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Theme: Sonship

Study 2-Sonship Observed

Paul declares that through faith in the risen Christ, we are baptized into his death, united to his resurrection, so we too may live a new life. We are exhorted as new creations in Christ to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness. But what does this new life look like? The short answer is Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

Through the Spirit of Sonship 'as he is, so are we in this world' (1 John 4:17). This lived expression of Christ is something that the Spirit forms in us as we set our minds on the Spirit (Rom. 8:6) who is the Spirit of Sonship (Rom. 8:15).

For us to live as sons and daughters in The Son, it is helpful then to learn what true Sonship looks like. Jesus Christ is God's one and only Son (in our fallenness, we are not eternal, righteous or free to obey the Father). Jesus is not only our saviour, he is also our power and example that we may follow him in his Sonship. All things are possible through him who loved us (Phil. 4:13).

Jesus the Messiah in the infancy narratives

Last week we surveyed the Old Testament to find the promise of Sonship. Of particular focus was the promise of the Son of God who would serve the Father in a way that Israel would not and could not. Through Nathan the Prophet, God gave Israel the hope of a Royal Son from the line of David, anointed by the Spirit and whose throne would be established forever. The writers of the Gospels stress that Jesus is indeed the promised Son and 'saviour of the world' (John 4:42).

In Matthew 1, the Angel spoke to Joseph in a dream, stressing his own identity as a Son of David, thus alluding to the prophecy of his son. "Joseph Son of David... Don't be afraid to take Mary as your wife because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit." The fully human child born of Mary is the also the one who is "God with us" Immanuel (Matt. 1: 23). Matthew identifies Jesus as the new 'Israel' in his return to the land of Israel (Matt. 2:15, quoting Hosea 11:1, '*Out of Egypt I called my Son*'). Jesus not only experienced his own exodus from Egypt, it anticipated the new exodus which was to come through the cross and revealed that, where Israel failed, Jesus succeeded. In Matthew, Jesus is the true Israel, the anointed first-born Son of God to which Israel pointed.

Mark is even more explicit. He begins His gospel with 'The beginning of the good news about Jesus the Messiah'. He identifies Jesus as the Royal Son of Israel's expectation.

And Luke writes on 1:30–33:

Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. ³²He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The LORD God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end

That Jesus is the promised messiah, the Son of God, is the message of the Gospels. There were many who claimed the title 'Son of God' (e.g. the Roman Emperor) however, the Gospel writers affirmed Jesus' exclusive right to the messianic title. He alone is the Son of God. His Sonship does not fit the glorified categories of glory in the world. Jesus is Son of God, born of a poor virgin in a manger; a unique Son who comes to seek and save the lost-not by being above them but by being as one with them. .

Jesus' Baptism

The revelation of Jesus as the Son of God is made by God at his baptism. Each of the Gospels record the Father's words through the Spirit:

This is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased (Matt. 3:17)

You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased (Mark 1:11)

You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased (Luke 3:22)

Both his mission and his identity are revealed at his baptism. This declaration from the Father comes specifically at the time of the Son of God's full identification with sinners in John's baptism of repentance. Where Adam failed as a Son of God by listening to the voice of satan, where Israel failed as the Son of God by rejecting God and worshipping idols, where Solomon failed as the Son of God by following the gods of his 1000 foreign wives and concubines, where we fail as sons and daughters by our faithlessness, Jesus alone succeeds as the true Son by listening to the voice of his Father. Indeed throughout his life on earth, Jesus resisted the temptation to reject his sonship and mission.

At the beginning of Luke 4, the devil said to him, "*If you are the Son of God*, tell this stone to become bread." Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone'."

Matthew 27:42–43 says, "Let Him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in Him. He trusts in God. Let God deliver Him now if He wants Him. For He said, '*I am the Son of God*'." His mission to save the world affirmed his true sonship.

The Son of God's mission

1) Revealing the Father and the Son

In Matthew 11:27 Jesus declares that 'no-one knows the Father but the Son and those whom the Son *chooses to reveal him*'. Jesus reveals the Father to us but also the Father reveals Jesus as the Son. The transfiguration is a revelation of Sonship of Jesus as the fulfiller of the Law and the Prophets (Matt. 17:1–8; Mark 9:2–8; Luke 9:28–36). Rather than listening to the Law or the Prophets, the Father calls the disciples to listen to the Son who fulfills them for us (Matt. 5:17). This revelation of Jesus as 'Messiah, the Son of the living God', is given to Peter by the Father (Matt. 16:16). The gospel of Sonship is the key to the kingdom.

2) Setting people free for Sonship

Jesus immediately went about proclaiming the "Gospel of God" (Mark 1:14–15). Luke 4 articulates his mission in Messianic terms: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he

has anointed me . . .” The Royal Son was now about his Father's purpose. Jesus himself (as Son) is the one who is sent from the Father to bring His Sonship to a world locked in their own prisons of sin, corruption and orphanhood. He was to proclaim good news to the poor, to proclaim freedom to the prisoners, recovery of sight to the blind, to set the oppressed free and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour. The mission of the triune God is full sonship which means freedom politically, emotionally, socially, mentally, physically and Spiritually. “The kingdom of God is at hand, repent and believe in the good news” (Mark 1:15).

3) Teaching the Father's kingdom

The Son's mission in revealing the Father was also to reveal the Father's values, commands and provisions. This was in contrast to the values and demands of Kingdoms of the world.

The Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 6) is a description of what Sonship in the kingdom looks like. It begins with the Blessing of the Father. Through the Spirit the Father blesses:

- 'the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven' (dependant children of the Father);
- 'those who mourn, for they will be comforted' (under death's threat of isolation, the Father comes in comfort for those who receive him);
- 'the meek, for they will inherit the earth' (inheritance is a Sonship term. It is the humble who 'despair of their own righteousness' who receive the inheritance of the Son);
- 'those who hunger and thirst for righteousness for they will be filled' (filled is to be satisfied with Jesus righteousness. Righteousness is the participation Christ's Sonship);
- 'the merciful, for they will be shown mercy' (the freedom to be merciful as the Father is merciful is a gift of his mercy in the Son).
- 'the pure in heart, for they will see God' (see the Father through the eyes of the Son).
- 'the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God' (Christ the Son is the prince of peace).
- 'those who are persecuted because of righteousness [Sonship?], for theirs is the kingdom of heaven'.

Rather than an exclusively legal term, righteousness becomes a demonstration of the Son's holy love and obedience to the Father. Righteousness is Sonship demonstrated. Jesus sets this more explicitly in his teaching about praying for your enemies

In the rest of the Sermon, Jesus teaches that His Sonship in which we share by the Spirit is peaceful and merciful (Matt. 5:21ff.); single-mindedly faithful and consistent (vv. 27–33); submissive to the Father (vv. 38–42); proactively loving even towards enemies (vv. 43–48); generous (6:1–4); trusting in the Father (the Lord's Prayer, fasting, treasures in heaven not earth [6:5–24]); confident in his loving provision (6:24–34; 7:7–11); fiercely exclusive and distinct from evil (7:13–23).

As well as explicit teaching of the Kingdom, Jesus illustrates the father/son relationship in parables.

Luke 15:11-32. The parable of the two Sons is an illustration of the father's heart and the need to come to an end of our illegitimate independence and come to the Father.

Mark 12:6. The parable of the Tenants: 'surely they will respect my Son'. He is the stone that the builders rejected who has become the cornerstone. This is the Lord's doing and it is wonderful in our eyes.

Matthew 22. The king who gave 'a wedding feast for his son'. The rich and powerful did not come so he called both bad and good who were willing.

Miracles are demonstrations of the Kingdom by the Son

Jesus' miracles were an intrusion of divine wholeness into the darkness of our world. They come as a mercy and promise, and further reveal the uniqueness of Jesus' Sonship. This is all for our benefit. The Son has full access to the creation by the Spirit as a Son of the Father. The disciples declared after Jesus calmed the storm: 'Truly you are the Son of God' (Matt. 14:33). The Son brings miraculous peace. Jesus went around proclaiming the gospel of the Kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction among the people. Indeed as John the Baptist's disciples wanted to know if Jesus was the Messiah, he called them to look at what they heard (his teaching) and what they saw (his demonstration of Sonship in miracles—Matthew 11 The disciples were sent out by Jesus to declare that the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand (Matt. 10:8): "Heal those who are ill, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received; freely give."

True Sonship and Fatherhood demonstrated at the cross

Mark 14:36, "Abba, Father," he said, "everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will." In obedience Jesus entrusted himself to the Father even at the cost of his life (Phil. 2:8). On the cross he cried out, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me" and the soldier seeing how he died declared, "Surely this is the Son of God" (Mark 15:39: Ps. 22).

At his resurrection Jesus gives us the mandate of making sons and daughters in Christ, baptising them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit (Matt. 28:19). Our destiny is Sonship, to be lived and demonstrated as Jesus does: "whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and for the gospel will save it" (Mark 8:35). The life of Jesus was enacted Sonship. He is the unique Son of God who was sent to reveal the Father and himself as His Son for us. He demonstrated Sonship in his miraculous actions and his teaching and calls all people to repent and be raised to life in his Sonship through faith. It is ultimately through the cross that Jesus makes a way to Sonship by judging evil, setting us free from our slavery to our own evil desire to deny the Father's claims upon us. If we want to know what true sonship looks like we need look no further than Jesus.