

## Part 11: Jesus the better son

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March 26, 2022

In our study through the gospel of Luke, we are in the middle of Luke the historian's second movement. Luke's first movement was the events surrounding and including the birth of Jesus Christ, and his second movement includes the last half of chapter 2 through the first half of chapter 4. It's everything Luke wants us to know about Jesus before his public ministry begins. And what Luke wants us to see about this Jesus is that he is something unique. He is like us, but he is not like us.

By the time we begin Jesus' ministry in Luke 4:14, if we have read carefully, we have seen that this Jesus is unlike anyone else we could ever consider. He is better.

There's a really tragic song written by Missoula's own Pearl Jam entitled "Better Man." In it, the lyrics describe a young woman trapped in a relationship with a man she really doesn't love. The chorus shows us her heart and says, "She lies and says she's in love with him..." As listeners to the song we naturally want to ask ourselves the question, if she doesn't really love him, if she's not really happy, if he's not really the one who will love her and care for her, why would she continue to lie to herself and try and act as if she does love him?

It's because, as the writer of the song tells us her fearful dilemma, "she can't find a better man."

In other words her life is miserable, she feigns happiness but refuses to search for something else because she doesn't think that someone better might actually exist.

At our community group this week one of the guys in it brought up a question that was asked to him by an acquaintance. The question was: "Why is it good to be a Christian?" If you had to answer that question today, what would your answer be?

What makes Christianity so good? Why is it worth, in the words of Jesus himself, giving up all we have and following him? What makes the gospel so beautiful that like a man who finds treasure buried in a field goes and sells all that he has in order to buy that field?

Today Luke wants you to see the answer to that question: Because Jesus is better. Today we are going to see in Luke 3:15-22 that even when compared to the greatest prophet of the day, Jesus is better. Then in verses 23-38 we are going to see that when compared to the whole history of all humanity, all the prophets and priests, all the kings and castles, all the celebrities and counselors, all the rich and resplendent, all the glamorous and glorified, Jesus is better. Why? Because of what he has come to do and because of who he is.

This is what we are going to see today. Our big ideal today is actually one simple statement: **Jesus is the better savior because he is the better son.** We will spend time then today looking at **Jesus the better savior** and **Jesus the better son.**

Let's begin by reading **Luke 3:15-20.**

So what we see here is a sort of religious revival going on in the wilderness. All this happened, as Jonny talked about last week, while Caesar and Pilate sat on Rome's power, Herod and Philip sat in their own power, and Annas and Caiaphas sat in their own power. But the bustle, the excitement wasn't coming from the power of Rome's military, or from the splendor of the rebuilt city of Jerusalem, or even the brand new temple, the bustle was in the wilderness at the hands of some wandering minister who had the word of God.

If you remember the context we pieced together back in Luke 1, love for God and religious affection was not at a high point in Israel. But here, people who once had no concern, no care, and no interest in the Lord were concerned. They were in expectation, Luke tells us. Not only were they expectant, but they were critical. They were examining in their hearts about John wondering if he might be "the Christ."

The word "Christ" is not Jesus' last name. It's a title. Perhaps a helpful way to think about it is how we use the word "Lord." We can call God, "The Lord" as a name and we get it. But the title is also a role. Lord also communicates who he is and what he does, he lords, rules, reigns over others.

So too is the word Christ. We can use Christ as a name for Jesus, the apostles do it all the time, but the word Christ is also the function of Jesus. Just as the Lord is also the ruler, Christ is also the messiah.

"Christ" is the Greek version of the Hebrew word, "Messiah" which means anointed one. It comes from Old Testament passages like **Psalms 2:2**. To be the Christ, was to be the Messiah, to be the Messiah was to be the anointed one. To be the anointed one of God was to be the savior who would right the ship, establish the kingdom, save the people, and bring peace to those who had none.

At this point in history, more and more people were considering who might be the one to bring this salvation. And naturally, many are wondering if John the Baptist is this man. This is our first point today: **Jesus the Better Savior.**

John is going to answer these seekers by pointing to Jesus, but first we want to see why these people thought it was John.

John was a powerful communicator; we saw this in his preaching in the first part of chapter 3. Even though he was at times seen as an oddity, what the gospel of Matthew tells us is that Herod himself was actually infatuated with John, he was attracted and grasped by the whole prophetic charisma John put out.

But more than this, isn't this sort of attraction exactly what was prophesied concerning John in Luke 1? Remember what the angel said to Zechariah about his son? **Luke 1:16-17.**

The role of John's ministry was to stir up this sort of religious introspection. Anytime our hearts are stirred to seek for salvation, we can bet that the Lord is at work in our midst. What John did was press the realities of life and death, judgment and salvation, repentance and sin into the forefront and the frailty and weight of life caused many to long and look for a messiah.

Haven't we seen this in our own day? Have you noticed that the surge of COVID associated deaths has caused more people to consider what a life worth living actually is? Is there hope after death? Hasn't the war in Ukraine caused many to try and establish their own system of morality seeking to decide what is right and what is wrong? For many the basis of these morals causes them to quickly realize that apart

from any supernatural realities we can't say for certain what is good or what is bad because goodness has no real basis.

Such events cause us to look around for what? For a messiah. We want someone with an anointing to make sense of our life and to tell us it will all be ok. We build cities around industry which can provide, entertainment which can distract, and adventure which can captivate.

How many of us in our zeal, or in our pain are quick to anoint for ourselves little "christs." Little bits of security that we hope will bring us peace in our own kingdom of life. Many of these are good things. We live among beautiful mountains which God himself created. We turn to food which God designed for our good. We embrace sex which God gave as a gift. We retreat into our families which God provided as a refuge. Here, these people are turning to John who was God's own prophet. Later on Jesus himself will say in Luke 7, "that among those born of women none is greater than John."

But just because we are searching for a savior, just because we realize our need for a Christ, doesn't mean that we end up in the right place naturally often, instead we misuse God's gifts and try to make the gifts into something more. These crowds were drawn to what God desired to use in John. But when they began to consider if John was the savior they needed--John spoke.

What if all the things we turn to in life for peace, for security, for salvation, suddenly spoke to us and said: "We're not it." But isn't this what our world naturally does?

Look at **Psalms 19:1-6**.

The whole of creation from mountains, to bread bowls, to art joyfully points us to the glory of God.

In Acts 10, Cornelius tried to worship Peter and Peter wouldn't allow it. In Acts 14 after a healing crowds tried to worship Paul and Barnabas and they shut it down. In Revelation, John fell down and worshipped an angel and the angel pointed him to Jesus. They dance not for themselves, but they dance to draw us upward to the one greater than themselves.

There's a wonderful scene in a show my wife and I often watch. At long last one of the main characters is finally going to ask his soul mate to marry him. It's the inevitable end the writers had been working for up to that point. As the woman is being lead through a door she finds all of her co-workers lined up in a row with her soon to be fiancé at the end.

At each step the co-worker closest to her asks: "Will you marry me?" And every time, she says, "No."

Why is that? It's because it would have been entirely unfitting for her to marry one of them. The only reason the co-workers asked her was because they knew she would say no. They knew that the one she loved, the one who would care for her best and love her the most was right in front of her.

For many of us, the longing in our heart is so strong that we grab onto the first person or promise which offers us a bit of joy, or peace, or love and cling to it. All the while God's natural world, and faithful people like John aren't actually asking for our heart, instead they are pushing our eyes onward to Jesus.

John's turning us to Jesus is not only true, as we will see in a bit. But doesn't it require a ton of humility? Here is John, preaching the prophetic word of God. Doing good work in calling people to repentance. At this time, Jesus isn't doing anything in regards to his public ministry.

Augustine said in his autobiography that if he had to choose to be scorned by the masses for believing what is true, or to be loved by the masses by believing what is false his flesh would rather believe what is knowingly wrong and be praised for it.

But John shows innate humility here. Why? Because he knew Jesus in truth. Nothing produces humility more than knowing Jesus in truth. Nothing is more humbling to one's own self than examining who we are in light of who Jesus is and that is exactly what John does here.

He does this and points out two distinctions between himself and Jesus the first is that Jesus is of greater might and worth, the second is that Jesus is the one who saves and judges. Read with me: **Luke 3:16-18.**

The first thing John wants those who are looking for salvation to consider is that Jesus is worthy of far more than anything in the world. He is truly distinct.

John actually turns a cultural anecdote on its head here. At this time in Judaism a rabbi would have disciples and the disciples acted as servants to the rabbi. They were asked to do anything a slave would do with one exception. They were not to untie the rabbi's sandal.

To untie the sandal would have been too humiliating. If this disciple was to one day be a Rabbi himself, he could never stoop that low. That kind of humiliation would certainly strip him of his authority later in life.

But John here says that he won't untie Jesus' own sandal not because John would have been dishonored, but because Jesus would have been dishonored! John says "Jesus is so far above any other honor and worth we have ever seen that even if me, God's chosen prophet were to untie his sandal, I wouldn't have enough worth to do it."

You see, if we want to understand what Jesus does in his salvation we need to understand who Jesus is in his unparalleled nature. This is what the 24 elders and the creatures in Heaven knew in the book of Revelation when Jesus stepped up to the scroll and they said: "Worthy are you to take the scroll and open the seal." No one else was worthy, no one else is able to do this.

This is so important because John not only points to Jesus' innate and wholly other worth, but he points to the unique task that only someone of unparalleled worth is able to do.

What will this Christ do? He will baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire. He will mend our roots to assure faithful fruit, he will gather his saints into his barn for eternal safe-holding and refuge, keeping us for the table fellowship with the Lord, he will rejoice over the fruits of his labor. But for those who do not bear fruit, for those who do not believe, there will be judgement, eternal fire, and punishment unending. He will for some save and sanctify through faith and repentance, and for others he will judge and condemn on account of their lack of repentance.

This is quite literally a hellfire and brimstone message! Yet did you see how Luke described the ministry of John? **Luke 3:18.**

This message, this exhortation was part of Luke's gospeling! It was good news. Why is it good news? Because apart from this Jesus all of us would be baptized. All of us would be buried in death on account of our sins and condemned to just, righteous and entirely deserved judgement by fire in hell.

But because Jesus is the Christ worthy of all things, there is another baptism available, the baptism of salvation. The baptism where the Holy Spirit doesn't labor to condemn, but labors to redeem. The one where to blood of Christ doesn't speak to judge us, but speaks instead to free us. The one where the refiner's fire doesn't destroy forever, but instead, though painful removes what is of lesser value so that we might shine with the pure righteousness of Jesus himself.

This is good news.

Value dictates our choices. My wife and I bought a cheap robot vacuum once. It vacuumed our floor. You can't deny it. It just didn't do it well. So we bought a more expensive one, one of greater value, and it did it better.

You might be able to find one sexual relationship which for a time seems to save you, to deliver you, but at some point you might realize you need something better, and you know what you might find that something better. This would be good news if our greatest problem was dirty floors and unsatisfied sexuality.

While there are some vacuums which clean better, some washings which remove dirt better, some words of affirmation that heal better, some mountains that stand higher, some kids to succeed better, some jobs that pay more, even some preachers who talk sweeter there is no Christ who can save better. Why?

Because there is no other name given among men by which we can be saved. For those who like these religious seekers, stare out into a world of options, of stand in saviors and wild talkers, see what John points you to. See this Jesus unparalleled in value and exclusive in his saving power. Come to him.

Why is Jesus better? What is the basis of his value and the power of his salvation? Luke continues to show us it is because **Jesus is the better son**. He is the son of God.

Luke shows us this in two passages, the first which show us God's pleasure in the son, the second which shows us our need for the son.

First look with me at **Luke 3:21-22.**

If you remember, as Jonny shared last week, John's baptism at this time was a baptism of repentance. It symbolized for all who felt the conviction of sin that repentance would wash away our impurity. This was meant to prepare us for Jesus who actually is the one who does that washing. And now Christian baptism isn't a baptism of washing, but it symbolizes total regeneration by being buried with Christ in death and raised with him in new life.

But the question remains that if Jesus was sinless, why did he need to be baptized? Did he too need to be washed? This is why this Trinitarian scene is so important to us.

Look back again at **Luke 3:21-22**. So what do we see here? Well we see a glimpse into the triune existence of God for all eternity. We see a blessed communion where in God the Son was praying to God the Father, God the Holy Spirit descended in physical form like a dove to rest on him, and God the Father audibly spoke to him. What we are invited to see here first and foremost is a perfect relationship of community, fellowship and peace. It's this kind of unity which Jesus invites us into in our redemption.

But more than that, we take note of what God the Father spoke of the son after his baptism: "You are my beloved son, with you I am well pleased." At this point we have already identified Jesus as the son of God, which happened back in Luke 2 when Jesus was at the temple. We have already identified that Jesus was uniquely filled with the Holy Spirit, that happened in Luke 1 when Mary conceived by the Holy Spirit.

So what is happening here in this text? We are seeing the divine pleasure of the entire Trinity in the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus, fully God and fully man, is fully sustained by the Holy Spirit and fully pleasing to the Father.

Many people were baptized that day and we have no record of the heavens opening up and saying anything like this. Why does it do so for Jesus? Because he is the son of God, and because he was perfectly obedient to his Father, he was perfectly sinless. So when he submitted himself for the ritual washing of sin the Father spoke: "I'm already well pleased with you my son."

Jesus had no need for baptism to receive God's pleasure. He had no need to have his sins removed so that he could be restored to perfect fellowship. This scene shows that Jesus already had all of this.

So why was Jesus baptized? He was baptized for our sake. Isaiah says that the Christ would be "numbered among the transgressors." He was identified with the repentant not for his sake, but for the sake of all who needed to repent.

This not only makes us the doctrine of substitutionary atonement, but it's also our hope for the doctrine of assurance. Here Jesus went before us to assure us that all who repent and are covered by the blood of the Son really do have a new reality of the pleasure of the Father.

How many of you have tried to earn the pleasure of your boss. Or maybe your spouse. Or maybe you're a kid in here today and you've tried to earn the happiness and pleasure of your parents. Don't we often actually have success in those areas? The problem isn't that we can't earn the pleasure, it's actually that the pleasure is often disrupted.

We sometimes do things which cause that individual's pleasure to turn to displeasure. Or, what is most often true, we feel that we have done something wrong enough that we have lost the privilege of deserving that pleasure. We spoke to much, we did too little, now all the hope we had for peace and acceptance is gone.

But here we look to Jesus the already and ever-pleasing Son of God. For those who follow John's repentance here we see John's source of salvation and assurance. Look at what Paul says in **Romans 5:1-5**.

Do you see the wonder of this passage? For those who repent and believe in Jesus Christ, all the Triune intimacy we see in Luke 3 in regards to Jesus the Son is here applied to all believers. Through the Son we have peace with God the Father, through the Son the love of the Father is poured out on us through the work of the Holy Spirit.

Here in the distinction of the Son is the hope of finding the pleasure, the salvation, and the hope we've always wanted and it's based not off you and your fragility but off of Christ and his perfect, unparalleled nature.

Here's why it's worth it to give our lives to Jesus—because in Jesus the whole perfect Trinity is pleased. How much more might our pleasure be in the eternal Son of infinite worth.

This Jesus is who you've been waiting for. He's the one who speaks into our suffering and our trials and gives us the hope of love and acceptance. Why? Because he's who all history has been waiting for.

Look at this passage which many of us would want to skip over but which Luke rightly includes: **Luke 3:23-38.**

So what did we see here? Yes we saw what seemed to be a long and winding genealogy. But what is Luke doing with it? He starts with Jesus and he runs the clock all the way back to Adam, and even before that in a Genesis 1 way, back to God.

Luke not only wants us to see that Jesus is the son of God. But he wants us to see that Jesus is the son of God all of human history has been waiting for. Adam wasn't son enough. Abraham wasn't son enough. David wasn't son enough. But this Jesus, here is the pleasure of God for all who believe. Here is salvation for real for those who are looking—Jesus the son of God.

We need this because there's this odd little interlude in this text where right after John the Baptist talks about Jesus judging and condemning the evil. Herod adds to all his evil by imprisoning John.

We need to find pleasure in the son, we need to remind ourselves that he and he alone is our hope, because the hope of Jesus has begun but it is not yet finished. Evil still reigns to a degree, imprisonment on account of the gospel still happens, tragedy and heartache still exist. But one day this Jesus, this son of God is coming back so we do not lose hope.

We cling to the one who is better than all who came before and to the one who will come again. This son won't leave us. This son won't fail us. This son is worthy of all our pleasure and all our hope even when things get dark. Even when the "christs" of the world seem large—Jesus is the Christ.

There's an old hymn that was actually birthed out of black, enslaved American Christians. They looked at all the pain, all the injustice and all the sorrow they felt and together they sang this:

*In the morning, when I rise, give me Jesus.  
When in sorrow, hear me pray, give me Jesus.  
When I'm dying, here me cry, give me Jesus.  
When I'm rising, hear me shout, give me Jesus.  
When in heaven, we will sing, give me Jesus.*

Brothers and sisters, there is one person, there is one hope where the expectant and the searching can turn to and find everything they ever wanted. It's in Jesus the Son.

There's one person which brings us hope when Herod's prison door slams. It's in Jesus the Son.

There's one place where the Father's pleasure is held out for us. It's in Jesus the Son.

There's one message we give to those who are lost. It's Jesus the Son.

There's one thing infinitely better than all we can ever imagine, a gift of the Holy Spirit and fire so purifying, one object of greatest pleasure and foundational treasure. It's Jesus the son.