth. Will you allow seven verses of an inspired poem to open your eyes to an altogether different way at looking at life, to see what in your thinking is inconceivable? It’s a scary proposition. To allow God’s word entrance into your heart, and to sit with it in silence long enough for it to speak to you with no preconceived notions will turn your world upside down (1 Sam 2:5-8). Do you have the time to do that? Are you open to what it might do? If you dare, you will discover that looking at Jesus through the lens of his resurrection and ascension not only radically alters our understanding of who he is, it also transforms the way we view ourselves and everyone else. As Paul affirms,

From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. (2 Cor 5:16-17)

In order to give us a taste of what life looks like through the lens of the exalted Son of Man, Jesus examines two classes of people at the opposite end of the social, political and economic spectrum—the wealthy and powerful scribes and an impoverished widow.

II. The Poverty of the Rich

And in the hearing of all the people he said to his disciples, “Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes, and love greetings in the marketplaces and the best seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at feasts, who devour widows’ houses and for a pretense make long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation.” (Luke 20:45-47)

Jesus takes the opportunity before a great and captive audience to deliver them from religious exploitation. Ezekiel predicted that God would one day send a new David to deliver his sheep from Israel’s oppressive shepherds who, instead of sacrificially tending God’s flock, had “been feeding themselves” (Ezek 34:2). That day has now arrived. Jesus publicly unmasks Israel’s scribes for the hypocrites they are. He exposes their vain affections, their unspeakable exploitation, and their treacherous hypocrisy. He says they do not serve for love of God or for the benefit of the sheep, but for the honor and prestige religion bestows. They love to lengthen their prayer shawls to show how learned they are. It’s one thing to wear a multi-colored robe at graduation, but quite another to go parading around every day at the mall. But this is what the scribes did, bestowing upon themselves an air of respectability as they strutted around the marketplace. At every public occasion they vie for the best seats so they may continue to bask in their delusional praise.

Despite their outward show of piety, however, underneath they were oppressive and brutal. In Old Testament times, teachers of the law were not allowed to receive payment for their services,

which made them dependent on gifts from patrons. But greedy teachers abused the system by preying on the generous hospitality of widows. Once they became ingratiated with their victims, they would not hesitate to devour entire estates and cover up their crimes with lengthy public prayers. Thus their wealth and status were the result of ravaging vulnerable widows, the very ones to whom they were to give special care.

What this implies is that whenever leaders use the privileges of their office to serve and elevate themselves above the flock, it separates them from the flock, especially the poor and needy, and therefore in Jesus' mind they cease to become leaders. No matter how many years we serve, we must never elevate ourselves higher than the role of being slaves.

From the image of "devouring widows," Jesus turns his attention to a "worshipping widow."

III. The Riches of the Poor

Jesus looked up and saw the rich putting their gifts into the offering box, and he saw a poor widow put in two small copper coins. And he said, "Truly, I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all of them. For they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on." (Luke 21:1-4)

Taking his seat opposite the treasury, Jesus observes the spectacle before him. The "treasury" is a reference to "the thirteen trumpet-shaped receptacles which, according to the Mishnah, were placed against the wall of the Court of Women."⁴ As he is sitting there, crowds of people press forward to contribute their gifts to the temple. Each contribution resounded with a loud clanging noise as the coins were thrown into the trumpet-like receptacles. And everyone knew when the rich made their weighty deposits, because the noise would ring out across the entire court. (This may give us insight to Jesus' statement in Matthew 6:2, "So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do").

Into this scene now comes a poor widow. Her poverty could very well have come about because the scribes had devoured her estate. Yet she is not bitter. She hasn't come to the temple for justice, but to worship. Pressing forward, she throws in two *lepta*, the smallest coins in circulation, about on eighth of a cent apiece. They barely make a trumpet sound. She had but two coins. She could have kept one, but she threw in both, for she loved God with her whole heart and gave him her complete adoration. Such faith deeply touches Jesus and he hurriedly calls his disciples to instruct them about her faith. To their surprise they learn that she, not the rich, is the greatest contributor to the treasury. When we look back to Jesus' foundational text of Psalm 110, we can see how she, in many respects, fulfills the imagery of verse 3:

**Your troops offer themselves freely on the day of your strength.
Arrayed in holy splendor, from the womb of the dawn,
the dew of your youth comes to you.**

Waltke beautifully unpacks the imagery of the Lord's army clothed in *holy splendor* emerging from the womb of the dawn, which signals that, with the chosen King securely set on God's eternal throne, the long night of weeping and darkness is over and a new age of hope and joy is born. With the arrival of the dawn, countless warriors offer themselves freely and wholeheartedly in

the service of their king. Their dedication is not coerced (as in a draft), or manipulated by money (like mercenaries).

The stout-hearted freely volunteer themselves because they love and trust their king, and know God is with them for their cause is justice...arrayed in holy splendor, literally, "holy splendors," is a metonymy for their regalia. "Holy" signifies that their garments mark them as set apart to God and so as a pure army. Perhaps the army wears the garments of priests, in accordance with the conception of the nation as a kingdom of priests (Exod 19:6)...This army, as copious as morning dew, mysteriously appearing and glittering on every blade and leaf, refreshes a languishing earth. Dew or "light rain" evokes the heavenly origin of the troops, for in the Old Testament dew is thought of as coming from the sky and descending upon the earth. Because its descent is imperceptible, it may evoke the invisible working of God...In sum, God mysteriously raises this holy army to refresh the earth with justice and love, after the long night of satanic tyranny (cf. Zeph 3:5).⁵

As we bask in the imagery of the verse, it is as clear as day that it is the destitute, vulnerable widow, not the wealthy and powerful scribes, who represents one of the first volunteers in the King's army. Unlike the scribes, who clothe themselves in their vainglory, she wears the garments of holiness and costly devotion. What moves God is not the amount of the gift but the amount of trust and love the gift symbolizes. The gifts of the rich were not burdensome or sacrificial. What were they but a generous tip taken out of the surpluses they had stolen? After they had given their gifts, they were still rich. The poor widow's gift, although tiny, was symbolic of her complete surrender to God. With those two weightless coins she has cast herself whole into the arms of God. Her glowing example, though nameless and small, is like the mysterious heavenly dew that refreshes the earth with justice and love. I find it instructive that it is a destitute widow who instructs us how to live out our faith, not the rich and powerful scribes. For, as James writes,

Listen, my beloved brothers, has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom, which he has promised to those who love him? (Jas 2:5)

And perhaps it is even more ironic that it is the faith of this woman that foreshadows the devotion Jesus will demonstrate on the cross. So whom do you learn from?

1. Bruce K. Waltke and James H. Houston, with Erika Moore, *The Psalms as Christian Worship: A Historical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 497-98.

2. Bruce K. Waltke with Charles Yu, *An Old Testament Theology: An Exegetical, Canonical, and Thematic Approach* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 895.

3. Waltke, *The Psalms as Christian Worship*, 503.

4. C. E. B. Cranfield, *The Gospel According to St Mark* (CGTC; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974), 386.

5. Waltke, *The Psalms as Christian Worship*, 505-06.

