Jesus: Son of God, Son of Man
Luke 3:21-38

Jesus: standing in line with sinners

Someone once said that in the UK there are only two universities. Cambridge and Hull, which will be a big disappointment to our politicians, most of whom were students at Oxford. And I don't know what it's like where you come from, but in the UK there is a well-worn path to political success. Those who want to get to the top as quickly as they can go to Oxford and study something called PPE. That's Philosophy, Politics and Economics if you didn't know. And then they get a job, with almost zero life experience, as a special advisor to a government minister at Westminster and then they stand for election as an MP, and once elected to Westminster they start making their way up the ladder. If you want to succeed, London or Washington or wherever, are the places to be seen.

How different with Jesus! If Jesus had wanted to make himself popular with the religious elite, and see his stock rising in their eyes, Jerusalem was the place to go. To launch his career as a religious teacher, respected by his peers, he needed to go to Jerusalem and play it carefully, and make the right contacts, and shake the right kind of hands. You don't stand on a riverbank with a bunch of people repenting of their sins, people who the elite looked down on, under the ministry of some crazy looking man from the desert called John.

But that's exactly what Jesus does. And in v21 Luke says that 'when all the people were baptized' – that's 'all the people', so there were hundreds, possibly thousands of them coming out to be baptized, Jesus was also baptized. So just picture the scene. These massive crowds of people – who know they're not right with God, they've been cut to the heart by John's preaching, but they want to get right with God and are coming in repentance, and they're coming down to the Jordan to get baptised, and Jesus is among them. And John's going along the line of people wanting to get baptised, saying repent, repent, make this change show, live differently, so, you're a tax collector, well don't be squeezed into the mold, don't take more than you should, you're a soldier, ok, don't abuse your authority, and then he comes to Jesus and he goes 're… what are you doing here? – You don't need to be baptised by me, I need to be baptised by you.'

So, if John's baptism was a baptism of repentance, and Jesus didn't need to repent, what's he doing there? Why does He get baptised? There are likely several reasons: it could be that He does it to endorse baptism: what's good enough for Jesus is good enough for us. It could be that He does it as our representative: the perfect man being baptised on our behalf. But it's more than that: just think who he's getting baptised with.

Jesus doesn't get baptised with a bunch of people who think they have it all together. He doesn't take His stand with the Jerusalem elite. He gets baptised alongside tax collectors and soldiers who know they've blown it, who know they've failed to live as they should, who every one else despises. And Jesus takes His place among sinners, among people like us. And the Man, who in three years time, will be crucified between two rebels, is baptised among sinners. As He lined up along the bank of the river, the man who went down in the water before Jesus would have been just some normal guy, like you or me, turning to God, and the one who jumped into the river after him would have been the same, and to quote

Isaiah's words in Isaiah 53:12 Jesus 'was numbered with the transgressors', in his baptism as much as in his death.

Later on in Luke 5:32 Jesus will say 'I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.' And that is great news, because you don't have to have it all together to have Christ as your friend, for Him to take his stand alongside you. There is going to be stuff you struggle with, what goes on in your heart, what comes out of your mouth. And you can look at your life and think 'I don't make the grade' and Jesus says 'it's you I've come to call, it's you I choose to be numbered among.'

And as Jesus stood in the Jordan river that day, God makes it clear that He approves.

God's Stamp of Approval

There are hundreds maybe thousands getting baptised, but something unique happens when it's Jesus' turn. As He comes out of the water, He starts praying and as He prays Luke tells us that the heavens were opened, the Holy Spirit descends and a voice is heard. Before we look at what happens there, just mark it that it happens when Jesus is praying. Heaven is opened as Jesus prays. And I point that out to you because it is so easy to let prayer be squeezed out of your life. If you are anything like me, the sheer business of your day crowds in on you, and prayer and cultivating some time in God's presence, however short, just gets squeezed out. In the pressure of life prayer is one of the first things that gives, when it should be the last. And what you find yourself doing is trying to live this Christian life in your own strength and in your own resources: and it's like trying to live under a closed heaven. It's like trying to grow crops in a drought. There's no refreshing rain from heaven coming down. Now don't give way to guilt or despair, but do take note: it was as Jesus was praying that heaven was opened and the Spirit came down. So however you do it, pray.

And as heaven is opened, Jesus' baptism becomes his inauguration, He receives the divine endorsement of God the Father and the Holy Spirit and the call for His mission to start. Now in the UK when a new king or queen is crowned his or her charge to reign with justice under God comes from the Archbishop of Canterbury. When a new president is inaugurated in the States, it's the Chief Justice who administers the oath of office. But when Jesus is baptised, it's not John who endorses Jesus, in fact Luke doesn't even mention John here, it's as if the spotlight has already moved from John to Jesus. And Jesus now stands alone, and the highest authority: higher than the chief priests, higher than a prophet, higher than an archbishop or a chief justice, *the highest* authority, beyond which there is no court of appeal, endorses Him. By the anointing of the Spirit and by the direct word from heaven, Jesus is marked out as the One God is going to use.

And what is remarkable about this event, is that it's the whole Trinity: God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit on display and at work. And that's a mystery. Because the Bible tells us that there is only One God, and that God is One and yet He has revealed Himself to us in three persons. And at this baptism it's clear that those three persons are not one person. You've got Jesus – a man,

the Son, you've got the Spirit coming upon Him, and you've got the voice of the Father speaking to Him from heaven. And sometimes you hear people describe the Trinity as being like a man, who is a Father to his children, a son to his parents and a husband to his wife. One man, but three different roles, three different ways he relates to people. And people say the Trinity is like that man. Only it's not. That's neat but it's wrong, because that man is still one man. And here we have three people: Father, Son and Spirit. One God, Three Persons and as the historic creeds have said they are of one substance, co-eternal, co-equal. And there simply are no adequate ways to describe or picture the Trinity, because there is nothing else like God. Every attempt we make to describe the Trinity by appealing to something we know in nature is going to fail because there is nothing else like God. In Isaiah 40:25 God says 'To whom will you compare me?' The answer is 'no-one': our God is incomparable. We cannot get our brains around Him. We are reduced, or maybe it would be better to say, we are lifted up to worship Him rather than worry about Him.

And as Jesus, this carpenter from Nazareth stands in the water praying, the heavens are opened and the Holy Spirit descends upon Him. Luke says the Spirit came v22 'in bodily form, like a dove.' It wasn't a dove, it was like a dove, it's as if the people who saw this happen and describe it to Luke say 'I can't tell you exactly what it was but it was like a dove coming down upon Him'. Now some of the commentators say this is like when a new king was anointed with oil at the start of his reign. And that might be the case. But this is the fulfilment of the prophecy of Isaiah from Isaiah 11:1-2 'There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse [King David's father], and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit. And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.' And at the start of His ministry the Spirit anoints and empowers and equips Jesus for what lies ahead.

Now on Thursday night I had the privilege to speak to the young people at YWAM. And before I spoke the director presented a video of the work YWAM are hoping to facilitate between Australia and Papua New Guinea and it was great: a call to young people to get their hands dirty in simple acts of service. And when I got my turn I spoke to them about how it's Christ's resurrection life that empowers our life. And I told them, you can see all these great needs in the world, your heart can be stirred by that and you can respond to the call to missions, but if you think you can do that in your own strength you're kidding yourself. And here is Jesus, standing on the threshold of His ministry, and the Spirit comes to anoint and equip Him. And if that was true for Jesus, how much greater is our need. Your need of God's empowering presence is no less, whether you are on the mission field at the EPFL, or the UNIL or at school, or in your home or workplace, than it is in Papua New Guinea.

But again, see how it all happens. Jesus is just praying, in a river of all places, and the Spirit comes. And when in Luke 11 Jesus teaches His disciples how to pray he says 'Ask, and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you… what father among you, if his son asks for a fish, will instead of a fish give him a serpent; or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you

then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!' In other words, if you know and confess your need of God's Spirit to live as He wants you and calls you to, you only have to ask.

And then comes the voice from heaven, the voice of the Father: v22 'You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.' Now this is before Jesus has embarked on His ministry. It's before He's preached any sermons, or healed any sick, or cleansed any lepers, and God loves Him, because He is His Son. And it was this same love that caused God to send His Son in the first place, that you and I might become His sons and daughters and be adopted into His family, the family which Paul calls 'the Kingdom of His beloved Son' (Col 1:13). John 3:16 'For God so Loved the world, that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.'

So God's love for you preceded Him saving you. It is not that you get saved and your life starts getting sorted and then He loves you. No. Just as the Father declares His love for His Son before His ministry begins, so God declares His love for us, before we do anything that could earn that love. Now, you and I are as different from Jesus in that regard as it is possible to be. He had done nothing wrong, there was nothing in Him that could have made the Father look away or withdraw His love. But you and I, we are undeserving of that love, and yet in His love He sends His only Son – His beloved Son- to rescue us. Romans 5:8 'God shows His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.'

And in affirming His love and pleasure in Jesus God the Father calls Him His Son. Now, if you remember, the religious types came out to hear John the Baptist preaching and John challenges them to their faces because they were tempted to say 'we have Abraham as our father.' We're sons of Abraham, who are you calling us to repentance. But here is God saying of Jesus 'this is my Son': you can grandstand about who you are, and whose son you are, and who is your father, and what a wonderful heritage you have, but this is my Son, this is the one I am pleased with'.

And from that incredible declaration Luke moves straight into Jesus' genealogy. One moment he tells us that this man Jesus is the Son of God, the next he hits us with a list of names. And he does so for a reason.

A Man Like Us

Now just remind yourself who Luke is writing this book to. He's writing to Theophilus, one of the educated Roman elite, and Theophilus is investigating Jesus and Luke is writing to tell him, 'Theophilus, it's all true'. And Theophilus has just heard God's declaration: 'this is my Son.' But now Luke takes him and us through this 77-name genealogy. It's like going from the heights to the depths in a single verse, because with all the enthusiasm in the world, genealogies are not the most riveting of reads.

So why does Luke do it? Well, put yourself in Theophilus' shoes. He's just read about this baptism and all the events surrounding it that speak so clearly about

Jesus divinity: He's the Son of God, anointed by the Holy Spirit, attested to by God the Father. And the danger is he starts thinking, 'yeh, and I've got 17 mythical demi-gods like this in my Roman and Greek mythologies' - the gods having children and sending them to earth.

And so Luke sets out to root Jesus firmly in his human family tree. 'Theophilus, this Jesus, who God calls His Son was a man.

And in v23 Luke says 'Jesus, when he began his ministry, was about 30 years of age.' That's the same age when the priests would begin their ministries (Num 4:3); and the same age when David began to reign as King over Judah (2 Sam 5:4). So priest and king – the two ministries Jesus fulfilled- began at thirty. That's thirty years of preparation for the Son of God, preparation at home and in a carpenter's shop. Even for Jesus maturity comes with time and God's timing is perfect. And if you ever find yourself being impatient for God's time for you to come, whatever that might be for, it's just possible that it's patience He is trying to teach you.

And then Luke sets out Jesus' genealogy. And whilst in Matthew's gospel, Matthew goes back to Abraham, because he's writing to a Jewish audience, Luke goes all the way back to Adam. Because he's writing to gentiles like Theophilus and us, and he's saying, Jesus is a son of Adam, He's a man like the rest of us.

And you can read this genealogy and think 'hey, here are the great men of faith and promise': there's David and Abraham these great heroes of faith, and Jesus has come as the fulfilment of God's promises to Abraham that through his seed, his offspring, all the nations would be blessed. And to David - that he would never cease to have a descendent sitting on his throne. And that's right and Jesus is the fulfilment of every one of those promises and more. But these men were also, to a man, sons of Adam, who just like Adam failed and messed up. And Noah got drunk, and Abraham was an idolator, who worshipped other gods before God took hold of him, and even after God did take hold of him, he still messed up and tried to secure his own safety by giving his wife away to save his own skin. And David, well, he was an adulterer and a murderer as well.

And it's as if God chooses this line, of real people, men and women – and I say women because in Matthew's gospel Matthew includes some, like the prostitute Rahab, men and women who messed up and screwed up, to demonstrate that He has come to redeem it all. And if you're anything like me, you can look at your family tree and think 'that's a mess': an adulterer here, bust marriage there, alcoholic here. And Jesus, the Son of God, is born into just such a family tree, to redeem it. You see it's not about your past, it's about what Jesus will do for you and in you and your family in the future. So for every messed up family tree represented in this room Jesus has come to redeem it and bring that to an end and start putting things right.

But as we move through this list of 77 names, the truth is that for most of them we haven't got a clue about any of them. We know nothing about their lives. So listen. It's ok for you to be a nobody. Whilst I was preparing this I sat and did a

google search: Tom Rizzo, comes straight up, Daniel Constam, straight up. Martin Slack: you can take your pick between the senior partner in my friend Jon's firm of actuaries in London, or some guy in Nottingham who got banged up for assault. This Martin Slack is nowhere to be seen. But I take heart from this genealogy of virtual unknowns. Virtually all of these guys are completely unknown to us except for this genealogy. Their lasting contribution to this world is that they were part of this family tree that brought us Jesus.

Now, you and I, we are extremely unlikely to leave any lasting mark on the world because of your work, or your research or whatever, in a generation or two you'll be forgotten. The thing you can leave is lives impacted by Jesus, a family tree of influence. Now that may be physical, within your family, raising your kids to love God and them doing the same, so that from you comes this family tree of blessing; or it may be a family tree of influence: you told this person about Jesus, and they told this person and they told this person; or you funded this mission or this church, and this person got converted and on and on. And no one will ever know it was you. Like these men you and I will soon be forgotten, but the influence for good and for God can keep on growing.

And working his way up through this tree, Luke comes to v38 and having started with Jesus finally he says '… the son of Adam, the son of God.' Theophilus, Jesus is no mythical greek demi-god, He's a man like us. But when God created Adam, He created him in His image, as the bearer of His image, but Adam fell flat on his face and since then there hasn't been anyone who has perfectly born that image until now. And Jesus has come, the Son of Adam and the Son of God: complete in His humanity, perfect in His divinity, the second Adam to redeem and rescue all the sons of Adam.