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Theme: Sonship

Study 3—Sonship Shared

Of all the gospel writers, John is the most explicit in declaring Jesus as the pre-existent eternal Son of God. He is 'The one and only Son' (John 3:16) who became flesh and was "Immanuel"—God with us. By believing in the Son sent by the Father we also may become children of God by his grace. His gospel is an invitation to participate in the life that exists between the Father and the Son through the Spirit. John's two-fold message; Jesus is God and believe in him for life. This is a supernatural encounter with the Spirit of God (1:13, 'Born of God') that transfers us from being children of the devil (8:44) to children of God (1:12). So John's purpose for writing the gospel is clearly evangelical. He seeks to fulfil one driving Spirit-given purpose:

. . . that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name (20:31).

John knows by the Holy Spirit that eternal life is the life of Sonship love and action. Jesus was sent into the world that we might share in his life as children of God. This contrasts with seeking to know God through the law as John gradually shows in his gospel. God's life comes to all whom the Father calls to believe in the Son through the gospel.

No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known (1:18).

The prologue (1:1–18): Jesus the pre-existent Son who has come in the flesh to bring life to those in darkness.

John 1:1–2; *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning.*

John establishes the pre-existent divine relationship between the Father and the Word of God from the beginning as light and life. This is a major goal for John: Jesus is God and his relationship with the Father is our life and the world's light. The 'Word' (*logos*) in Greek philosophy is divine reason or the mind of God and John employs this meaning here. In identifying Christ as the Word he speaks of God's active purpose in the Son. In the same way that God's Word brought creation into being in Genesis 1, so 'the Word becoming flesh' puts God's purpose (His reasonings) into being. That reasoning of God is to share with creation and particularly human beings, the particular 'with-ness' that the Word shares with the Father. Jesus was sent to make us children *with* God as the Word was *with* God. This is not to make us the same as the Word but to give us through grace the experience of the eternal life of God as a child of God.

We can see this clearly in the prologue:

In him was life (v. 4). Life is the experience of relationship as a Son to the Father.

And that life was the light of men (v. 5). The Father/Sonship relationship is what enables the world to see truth and walk in the image of God.

'And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth' (v.14). The 'glory' that we see is the glory of a Son to the Father. John can't describe Jesus' glory without at the same time

speaking of the Father's glory. For John they are inseparable. Revelation is the revealing of the Son of the Father; Knowing God is knowing the truth, the grace, the purity, the fullness of the Father/Son relationship through the Spirit. The Glory of God is God in filial relationship of love and creative power. This is the world's light and life.

John then spends the rest of the gospel shining the spotlight on Jesus as the Son of God so that the Father would draw people to Himself and believe in the gospel. This is necessary because people prefer darkness to the light that is Jesus (1:11; 3:19), they are enslaved to sin (8:34) and death and must be 'born again' through believing that Jesus is the Son of God and Son of Man (3:3).

Jesus and the Father: God's will displayed.

Jesus refers to God as Father over 100 times and himself as Son over 50 times in John's gospel. His purpose is to enable us to see the Son (note the importance of the blind man seeing the Messiah in John 9), for seeing the Son is seeing the Father and the renewal of our life:

For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself (5:11).

I and the Father are one (10:30).

Indeed not to believe in the Son is to live in condemnation:

. . . whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God (3:18).

But for love of the world (3:16) the Father sent the Son. The Father loves the Son and has given all things into his hand (3:38). The Son has authority over all things to reveal the Father and grant life in His name. The Son is about his Father's business. This relationship is not static but active. Indeed we can see that Jesus is the Son by what he does. His works are a demonstration of his identity. John knows of no faith without action. To be a son of God is to act as a son of God:

I told you, and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father's name bear witness about me (10:25).

. . . even though you do not believe me, believe the works, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me, and I in the Father (10:38).

This comes is direct conflict with the existing religious status quo. The Pharisee often disputed Jesus' claims to be the Father's son. Indeed, to speak in such a way was proof he was evil and must be destroyed:

The Jews answered him, "It is not for a good work that we are going to stone you but for blasphemy, because you, being a man, make yourself God".

But it was the revelation of the impotence of their religion (and ours) that was necessary. Their desire to kill Jesus demonstrated that were not children of Abraham (i.e. of God) but of the Devil because their behaviour demonstrated the action of their father not God. The Devil kills, steals and destroys (10:10). In the same way, Jesus' good works were evidence that he

and the Father were one; the Pharisees' evil works were evidence of their sonship to the Devil:

You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies (8:44).

There is no salvation apart from abiding in the Son (15:4).

The healing of the man born blind (John 9) and its subsequent debate about God point to the revelation of both the Glory of God and the unveiling of the impotency of religion. The 'Glory' that Jesus speaks of in chapter 9 is the revealing of who God is. His miraculous action of healing glorifies God for it is a supernatural demonstration. The action glorifies Jesus because 'no one could do the miracles that he did unless God was with him' (3:2). This is in contrast to the religious system that could neither heal, nor reveal God. Its purpose is to get us to look to the Son for light and life.

It is not by religion that one comes to the Father but by the revelation of the Son by the Father. It is only those who are drawn by the Father who believe in the Son (6:44). They are the sheep who recognise the Good Shepherd's voice and will not go to another voice (10:5). The sheep are those who long for the love and protection of their Father and they hear the Father's voice in the Son:

My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. I and the Father are one (10:27–30).

Indeed, it is only those who rely upon Jesus as the basic provision of life are those who truly live. Jesus speaks of himself as Son of God, as 'the living bread' and 'the living water'. For those who hunger and thirst for life, Jesus is the one who brings it. In John 6, Jesus is the "bread of Life". As God provided lifesaving manna for the Israelites in the wilderness, so Jesus is the lifesaving manna from heaven. His relationship with His father is the bread that sustains us for eternal life\:

I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread he will live forever (6:51).

While there are strong illusions to the Lord's Supper' eating the flesh of Jesus in John's gospel is by having faith in the Son as the only sustenance in life. In believing we take into ourselves not only Jesus but also His Sonship relationship with the Father so that we can experience what he experiences. This is pure grace for sinners who live in condemnation. This is also stressed in Jesus' references to himself as the 'living water' (4:10; 7:37). He is the 'living water' that he offers to the Samaritan woman worn out by her futile search for life (John 4). This invitation for the thirsty to drink is given to everyone:

"If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'" Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive (7:36–37).

Seeing that Jesus is the only way to God is fundamental in John's Gospel. Through vivid imagery Jesus continues to declare "I and the Father are one". He states 'I Am the Bread of Life (6:35); I Am the Light (8:12); I am the Door of the sheep (10:7); I Am the Good Shepherd (10:11); I Am the Resurrection and the Life (11:25); I Am the Way the Truth and the Life (14:6); I Am the True Vine (15:1): Before Abraham was I Am (8:58). You cannot not escape this truth in John's Gospel. Jesus is God's Son and by believing in him we have life—the life of sonship. It is Jesus' claims to divine Sonship that sees him stir the wrath of the Jews and the Romans and be sentenced to death on the cross.

The Glory of the Son on the Cross

'As soon as Judas had taken the bread, he went out. And it was night' (13:30). These are the words that describe the act that sets in motion the Father's eternal plan to make children in the Son through the cross:

When he was gone, Jesus said, "Now the Son of Man is glorified and God is glorified in him. If God is glorified in him, God will glorify the Son in himself, and will glorify him at once. My children, I will be with you only a little longer. You will look for me, and just as I told the Jews, so I tell you now: Where I am going, you cannot come."

In his high-priestly prayer (John 17), Jesus prays to the Father as his Hour has come: "Glorify your son that your Son may Glorify you" (v. 1). Jesus predicted the cross in Chapter 12 where again he prayed "Father, Glorify your name", and the Father replied, "I have glorified it, and will glorify it again". The Holy Spirit will glorify the Father by taking what belongs to Jesus and making it known (16:14). The dynamic, loving, selfless identity of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit is made known on the cross when the Son died in our place and gave up his Spirit. When Jesus is raised to life he is the first fruits of a new creation where sonship is really made possible through the new creation of humanity in the risen Son. We are glorified when we receive the Father/Son relationship necessary for salvation by the Holy Spirit. The glorifying of God is always a revealing of the Triune identity and action of God. Eternal life is knowing the Father and the Son through the Spirit (17:3). Consequently, there is great joy for Mary as she hears the risen Jesus words, "I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God"! This is the promise of the gospel: the relationship that the Son has with the Father. As Jesus prays for us in John 17:21–23:

. . . that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one—I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

Jesus gave his disciples a new commandment to love one another. This is possible now through the Spirit of Sonship. Jesus is God. He came to save the world because the Son came into the world. He came as light to the world. If we believe this, his light will penetrate our darkness. But we don't believe alone. We hear his voice. The Holy Spirit is given to teach afresh to us the words of Jesus. That he is the Son of God to bring us to God. In abiding in him we will not only know him, we will also have life that shines in a dark world. The call now for us is to abide in the Son, to obey his voice and follow him. He says, 'I am in the Father, I will be in you and you will be in me'. This is the Intimacy of a divine fellowship so that we, like Jesus, may do the things the Father is doing in the world.